

Managing Media: Bridging The Gap between Grassroots and Power Corridors?

Media could be the bridge between the policy-makers and general public. It can operate as an intangible, vibrant and live bridge running from power corridors to grassroots. The message that the government sends across can turn crowds into mobs but may also stem mayhem and turn ordinary people into human resource. The right premise of politics should be economy. Politics is empty without sound economic basis. But to build a strong economy, apart from right policies, apart from spadework, the right message and the choice of right media are also important. Though numerous studies have focused on adverse impact of media on society and especially on impressionable minds, it is equally necessary to explore media as an agency for reform and as a catalyst to good social processes. It may be of interest to explore ways in which media could be put at the service of society to wrought behavioural change and for sustaining desirable transformation in attitudes of people. Media has inundated our lives and we live in the age of media surveillance as well as media policing.

Keywords: Message, Media, Campaigns, Behavioural Change, Media Surveillance, Media Policing.

Introduction

Any government should aim at best media response to any emergent situation. Media can help government at alleviating crisis and not just reporting crisis. In times of peace, it should be used to keep motivation high and derive consistent performance from the people. It should be spontaneous but not impulsive. Media has to constantly introspect and respond to the needs of the society in a healthy way.

Aim of the Paper

The Indian populace is well-conversant with use of media in directing and guiding public opinion. Media governance and management not for getting favourable election results or aligning votes, but for aiding execution of community-oriented plans may be most gratifying for any government. The emphasis will be on constructive use of media rather than destructive use of the same.

Review of Literature

Since the paper is about the media, so the researcher has relied largely on the articles that have been published in the various newspapers and magazines in the country. The important articles that the researcher came across are: "Modi Govt Thinks Managing Economy Means Managing Headlines: Shourie" published in 2015 and 'NDA government is Congress plus a cow, says ArunShourie published in 2018. The researcher also came across useful book written by Marshall McLuhan *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* published in 1964 that discusses how media functions.

Propaganda, Films and Press

The conscious use of media for political purpose was perhaps most intensely, rampantly and obviously done in Soviet regime. Movies were used to disseminate socialist ideology in Lenin and Stalin era. USSR was formed in 1922 and discursive cinema was identified as a medium to sustain the state: *agitki* (provocative movies distributed by the Soviet state to hail the merits of communism), documentaries and newsreels fortified exciting speeches on merits of communism. Chief amongst these films was *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein (1925). Censorship and state control over movie production was supreme.



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Throughout history, films have been used to support the hegemonic claim: for instance, by Nazi Germany during the World War II and in contemporary times to justify American A-bomb attack on civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Conversely, films have also been made to critique these perspectives: Auschwitz literature and literary texts originating in subjugated communities. In the *Introduction to What is Cinema?* Hugh Gray admires French film critic Andre Bazin for having 'founded a cine-club which developed out of meetings at which he defied the Nazi forces of occupation and the Vichy government by showing films they had banned for political reasons (Gray, 3). Films can serve as ideological weapons but a play of perspectives (narrative or camera or audience) may help overcome the assault.

Can we in India create models that have substance and altruism both and that is based on cooperation of peasant, proletariat, engineer and entrepreneur? This could be done by using media to introduce the discourse of development and replace the discourse of religion, casteism and fundamentalism. Unparliamentary language and politically correct jargon both are to be avoided- an honest perspective on realities should be taken. Dialogue, discussion and brainstorming should emerge and the spirit of research and scientific temper should be fostered. Reinvesting faith in cliché and hackneyed terms is important. Instead of reporting statistics of different communities that lost their lives, total scale of human devastation and injury to humanity may be stated. Instead of calling certain heinous murders as 'honour killings', the term should be dissociated from the term 'honour' so that in future such incidents are not repeated under public pressure or caste duress. From restoring peace to mitigating violence, from reporting war to issuing alerts, from building images, brands and goodwill to defaming people and killing reputations- media has become an important instrument and a quick one. But media should be impersonal and objective and ethical media can counteract polarizations. It can mitigate ill-feelings in riots or it can publish prejudicial statements. It can assist vote bank politics; it can be as effective as a disinterested observer. So, if the need is to re-invest the faith in humanity or urge the farming community to revise their attitudes towards farming and stick to this profession. But of course, impressions will be buttressed only by substance and work on ground level.

