The role of internet and satellite channels in cultural and political changes in developing countries: A review of research findings

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Abstract

Media like internet and satellites have significantly changed the political and cultural interactions of political groups, so that it overshadows the concept of border as one of the element of governments and nations. Therefore, this research report focuses on awareness – based on indices like education, income, employment, etc. among others – in selection of the programs and contents of the above-mentioned media and their effects. It also clarifies the range of influences from these media and their power which can clear the way for a realistic approach in dealing with their consequences in Iran and in programming for meeting challenges like cultural invasion. The results show that political-cultural changes in developing countries cannot be clarified focusing on a single factor, since they do not have causal relationship with media like internet and satellite and should be studied taking into account other influential factors. Therefore, the functionality of these media can be noticed taking into account the environmental conditions and considering them as medium factors.

Key Words: internet, satellite, cultural-political changes, telecommunications, socialization, political socialization

Introduction

Internet and satellite are among telecommunication media which do not have the obstacles limiting and controlling the transmission of messages. Rapid growth of these communication devises in the world which has different bordering and forms, made people worried about the future conditions of borders in future on the one side, and the changes inside borders on the other. Daniel Lerner is right is positing that these devices have powerful influences because they facilitate the process of extrapolation and tautology and finally provide for the growth of basic character for accepting different conditions (Cazeneuve, 1993: 247).

As John Fiske put it, TV and satellite programs have a new interpretation of human in them. This human can understand individual and social experiences of others and contribute in their wisdom and imaginations. This new interpretation carries with it a new look at human, art, values, etc. which will become widespread all over the world. News will direct people's impressions and interpretations and creates a new model of political-social thoughts in their mind. Noticing the fact that the main part of news and programs are produced in Europe and America, a big part of values and concepts present in these societies are disseminated using satellites. Even local media products like what is produced in Arab or Asian south eastern countries are also influenced by concepts of western modern culture. In other words, 15000 TV channels will prepare the ground for cultural globalization (Melody, 1995: 6-10).

Therefore, questions are posed about their "role" in cultural and political changes in general and in cultural and political changes in developing countries in

particular. In other words, the effects of globalization of electronic communications on changes in accepted positions in the structure of different cultural and political systems are studied. Considering these facts, the main research question is: what are the effects of communication devices like internet and satellite on political and cultural changes in developing countries?

The hypothesis thereon are posed as: internet and satellite, through indirect but effective entrance into socialization and political socialization processes in developing countries, prepares the ground for political and cultural changes which differ depending on education rate in each society.

The role of internet and satellite in political and cultural changes in (developing) societies

Internet and satellite as international media has high potentials in transmitting messages. In fact, these two are among the greatest message conveyers in the world. Paying attention to this fact can help us in understanding their effects in the area of political and cultural changes, but besides the influencing power and positive or negative effects these media have, we should pay attention to the other side of the coin that is their audiences and the systems dominating them. That is because nowadays the concept of media enforcement has been rejected and proven wrong. The purpose of the hypothesis here is to pinpoint this fact which can be a good guide in analyzing cultural and political challenges of these media for nations and governments.

Nowadays, one of the outcomes of globalization is the outspread of information at a global level or the globalization of awareness. In fact, the main audiences available for these media are people living in cities who, in spite of different local

and national positions resulting from modern life, have a progressive analysis and understanding power.

Thus, the answer to the question of the role of internet and satellite in cultural and political changes of (developing) nations depends on analyzing the applicants and change factors (the receivers of messages) and the systems or regimes they are in. based on a system approach, media are considered as parts of hindering or encouraging elements which lead the changes and whose power and functionality is determined in the framework of social systems which includes the cultural and political systems.

This way, media are transferring elements in nature that can play the role of mediating variables. In other words, in the series of events leading to political and cultural changes, media can affect these changes by restating and processing the representations, but their role is not considered as an independent variable. Considering the plurality of globalization processes, confinement of the relationship between the messages of media with their audiences as a result of shortage of time on the part of the audience and close competition of media, alongside the audiences' variable selection power make us concentrate on understanding these media as "path breakers" for those attitudes in the area of political and cultural issues.

