

Media Turns Villainous While Performing its Upright Obligations of Educating, Informing and Entertaining: Analysis with Particular Reference to Pakistan

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Abstract:

Media has become a powerful actor in the modern world, particularly in Pakistan. Media inclusive of traditional media and social media primarily aims at informing, educating and entertaining the public; but in doing it so; it led its viewers and/or readers in Pakistan to sociopolitical chaos in various ways. That being said, it helped prop up militancy and extremism, presented unethical contents to the viewers, succumbed to ideological division, and became the harbinger for online extremist communication. Said in another way, it has assumed both the face of a guide and a monster in Pakistan.

Key Words: Traditional media, social media, culture, sociopolitical chaos, online extremist communication

1. Introduction:

Precisely termed as the fourth estate of the Government, Media has become a powerful actor in the modern world, particularly in Pakistan. Given the nature of programs ranging from entertainment to awareness-creating ones which the traditional media present to its audience, and in the case of social media, unrestrained freedom in blogging, posting and viewing; media has assumed both the role of a guide vis-à-vis fabricating public opinion regarding a particular state policy and promoting culture, and the face of a monster vis-à-vis molding the public opinion in the desired (read it “undesired”) direction and procreating turmoil in the socio-cultural setup via its presentation of morally-banged unethical contents.

Traditional media inclusive of print and electronic media in the modern world not only helps inform, educate and entertain the public but also creates political and emotional connect across the large part of the country or for that matter the Pakistani diaspora spread across the entire globe (Pirzada and Hussain 2013). Furthermore, it also insinuates the sense of “One Nation” among the diaspora spread across the entire world, connected together emotionally and politically by a share sense of success and tragedy. However, in performing its upright obligations mentioned in the previous lines, it lost its way somewhere in the middle and lead its viewers instead to a sociopolitical chaos via creating socio-ethnic divide among the masses: propped up militancy and extremism via its amateur editorial policy; and went into an unseen symbiosis with terrorist elements (Pirzada and Hussain 2013). It further fanned the fire when in the name of freedom of expression and liberalism (read it pseudo-liberalism) it metamorphosed from culture-promoting actor to a killer of social and cultural values by presenting unethical contents to the masses.

In a similar fashion, social media also plays its part in the noble ambition of educating, entertaining and informing the public: it breaks the stories ignored by the traditional media; mobilizes the public by disseminating information about the public protests and other social campaigns; renders a helping hand in humanitarian efforts by coordinating and advertising initiatives; serves as an advocate for social causes; and establishes a link between politicians and their constituents (read it followers). As contrast to its constructive role, however, social

media also poses a serious risk of exploiting the masses, in particular the youth, by becoming a harbinger for extremist online communication; succumbing to the ideological division; and producing unethical contents due to the lack of regulation (Kugelamn 2013).

2. Traditional Media

2.1 Constructive Role of Traditional Media

Traditional media, in particular the electronic media, impinges on the masses culturally, politically, socially and economically.

2.1.1 Cultural Role of Traditional Media

It has served the cultural purpose of assuaging the tensions and enhancing harmony among the masses. To put it differently, traditional media has made it possible to harmonize the cultures by directing the attitude and desires of the people, exposed to the similar media programs, of various cultures towards the common objectives. In the restoration of disposed judiciary in Pakistan in March 2009, for instance, the people from different spheres of life and different cultures in the multicultural setup of the country unified for a common purpose of restoration and freedom of the judiciary (Pirzada and Hussain 2013). In a like manner, the monstrous 2005 earthquake and the horrible 2010 floods (NDMA 2011) in the country (Pakistan) saw the public from different cultures pledging their parts in abetting the disaster-stricken people vis-à-vis the presentation of programs depicting the pitiable condition of the quake and flood-hit areas and the Adam's sons and the Eve's daughters by the media. The most recent example of Shahzaib murder by Shah Rukh Jatoi and Saraj Talpar, both of whom represent infamous powerful culture of Wadera Shahi in the country, is the best one with media turning up the stage strongly condemning the Wadera Shahi in lieu of the murder (The News 2013).

In another instance, legislative assembly in India was made to introduce effective legislative measures for curbing the menace of corruption by the massive protests, under the leadership of Anna Hazare, by the people of distinct cultures in 2011 driven by the media (Tripathi and Yardley 2011). Indian protests condemning the rap of a 23 year old student girl followed by her death in December 2013, and Mumbai protests condemning the rape of four year old child girl just recently also depict the mentioned fruitful role of the traditional media.

