ROLE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MASS MEDIA AND INDIAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Sandeep Kumar Upadhyay   **Dr. Tanu Dang**
Research Scholar   Supervisor
Sunrise University   Sunrise University
Alwar, Rajasthan   Alwar, Rajasthan

ABSTRACT:
The role of media in a democratic system has been widely debated. India has the largest democracy in the world and media has a powerful presence in the country. In recent times Indian media has been subject to a lot of criticism for the manner in which they have disregarded their obligation to social responsibility. The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news. Newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in the daily news – lead story on page one, other front page display, large headlines, etc. Television news also offers numerous cues about salience – the opening story on the newscast, length of time devoted to the story, etc. These cues repeated day after day effectively communicate the importance of each topic. In other words, the news media can set the agenda for the public's attention to that small group of issues around which public opinion forms.

KEY WORDS: media, newspaper, television

INTRODUCTION:
The principal outlines of this influence were sketched by Walter Lippmann in his 1922 classic, Public Opinion, which began with a chapter titled "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." As he noted, the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind." 1 What we know about the world is largely based on what the media decide to tell us. More specifically, the result of this mediated view of the world is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. Elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent in the public mind. Social scientists examining this agenda-setting influence of the news media on the public usually have focused on public issues. The agenda of a news organization is found in its pattern of coverage on public issues over some period of time, a week, a month, an entire year. Over this period of time, whatever it might be, a few issues are emphasized, some receive light coverage, and many are seldom or never mentioned. It should be noted that the use of term "agenda" here is purely descriptive. There is no pejorative implication that a news organization "has an agenda" that it relentlessly pursues as a premeditated goal. The media agenda presented to the public results from countless dayto-day decisions by many different journalists and their supervisors about the news of the moment.

MEDIA AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE NORMATIVE ARGUMENT:
The normative view of the press argues that the conduct of the media has to take into account public interests. The main public interest criterions that the media need to consider include freedom of publication, plurality in media ownership, diversity in information, culture and opinion, support for the democratic political system, support for public order and security of the state, universal reach, quality of information and

culture disseminated to the public, respect for human rights and avoiding harm to individuals and the society (McQuil, 2005). The social responsibilities expected from media in the public sphere were deeply grounded with the acceptance of media as the fourth estate, a term coined by Edmund Burke in England. With the formation of the 1947 Commission on the Freedom of the Press the social responsibility of media became a strong debating point. It was formed in the wake of rampant commercialization and sensationalism in the American press and its dangerous trend towards monopolistic practices. The report of the Hutchins Commission, as it was called, was path breaking on its take on social responsibility and the expected journalistic standards on the part of the press. The theory of social responsibility which came out of this commission was backed by certain principles which included media ownership is a public trust and media has certain obligations to society; news media should be fair, objective, relevant and truthful; there should be freedom of the press but there is also a need for self regulation; it should adhere to the professional code of conduct and ethics and government may have a role to play if under certain circumstances public interest is hampered (McQuil, 2005).

DEMOCRACY, MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE:

Informing the citizens about the developments in the society and helping them to make informed choices, media make democracy to function in its true spirit. It also keeps the elected representatives accountable to those who elected them by highlighting whether they have fulfilled their wishes for which they were elected and whether they have stuck to their oaths of office. Media to operate in an ideal democratic framework needs to be free from governmental and private control. It needs to have complete editorial independence to pursue public interests. There is also the necessity to create platforms for diverse mediums and credible voices for democracy to thrive (Parceiro, 1999). It has already been discussed that media has been regarded as the fourth estate in democracy. Democracy provides the space for alternative ideas to debate and arrive at conclusions for the betterment of society. The publicly agreed norms are weighed over that of actions on the part of economic organizations and political institutions (Barnett, 2004). This is close in essence to the concept of public sphere where rational public debate and discourse is given importance. Individuals can freely discuss issues of common concern (Tsekeris, 2008). Media plays one of the crucial roles behind the formation of public sphere (Panikkar, 2004).

MEDIA AND INDIAN DEMOCRACY:

The political system in India is close in spirit to the model of liberal democracy. In the constitution of India the power of the legislature, executive and judiciary have been thoroughly demarcated. The party system in operation is a competitive one with flexibility of roles of government and opposition. There is also freedom of the press, of criticism and of assembly (Pelinka 2003). Indian democracy has always attracted attention worldwide and has made scholars to ponder over the secret of its success amidst considerable odds. In India diversity is almost everywhere and it is not a developed nation. The problems of poverty and inequality in distribution of income have been constant irritants. Nevertheless, till today democracy has survived in the country. The role of media in India, the largest democracy of the world is different from merely disseminating information and entertainment. Educating the masses for their social upliftment needs to be in its ambit as well. In a country where there is large scale poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment media has a responsibility towards developmental journalism. It has a role to play behind formation of public opinion which can force the political parties to address the core issues haunting the country's progress. However, public opinion can be manipulated by vested interests to serve their own goals (Corneo, 2005). In India public service broadcasting was given much importance after independence. It was used as a weapon of social change. AIR (All India Radio) and Doordarshan, the public service broadcasters in the country had the responsibility of providing educational programs apart from information and entertainment. However, it needs to be taken note of that the public service broadcasting system in the country was closely identified with the state. A monopolistic media structure under state control has the threat of becoming the mouthpiece