Thus we enter the areas related to formation of people's viewpoints and beliefs or the issues of socialization and political socialization. From this perspective, there is a necessary and meaningful distinction between the existence of a message on the one side and its acceptance on the other.

A point which can help us understand the "ambiguity" in the "role" of these media is the combination of primary and secondary factors in the processes of socialization and political socialization. Mass media which are among the secondary factors have entered the realm of primary factors through utilizing new communication technologies. Their access to inside of families have consequences for family and its influence as the main factor in educating people, on socialization and political socialization processes. What may suffer the society is the unconscious impressibility resulting from these media.

Jean Baudrillard writes about "the culture of mass media" in this way: behind "the use of images" by imperialism a reading system is revealed. That is, there exists increasingly just what can be read (what must be read, i.e. fictions). Thus, the reality of the world or its history is no longer important, instead, the internal coherence of reading system is prominent. If we want to use Mc Lohan's terms, we should say each medium imposes its own message and what we "use" is a purified world reinterpreted by a technical and "fictional" code (Baudrillard, 2001: 115).

Therefore, we can say that the two issues, i.e. "the conditions of cultural and political systems" and "conditions of receivers of messages" from different respects clarify the role of internet and satellite in the country. Thus, if internet and satellite messages are considered as external factors affecting political and cultural changes and their efforts and success are focused on in the framework of cultural diffusion and political implications, we should assess the internal factors affecting changes in political and cultural systems in order to be able to determine the rate of their effects. This way, instead of assuming every political and cultural

change as the consequence of these media and their messages, we seek the reasons for their acceptance – the two issues mentioned above. Moreover, and the success or failure of people responsible for making values or culture reproduction are criteria for determining the rate of influences from internet and satellite in cultural and political changes. This is related to Hoebel's serious warning about the study of diffusion. Diffusion is not a simple process; instead, it's more like a carriage which carries a cultural element around the world. These facts show that in determining the role of internet and satellite in cultural and political changes in (developing) societies, we have to consider different layers of cultural and political changes in order to: 1) prevent the exaggeration made about their influence and 2) consider their utilization and reaction as they are, i.e. plural and relative.

Research findings

In this study, considering the fact that the issue at hand requires longitudinal and repetitive methodology, research findings from different periods of time have been used to enrich the conclusions. Thus, the research findings are not confined to a specific research or time period. Generally, random and cluster sampling were used. In a research done by the Research and Instruction Undersecretary of the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance in 1374 using a random sample of 3540 people in 15 Iranian cities the following results were obtained for the question of "how do you usually become aware of the events and news in the country?". The results are grouped based on "gender", "age group", "education", "Marital status" and "income".