2.1.2 Political Role of Traditional Media

Traditional media in tandem with the institution of education has helped create political consciousness among the masses and, hence, served its part in the political arena. In particular reference to the developing countries, traditional media has raised the political rational capacity of the general masses which at present do not feel reluctant to point fingers at the state policies that are not on the same wavelength as the public interest. It has assumed the position of a stage for political theatre wherein the starrers appear well before the elections, present their political manifestos and continue to advertise them till elections; the drama continues even after the election when the actors keep on advocating their manifestos using the media channels. In the November presidential elections of USA (CNN.com 2012), for instance, media served as a handy tool for both the presidential candidates (President Obama and Governor Romney) who projected their programs concerning foreign policy, economy and war on terror in their presidential debates via media to the masses. Earlier this year, the "Uproar" of Allama Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri and his contingent long march using media fascinated many viewers towards itself (The News 2013).

2.1.3 Economic Role of Traditional Media

On the economic front traditional media has been educating the masses about economic activity concerning the budget, unemployment, inflation rate, foreign aides and debts, GDP rate and corruption; or otherwise the economic prosperity of the country (as the case may be). In a bid to economic education of the masses, it has more or less put the executive authorities, fearing the public uproar, on track to fabricate policies in the best possible public interest. Democratic government of Prime Minister Berlusconi, in Italy, was dismissed on the grounds of corruption in 2010 highlighted by the traditional media. In a similar fashion, media brought to limelight the infamous Haj Scam in Pakistan in 2010 which cost Qadri and Azam Khan Swati their ministries. NICL case, ephiderine cases etc. and Rental Power Project scam are some other examples. Moreover, the long show of commercial advertisements in media has transformed the need economy of masses into the desired economy of luxuries making the life of the people easier than ever.

2.1.4 Social Role of Traditional Media

In social sphere traditional media via its entertainment programs has been imparting such social values and standards, which have converted the local cultures into a large common national culture, into the life of the

masses (Pirzada and Hussain 2013). While doing it so, traditional media has sought to provide a political and emotional connect across the large parts of the country and the globe at large. This connect has, in turn, helped indoctrinated the feeling of “One Nationhood” among the masses by a shared sense of success and tragedy. In addition, traditional media has also helped the masses to preserve the existing social norms and values, which are in sync with cultural norms, by creating a sense of pride in them.

2.2 Social Media

Social Media or The New Media (a newly coined term for the replacement of social media) is no less than the traditional media in educating, informing and entertaining the people albeit not in the same capacity as the traditional media. Facebook, created by a Harvard Student Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 initially as a gadget to connect with fellow students, has at present more than 845 million active users across the world. Fathered by Chan and Chad Hurley in 2005, You Tube provides the forum for distribution of video contents ranging from cute singing bird, to unrun-sofar TV programs, to eye witness accounts of tragic incidents such as accidents etc. Launched in 2006, Twitter is online social networking and micro blogging service whose user number has grown to 300 million as per the statistics of 2011 (Kugelamn 2013).

The reason that these giant social media services and micro blogging have appealed so much to the masses is that every Tom, Dick and Harry with little or no advanced computer skills can use them with ease. Besides, a video posted on You Tube can be shared in Facebook and/or Twitter. In other words, a large number of people can be contacted inexpensively via a variety of services (Kugelamn 2013). In addition, social media as contrast to the traditional media is also faced with small or no socio-economic barriers to pledge its part (Kugelamn 2013). To put it differently, you do not have to “be somebody” to “be somebody” on the social media. Ranging from a villager singing on a *Dhaba* (tea shop) in a rural street, to a 1 year old child trying to sing, to a student singing in its school annual dinner night; social media has given them all the roles of no less than the heroes of super hit movies presented in traditional media.

2.2.1 Constructive Role of Social Media

Social media amplifies ----and often breaks---- the stories which the traditional media is unwilling to break or does not give importance to. For example, a video on You Tube of Pakistan paramilitary forces in 2011 shooting at an unarmed young man begging for his life went viral and invited the wrath of masses via blogs, posts and tweets. A yet another leaked-video footage of a *Dunya News Channel* crafted interview of two well-known anchor persons with real-estate tycoon Malik Riaz in June 2012 sparked fire well before the traditional media (Kugelamn 2013).

