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Public Opinion: Role of Media

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Abstract:

In a democracy, media's role is not only limited to news presentation but it creates social, economic, and political awareness in the country, particularly in those regions whose audiences don't have adequate knowledge or experience. In contemporary times media has been powerful tool in setting the track for public opinion. Many times it is said to be molder and mirror of public viewpoint. Several types of media the television, press, internet and radio have their penetration at different levels of society. In twenty first century electronic media has been transformed to a great extent and re-energized by internet. It has been found out that different style of media is perceived differently by people. This perception is biased towards the view that print media highlights the current issues in a much better and rational way than other kind of media. Like in context of India, the largest democracy of the world media is taken to be the fourth pillar. It has its presence in foreign policy formation too. Like every other thing, media too has its virtues and vices. Many times media tend to be carried away by reporting more about economic and political changes and ignoring the social aspects. At the same time, it is playing a role of watchdog towards functioning of the government machinery. Often media is criticized for bad business practices like 'paid news' on one side and ignorance of their social responsibility. It is found out many a times that information presented by media is incomplete which lead to dissipation of public debate that if present can provide the alternate solution to problem. This paper will try to provide few cases in which public view and perception is affected by role of media. Media has a potential to bring about social change in the society and a lot of work has to be done in this direction.

Keywords: Democracy, media, news, responsibility, social

1. Introduction

Media in today's world is mirror of regularly changing society. Internet that includes blogs and emails, newspapers, radio and most importantly television plays leading role in opinion formation of public in general. Electronic media presents news and bring in forefront the personalities be it politicians, celebrities or any other film industry people and issues related to them. Public after following this media news, forms opinion about those people. Latest example of this trend being the elections happening in different part of country. In earlier times these elections were kind of contest among the politicians but now in recent times it is more of private tussle among candidates of political parties. Globalization has its effect on media too. Now image of media is totally different. Due to enormous reach of media and the awareness created by its different modes such as newspaper, television, magazines, radio or internet, people cannot only talk about events that are happening with in the national boundary but also about those events that are beyond the geographical boundaries. Due to this, opinion about events happenings across the world is created accordingly. Also from now on they are able to keep themselves updated about latest happenings. In past times, several incidents of treatment of United Kingdom and Australian citizens towards Indians living in those countries was brought up in public domain by media so aggressively that many protests against it happened in various parts of India.

2. Media and Social Responsibility

The public agenda is not solely determined by the media, though it influences it. There are several other determinants and attributes apart from information and data brought by media. It will be wrong to say that the influential substance of media can overtake the basic principle of democracy that the people at large have enough wisdom to decide the vision of their country, state or their local society. People in particular are quite smart enough to decide the basic relevance to themselves, of the events and information bring by news media. The media advances their agenda to public only if the receiver side that is the public perceives the news as relevant. It is right to say that the behavior of media should take into account public interests. Few criteria of public interest that media should take in account are diverse information, strengthening of public order, peace and security & integrity of state, universal reach, freedom of publication, human rights, support towards democratic political system, culture and heritage, avoiding any harm to society and individuals, plurality in ownership of media, culture disseminated to people and quality of information. There has been a famous report called by the name of Hutchins Commission has a great leap towards its take on social responsibility and the expected journalism standards to be maintained by media in general and press to be specific. This report was strengthened by various principles

that includes media has several obligations to society and ownership of media is a public trust, news media is considered to be objective, fair, truthful and relevant, self-regulation is very important though there might be freedom of press, it should be guided by professional code of conduct, ethics and integrity, constitutional authority like government should intervene is there is hampering of public interest. Democracy model in India is liberal but in spirit the political system is closed. The three pillars on Indian constitution are legislature, executive and judiciary. Their powers are thoroughly demarcated or can be said as water tight compartmentalized. There are several parties in India, and the party system is as such that the party that is in power or in opposition has various roles and responsibilities. The fourth pillar that is media has freedom of press of criticism and of assembly. With so many odds in Indian democracy, there has been considerable amount of success as the world's largest democracy, which has attracted the scholars from world over to ponder about the secrets of its success. India is still a developing nation and there has been diversity in every arena and almost everywhere. There have been several social problems like gender sensitization, inequality in distribution of income, poverty and hunger at the top most. Given so many situations and different socio-cultural, geographical and political features in India, role of media in current society is more than mere dissemination of information and entertainment. Media has to play its role in social upliftment and education besides just reporting of events. In short it has to responsibility of development journalism. Awareness programs are in vogue in electronic media, social media and on various other social platforms. Also, in these times government of India is taking cognizance of those social events and happenings, and in future it is expected that media will be having a more serious role to play in policy formation. Many a time public opinion has been manipulated by vested interests to serve their own interests. Along with dissemination of facts and figures media can also conceal facts which during time of elections has role to play and in the end it influences the electorate and voting outcome. This situation clearly describes the lack of truthfulness and objectivity in media and this is a dangerous situation as far as Indian scenario is concerned as literacy rate in India is low as compared to world so misinformation tend to influence the illiterate public of India.