Table 1: how people become aware of the events and news

		Radio		TV		Newspapers		conversations		other		unknown		X^2
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
gender	m	181	10.7	1182	67.2	273	15.5	61	3.5	18	1	38	2.2	47.6
	f	151	8.5	1320	74.2	163	9.3	93	5.2	11	0.6	42	2.4	P=0.000
Age group	16-24	41	5.7	526	73.3	97	13.5	36	5	4	0.6	14	1.9	102.9
	25-34	41	5.6	529	72.5	106	14.5	34	4.7	9	1.2	11	1.5	P=0.000
	35-44	58	8.3	496	71.2	105	15.1	25	3.6	7	1	6	0.9	
	45-54	83	11.7	512	72.2	72	10.2	23	3.2	2	0.3	17	2.4	
	+55	116	16.9	439	64	56	8.2	36	5.2	7	1	32	4.7	
education	Illiterate	66	15.5	285	67.1	14	3.3	32	7.5	-	-	28	6.6	238.2
	Literate without degree	31	12.7	`182	74.6	9	3.7	18	7.4	-	-	4	1.6	P=0.000
	Elementary	62	9.8	503	79.2	42	6.6	15	2.4	2	0.3	11	1.7	
	Guidance school	56	8.5	498	75.6	66	10	23	3.5	6	0.9	10	1.5	
	Diploma	72	7.2	707	70.6	166	16.6	40	4	8	0.8	9	0.9	
	Associate Degree	14	8.3	106	62.7	35	20.7	7	4.1	3	1.8	4	2.4	
	B.A. and over	38	9.7	213	54.3	103	26.3	16	4.1	10	2.6	12	2.1	
	unknown	-	-	8	57.1	1	7.1	3	21.4	-	-	2	14.3	
Marital status	Single	56	7.2	515	66	141	18.1	43	5.5	7	0.9	18	2.3	50.2
	Married	257	10	1849	72.3	279	10.9	97	3.8	21	0.8	55	2.2	P=0.000
	Divorced	3	9.4	23	71.9	4	12.5	-	-	-	-	2	6.3	
	Widow	22	13.9	112	67.9	12	7.3	12	7.3	1	0.6	5	3	
	Unknown	-	-	3	60	-	-	2	40	-	-	-	-	
Income of Family' breadwinner (10000 Rials)	0-20		11.9	702	72.9	76	7.9	53	5.5	1	0.1	16	1.7	114.7
	21-30		8.7	595	79.6	65	8.4	26	3.4	3	0.4	18	2.3	P=0.000
	31-50		8.8	481	70.5	105	15.4	20	2.9	8	1.2	8	1.2	
	51-100		8.7	318	64	102	20.5	18	3.6	7	1.4	9	1.8	
	+101		6.1	88	59.9	35	23.8	10	6.8	2	1.2	3	2	
	unknown		9.4	318	66.7	53	11.1	27	5.7	8	1.7	26	5.5	
total			9.6	2502	70.7	436	12.3	154	44	29	0.8	80	2.3	

Although in this research, direct reference is not made to internet and satellite as media for obtaining information about events and news in the country, considering the differences and similarities between internet and satellite on the one side and radio and TV on the other, we can use the results and draw the following conclusions:

The relationship between gender and news media is significant (X^2=47.6, p=0.000), but TV is more successful in providing women with news (74.2 % for

women and 67.2% for men). Newspaper is more favored by men (15.5% for men and 9.2% for women). Comparing these figures with those of a 1353 research by Research Centre for Communication and Development Sciences show that the role of press in providing women with news increased significantly from 1353 to 1374. In 1353, women who got news from press were 5 percent while this increased to 9.2 percent in 1374. Naturally, this report is related to the increase in women education in recent years; and had been under the influence of increase in their political awareness.

The second conclusion is that the relationship between education and news media is statistically significant (X^2=248/2, p=0.000). Results show that with the increase in education, the significance of radio and TV decreases.

The results show that since audiences are not mere receivers and in today's world, specifically in Iran, peoples' awareness and education have increased, the effects of visual media like TV satellite and internet should be considered as factors among others affecting cultural and political changes. On the other hand, the significance of the relationship between other variables (age group, marital status, and income) and ways of obtaining information about events and news in the country show that the change factor is not just the technological transformation and cultural-technical structure of the media. That is, the changes in people's cultural and political conditions (employment, education, income, …) are effective in this transformation.

In a survey with a sample of 300 persons randomly chosen in Tehran the following results were obtained:

In the survey 182 male participants (60.67 percent) and 112 female participants (37.33) answered the questions with higher participation going to men.

Frequency distribution and participant percentage according to age is analyzed and those of age 24-34 comprised 34 percent (102 participants) of the sample which is the highest percentage. The lowest percentage goes to participants over 44 years old (34 participants or 11.3 percent). Thus the young class of the society or the second generation of the Islamic revolution has the highest participants.

The frequency distribution according to education showed that most of the participants (105 persons or 35 percent) has a B.A. or B.Sc. degree. The lowest figure goes to participants with M.A, M.Sc. and above (39 participants or 13 percent). Thus, we can assess the quality of responses considering the participants' education.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution for using satellite

Using satellite	frequency	percent
Yes	205	68.33
No	65	21.67
Without answer	12	4
Total	300	100

In Table 2. Frequency and percentage distribution for using satellite is analyzed. In this survey, 205 participants (68.33 percent) said they use satellite as a mass media. The high percentage of people using satellite may show the increasing level of attention paid to it in the society.