In addition, social Media serves as a communication forum by informing the public of about the protest campaigns and other social movements, thereby playing a mobilizing role. Jasmine revolution (read it Arab Spring), for example, resulted into the ousting of Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine in January 2011; and brought up the end of 30 years of dictatorships of president Hosni Mubarak in Egypt in February 2011 within few days of the massive protests at Tahrir Square. Other such protests shakings the regimes were those in Libya, Syria and Lebanon with varying degrees of success. All it can be summed up is, Thanks to social media: SMS texts mobilized the protestors; blogs hosted discussions and produced news; and online social-networking sites served as connecting tools for the protestors (Kugelamn 2013).

Besides, social media promote and accelerate humanitarian efforts by mobilizing, advertising and coordinating initiatives. This was on full display during the 2010 catastrophic floods in Pakistan that stormed the country badly. With government and international efforts bleakly insufficient, public used Facebook, blogs and online forums for funds donation and relief supplies (Kugelamn 2013).

By the same token, social media establishes link among the masses by advocating for social causes. In other words, social media has helped promote such common causes as uniform and universal education for all, eradication of poverty, saying no to stereotypes, women’s rights etc (Kugelamn 2013).

Finally, social media serves as a resourceful stimulant of political communication among the leaders and the masses. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf Chairman Imran Khan, for example, boasts 300,000 followers in Twitter. With 35000 followers each in the Twitter, Chief Minister Panjab Shabaz Sharif and interior minister Rahman Malik second the list. This role of connecting political leaders and to the masses makes the social media blow its own horn (Kugelamn 2013).

2.3 Destructive role of Media

Notwithstanding its constructive role, however, media inclusive of traditional and social media has proved at times to pledge a destructive part vis-à-vis directing the public opinion in the desired dimensions and its plentiful show of unethical contents bring the social and moral demoralization (Haque 2012). The list of the reasons is big: inability, or perhaps the unwillingness, of those at helm of affairs of the media to develop mature editorial scrutiny; the failure of state authorities to clearly define the code of conduct and the rules for censorship universally accepted by all media channels; mushroom growth of private ownership of media channels by the private investors who use such channels for the pursuance of their own political, economic and ideological interest etc. (Pirzada and Hussain 2013).

Driven by the desires of “Going Live” and infected by “Breaking News Syndrome”; media, in particular the electronic media, remains active 24/7 to look for the news, albeit demoralizing and disintegrating and not in the best interest of viewers. Terrorist, often cognizant with the fact, exploit this media appetite by planning and executing their strategic acts meticulously and efficiently such that media is left with no but Hobson’s choice of giving those acts coverage, notwithstanding the fact that this may be detrimental to the viewers. Such media-terrorist symbiosis can be explicitly observed in 9/11 attacks, Bali attacks 2002, Madrid bombings 2004, London bombings 2005, Mumbai attacks 2008 and Marriot Hotel attack 2008. (Iqbal 2012)

In addition to the causes mentioned above, social media poses serious risks of deepening ideological divide amongst the social masses (Kugelman 2013). That is to say, the liberals have resorted to social media for the projection of their views, and the conservatives have taken to the streets to appeal the masses with the result that there is yet another divide between the liberals and conservatives. Besides, Social media even risks becoming a safe haven of online communication for extremists and terrorism (Kugelamn 2013). Terrorist outfits, such as al-Qaida, continue using social media for the preaching of their ideologies to the general masses which may appear appealing to the easily unexploited faction of the masses and hence, attract a large number of recruiters. The display and wide access of unethical contents due to the lack of regulation is yet another drawback consistently hampering the constructive role of social media.

2.4 Conclusion

It can now fairly be concluded that media is a powerful actor in the modern world via its role of educating, informing and entertaining and as an agent of change. This role, however, goes villainous when played unprofessionally for amateur purposes.

In a nutshell, media is the power stimulant of the masses in its constructive role of creating public awareness; its destructive part, however, of demoralizing and dividing the masses on ideological basis needs to be tapped. Various such measures of bringing media back to its normal constructive sphere would be widely accepted code of conduct, policy aspects of regulation, training and capacity building of the media men and other such acts (of legislation etc.).

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