of the ruling elite. The scenario was bound to change with the opening up of Indian economy in a bid to integrate with the global system. It signalled the emergence of a competitive market in the field of media with public service broadcasters getting challenges from private entities. This, however, had the seeds of a new problem of ownership. Ownership pattern of media across the globe and in India is a cause for concern. There are big corporate houses who own newspapers and television networks. A higher concentration of ownership increases the risk of captured media (Corneo, 2005). Media independence in such a scenario gives way to safeguarding the interest of the owners who may not serve social responsibilities. The space for plurality of ideas is eroded sending ominous signals for democracy. Bogart (1995) opines that in many democratic countries media ownership has reached dangerous levels of concentration. He has cited the examples of News Corporation's (owned by Rupert Murdoch) 37 % share in United Kingdom's national newspaper circulation and Silvio Berlusconi's ownership of top three commercial television channels, three pay TV channels and various newspapers and magazine in Italy which act as his political mouthpieces. Transnational powerful media organizations are in operation in India post liberalisation. These are big multinational corporations who own a chunk of the mass media market ranging from newspapers, television, radio, book publishing to music industry. Five of world's largest media conglomerates include General Electric, Walt Disney, News Corporation, Time Warner, Viacom and CBS. In India there are big players like the Times Group and ABP who rule the roost in the media arena. In a bid to open up the Indian market 26% foreign direct investment has been allowed in news publication and 74% has been allowed in non news segments by the Government. 100% foreign direct investment is available in the film industry. 100% FDI is also allowed in television software production subject to certain government norms. Cable networks and FM Radio networks have FDI limits of 49% and 20% respectively (FICCI and PwC, 2006).Research undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers has shown the FDI investment trend across mass media in India. Virgin Media Asia has a holding in HT media's foray into FM radio. Financial Times (Pearson Group) has an arrangement with Business Standard; AmericorpVentures, Mauritius has a stake in Nimbus Communications which deal in television and films and Reuters UK has equity sharing with Times Global Broadcasting, the Indian entity. Therefore, across mass media options have opened up for availability of transnational homogeneous content. The growth of media conglomerates and their powerful presence has raised fears of manipulation of ideas by a powerful few detrimental to the democratic fabric. The corporate giants have also engaged in severe competition among themselves dishing out news and content which is primarily dominated by sensationalization, sleaze and glitz to capture wider markets. The disturbing trend that has emerged in the present media scenario is the use of media in the battle between rival political groups (Coronel, 2003). In fact, this new phenomenon is in operation in India with newspapers and news channels taking sides while presenting facts. The same event can be presented in two contrasting manners in two newspapers or two television channels. Coronel argues that promotion of hate speech in place of constructive debate and creating an atmosphere of suspicion rather than social trust has the danger of making people cynic about the democratic setup leading to its breakdown.

MASS COMMUNICATION- PRIMITIVE SOCIETY & TRADITIONAL SOCIETY:

James D. Harless writes in this reference " by definition primitive have no written language and therefore, little need for printing. They lack electricity to power presses, transmitters or projectors. They spend much of their time hunting and forging for food and have little time for media consumption. They do not understand money advertising or trade but depend on barter. Primitive societies do not have proper time, " mind set" or economy to support mass communication". Joseph Dominick presents a very live picture of primitive society in reference of mass communication and on how it works in primitive society. "Primitive tribes had sentinels that scanned the environment and reported dangers councils of elders interpreted facts and made decisions. Tribal meetings were used to transmit these decisions to the rest of the group other members of the tribe may have been story tellers and gestures who functioned to entertain the group. As society became larger and more complex, these jobs grew too big to be handled by single individual with the advent of a technology

that allowed the development of mass communication. These jobs were taken over by the mass media. This change was an important one, and throughout the following discussion we will examine the consequences of performing these communication functions by means of mass communication as opposed to interpersonal communication."

As pattern of society has been changed according to time and primitive society has become traditional having some fixed characteristics. David Riesman has described traditional society as a stable society of family and kinship ties that finds meaning of life in its age old patterns and traditions, and in following the traditional religion and wisdom of its forefathers. In the traditional societies (advance from the primitive societies), there were little resource for mass communication because the utilization was limited, power supply was for a little time period in a day, illiteracy prevailed and written language was in few schools. Mass communication can be scanned as one of the several society-wide communication processes, at the apex of a pyramidal distribution of other communication processes according to this criterion."

As human life has been very-very hectic and mass media are pervasive in the modern life style man can stop but the information flow of the channels is going on and on, so it has been very important. If communication is concerned in its broadest sense, not only as the exchange of news and messages but as an individual and collective activity embracing all transmission and sharing of ideas, facts and data, then it acquires an area of functioning in any social systems. This intern enhances its capacity as well as the role it has to play. In these terms mass media have become pervasive in today's society. It is due to mass media that the world today's has turned into a global village. In today's life-style communication touches many aspects of human life, be it intellectual, political, economic or social. Intellectually mass media have contracted the world into a global village. It has made the world beyond our intimate environment known to us.

CONCLUSION:

In Indian democracy media has a responsibility which is deeply associated with the socio economic conditions. The present scenario is not quite encouraging and certain areas need to be addressed. Media organizations, whether in print, audio visual, radio or web have to be more accountable to the general public. It should be monitored that professional integrity and ethical standards are not sacrificed for sensational practices. The freedom of press in the country is a blessing for the people. However, this blessing can go terribly wrong when manipulations set in. The self regulatory mechanism across media organisations need to be strong enough to stop anomalies whenever they occur. Agencies like Press Council of India need to be vigilant to stem the rot. Big media conglomerates are a serious threat. To counter this problem pluralistic media organizations which are financially viable need to be encouraged. Community participation is a goal that the media should strive for in a country like India.

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