Table 3: frequency and percentage distribution for using internet

Using internet	frequency	percent
Yes	214	71.33
No	74	24.67
Without answer	12	4
Total	300	100

In Table 3. frequency and percentage distribution for using internet is analyzed. In this survey, 214 participants (71.33 percent) said they use internet as a mass media. The high percentage of people using internet may also show that most people are familiar with it and use it as a mass medium.

Table 4: frequency and percentage distribution for using the type of mass media

Media	frequency	percent
Radio	62	20.67
TV	105	35
Satellite	54	18
Internet54	63	21
Without answer	16	5.33
Total	300	100

In Table 4. frequency and percentage distribution for the type of mass media used is analyzed. In this survey, 105 participants (71.33 percent) said they prefered TV and 63 participants (21 percent) said they preferred internet as a mass media in their leisure time. Thus, TV as a national medium stands first in Tehran to be used by people in their leisure time.

Table 5: frequency and percentage distribution for the reason of using satellite

Reason	frequency	percent
Instructional programs	62	20.67
Sports programs	105	35
Political programs	54	18
Films and series	63	21
Without answer	16	5.33
Total	300	100

In Table 5. frequency and percentage distribution for the reason of using satellite is analyzed. In this survey, most students reported they use satellite for watching films and series (214 participants or 71.33 percent). Also, 85 participants (28.33 percent) and 51 participants (17 percent) said they use satellite to watch instructional and political programs respectively. Thus we can say that almost one third of the population use satellite to watch films and series.

Table 6: frequency and percentage distribution for the reason of using internet

Reason	frequency	percent
Hobby programs	141	47
Obtaining economic information	42	14
Obtaining political information	23	7.67
Using scientific resources	83	27.67
Without answer	11	3.66
Total	300	100

In Table 6. frequency and percentage distribution for the reason of using internet is analyzed. In this survey, 141 participants (47 percent) reported fun programs,

83 participants (27.67 percent) using scientific resources and 42 participants (14 percent) obtaining economic information as the reason for using internet. Thus we can say that almost half of the population use internet to use fun programs therein.

Table 7: frequency and percentage distribution for the participants' opinions about choosing their fashion from mass media

Media	frequency	percent
TV	10	3.33
Satellite	52	17.33
Internet	21	7
None	201	67
Without answer	16	5.34
Total	300	100

In Table 7. frequency and percentage distribution for the participants' opinions about choosing their fashion from mass media is analyzed. In this survey, 201 participants (67 percent) reported that none of mass media is effective in their choosing fashions. 52 participants (17.33 percent) reported satellite and 21 participants (7 percent) reported internet as effective factors in their choosing fashions. Thus we can say that the role of internet and satellite in this area is not significant.

Table 8: frequency and percentage distribution for participants' choosing models from satellite film characters

Model character	frequency	percent
Conservative	52	17.33
Patient	45	15
despotic	12	4
Favoring justice	186	63
Without answer	5	1.67
total	300	100

In Table 8. frequency and percentage distribution for participants' choosing models from satellite film characters. In this survey, 186 participants (62 percent) reported that they choose a character that supports justice as a model. 52 participants (17.33 percent) reported conservative characters and 45 participants (15 percent) reported patient and rough characters as their model chosen from films. Thus we can say that over half of the people watching satellite movies in Tehran prefer to choose just characters as their model.

Table 9: frequency and percentage distribution for the participants' opinions about the effects of satellite programs on the audiences' attitude and behavior

Opinion about the effects of satellite programs on attitude and behavior	frequency	percent
positive	92	30.67
negative	71	33.67
Somewhat positive	134	44.66
Without answer	3	1
total	300	100

In Table 9. frequency and percentage distribution for the participants' opinions about the effects of satellite programs on the audiences' attitude and behavior are analyzed. In this survey, 134 participants (44.66 percent) assessed these effects on their own behavior and attitude as somewhat positive and 92 participants (30.67 percent) as positive. 71 participants (23.67 percent) reported these effects as negative. Thus we can say that over half of the population assessed the effects of satellite programs on their behavior and attitude as positive.