After Independence importance to media was given to act as a weapon for social change. The public service broadcasters All India Radio and Doordarshan, which were there at that time were given additional responsibility of providing learning and educational program to the masses apart from providing entertainment and information. At the same time this public broadcasting system can be used as the government mouthpiece and can only provide with the monopolistic views that is supposed to be of government. With due course of time with the advent of globalization and opening up of economy there emerged the competitive world in media spectrum which till now is existing and giving tough fight to public sector media. This privatization of media has its side effects to that are related to media ownership. This ownership is not only related to India but world at large. Foreign media that are owned by other nationals tend to bring the opinions about India through their news and reporting which in ground reality are not true about India. There are several corporate houses that owns newspaper, magazine networks and television networks. This ownership pattern has increased the risk of captured media. The present scenario has led to the use of media in the battle of two political rival groups. This thing in reality can be seen to be operating in India with news channels and newspapers taking sides while presenting viewpoints. Social media is no immune to this thing. Nowadays, many political parties and their candidates are employing their agents on social media to create a vibe in their political favour. At time this way of handling in social media is appreciable as it happens to disseminate the government schemes to public. Now almost every person in India is attached to social media and this means of communication from the part of government is beneficial to both public and the authorities. The reach of everything has penetrated to the masses with the advent of internet revolution. At times the promotion of hate speech in place of creation of developmental atmosphere, tend to play in minds of people which then undermine the very power of democracy.

3. Presence of Media in Rajasthan

Media likewise in every other part of country is of various conventional categories that have its presence in state of Rajasthan too. They are radio stations, television network and print media. Earlier after independence mostly Doordarshan and All India Radio was present but in latest times online media such as social media is very popular in urban areas of Rajasthan. Nowadays news reporting is on the go. With one touch on smartphones news for whole of Rajasthan can be accessed and real time update can be maintained. This trend of online media has posted a challenge in front of print media in every aspect such as circulation and sales, readers interest or advertisement, as most of their news are available and read online. Now Radio FM also are playing their part in dissemination of information around the region. The cultural heritage of Rajasthan state and society is being brought on world forum because of while tourists from all around the world are seeing this state as their favourite tourist destination. With influx of foreign and other state tourists, there has been real integration of society and culture happening. This was media is playing a role of world integration.

4. Gender Sensitization

This social feature should be on the priority list of media as just reporting of facts and figures on this issue will not solve the very evil problem of gender biasing. The gender gap needed to be bridged. Towards this path, role of media as a vehicle of social change is important more than ever now. Time to play a proactive role in addressing the issue of gender sensitively and safeguarding women from not being portrayed in bad light is the responsibility of media. Every category of media should take a vacation from their routine job of reporting crimes on women and sensationalized events. Now they should focus more on highlighting the constitutional and legal rights of women along with the privileges and other ordinary rights. It's this media only which can again change society in every possible way and not just changing but at least acting as a trigger to that change is more important.

5. Conclusion

Media is associated deeply with the socio economic conditions and their responsibility in the democracy like India. At present time things are not up to mark and many areas needed to be addressed. Time is to revisit and rethink the nation's broadcast media policies. Accountability of every category of media is needed to be fixed and mentioned clearly. Often this freedom of press is maligned and misappropriated whenever the manipulators set in. More importantly self-regulation network of media has to be strengthened further. This all is crucial as media acts as a public relation agent for nation in gaining credibility worldwide. For a country like India, community participation is important and media should move ahead for its fulfilment. Press Council should be more authoritative in countering the objectionable dissemination of information. Now time has come that media walked the talk.

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