Table 10: frequency and percentage distribution for the participants' opinions about the effects of satellite programs on the audiences' beliefs

Opinion about the effects of satellite programs on beliefs	frequency	percent
In agreement	97	32.33
In contradiction	68	22.67
Without effect	101	33.67
As alternative	30	10
Without answer	4	1.33
total	300	100

In Table 10. frequency and percentage distribution for the participants' opinions about the effects of satellite programs on the audiences' beliefs are analyzed. In this survey, most of the participants (101 participants or 33.67 percent) reported that these programs have no effect on their beliefs. 97 participants (33.32 percent) reported the programs were in agreement with their beliefs and 68 participants (22.67 percent) reported they are against their beliefs. 30

participants (10 percent) reported the effects of satellite programs on their beliefs as an alternative factor. Thus we can say that almost all participants assess the effects of these programs in agreement with their beliefs.

In another research done on male and female Rahnamaei (guidance school) and high school students comprising a sample of 1002 participants chosen by cluster sampling method, the following results were obtained.

Table 11 : frequency and distribution of participants' using or not using the media

Media	Using		Not using	
	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
TV	968	97.7	23	2.3
video	624	66	322	34
satellite	248	27.2	664	72.8

According to the results, TV and video have the highest usage among the population respectively. Using satellite filled the third rank with only 27.2 percent of the participants using it. Of course these results, as the researcher says, should be analyzed considering the prohibition of satellite in Iran. Priority of purposes for using visual media was asked and revealed the following results.

Table 12: priorities in using visual media

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	Score
Instructional	77	123	298	296	1	2.97
Scientific	145	201	296	171	1	3.39
Music	199	-	166	301	240	-
Films and plays	601	195	70	54	3	4.45

As can be seen, the research findings supports previous findings and shows that films and plays got more attention on the part of the audiences. Thus, the audiences of visual media like TV, video, satellite and internet use these devices as a hobby and instructional purposes are not significant in this regard.

Conclusions

The popularity of different media and their penetration in different layers of human life have made life without them very difficult, if not impossible. About internet and satellite, the main point is their popularity. In fact, because of their "distribution" power on the one hand and continuous presence in societies on the other, media issues get a direct relationship with "changes" which is not necessarily causal.

Therefore, thinking about the relationship between the dynamic power of societies and their environment with media like satellite poses a significant question about explaining different changes including political and cultural ones: What is the role of internet and satellite among the factors leading to political and cultural changes?

In this paper we tried to focus on organizing processes of attitudinal and intellectual frameworks and determine the factors for impressing and impressibility. In this regard, the processes of socialization and political socialization – which include assessments of present and favored cultural circumstances- as the common point of media, were considered as important elements in different processes like family. We showed that the emergence of new variables (like internet and satellite) causes an interference of sources and alters the patterns of political and cultural changes. This interference has many

consequences including frangibility and weakening of the least reproduction of attitudinal and intellectual frameworks supporting the current and favored political and cultural circumstances.

Therefore, in analyzing the various responses to the question of "what should we do?" in the political and cultural areas, i.e. the types and orientation of cultural and political changes, attention is attracted toward new variables and their emergence. However, as expected and stated in the hypothesis, the "role" of internet and satellite, if considered along with other factors affecting cultural and political changes surrounded by the social system, are noticeable as path breaking factors.

It's worth noticing that this role has a relative high power in its own right, a fact which has made internet and satellite prominent. But we should not forget that cultural and political areas in every society are not easily changeable; therefore, cultural diffusion and political implications through internet and satellite are not effective and do not have absolute power unless the internal political and social conditions of a country are suitable for them.

In a general conclusion, we can say that the role of internet and satellite in cultural and political changes of developing countries is an intervening and medium role which alters depending on internal political and cultural circumstances and the conditions of socialization and political socialization which determine the receivers of message. This alteration is the reflection of cultural and political potentials of each society which include a wide variety of capabilities. This may prevent the analyst to assess the role of internet and satellite as an independent variable causing political and cultural changes directly. Empirical

evidence shows that the effects of internet and satellite is limited to specific levels and areas, and they are used most in the areas like film and hobby programs. Therefore, their role is significant taking into account these areas and their relationship with political and cultural changes.

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