In contemporary scenario, apart from information, media is about education and motivation. Portmanteau words like 'edutainment' and 'infotainment' have emerged in recognition of this important task. But Indian law-makers and administrators realizing its significance have considered media, the fifth pillar of the constitution. If media can polarize opinions and sentiments, responsible media can endorse politics that is economy-oriented and not based on religion or caste. In the contemporary world, media is converging and the message changes several forms as it moves across this media. Many-a-times, the message is

altered beyond recognition. The original meaning is not only lost, but may take an unintended ironical note. It becomes difficult to differentiate reality from illusion and virtual reality.

The need of the hour is to emphasize the message that though employment can be granted by placements, it multiplies by entrepreneurship. It is axiomatic to say that while an entrepreneur creates jobs for others, besides himself, a job seeker is satisfied with his own job. To create a pro-entrepreneurship mindset, it is imperative that media be used not just to advertise campaigns but also assist the government in creating awareness, enhancing critical thinking, keeping people motivated, informing the people about how available schemes could be availed. If the government flags-off a campaign, it is important to win faith and sustain the motivation to participate. The entrepreneur is risk-taker by nature. But in India, the reigning sentiment is that the risk-taking avenues are severely limited and the risk is unlimited. Recently Arun Shourie made a scathing comment on the working of the incumbent government observing that: 'the present government thinks that managing the headlines means managing the economy'. He also caricatured the current policies as 'Congress plus a cow', adding that the current PMO is the weakest ever. But the media can dispel doubts and allay fears. By corollary, it can also aggravate pessimism and create mistrust. It must convey a sense of déjà vu as the NDA government does not just believe in using media as tool of propaganda but also restricts it without declaring an emergency. According to Reuters, 'Indian journalists say they are intimidated, ostracised if they criticise Modi and the BJP'. The same report further claims, 'In its annual World Press Freedom Index released on Wednesday, the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders said that India was now 138th-ranked in the world out of 180 countries measured, down two positions since 2017 and lower than countries like Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Myanmar. When the index was started in 2002, India was ranked 80th out of 139 countries surveyed' (Reuters). It further states that Prannoy Roy, co-founder of NDTV finds in the current NDA regime a 'variant of McCarthyism' (Reuters). True enough, the political opposition too has alleged snooping by the government. Responding to which Arun Jaitley, the finance minister asserted that 'order issued' was made 'under 2009 rules' and uses 'national security' as a pretext (Livemint). Contrast this with encouragement for media for building public opinion but not by instilling fear.

Sir Chhotu Ram, the great leader of united Punjab asserted: "I have learnt my economics from the Book of Life". Sir Chhotu Ram was the first leader to realize the importance of garnering public opinion in policy-making and also keeping public informed about government policies. He laid the foundation of modern day PR departments by starting BhaJan Mandalis to propagate government programmes and campaigns amongst the folk of Haryana and Punjab. He also used the mandalis as well as pirs to mediate between government and public to build peace across religions.

Emergency, Wars, Agitations, Freedom movements –all need sensitive press, rather than a press that sensationalizes. It can educate the public and channelize energies for rebuilding, rehabilitation and peaceful reconstruction. It can also be an effective platform for public to voice their concerns as in ‘letter to Editor’ columns or even when the press itself feels marginalized as in the Emergency during Indira Gandhi’s regime. In 1975, during the Emergency, freedom of press was suspended along with fundamental rights.

Exhibit1.The Hindu**Exhibit2.Outlook**

In the current context, it should be the aim of media to let the government understand realities of life and keep getting the glimpse of the book of an ordinary man’s life, even to those who are walking the corridors of power. Media is an effective platform for dialogue and discussion. Its liberty can help democracy thrive but its very strength can make it volatile and if handled irresponsibly media can wreck havoc. In fact, media has to be constantly alert and introspective so as to monitor itself for keeping the nation well-integrated and cohesive. The media, however, has lately run out of government control and thrives in public domain. The recent riots in UP and the Haryana emphasize the need to govern and control media. Guidelines for media credibility, responsibility and ethics should be circulated and media be motivated to subscribe to ethical benchmarks in reporting. The checks should be well-timed and not occur after an adverse situation has precipitated into a worst one.

Media enjoys debate so much so that in the current age, controversy has become a way of surviving in the world of media and politics. However,

media should aim at finding solutions and not just stating problems. To change that mindset, the policies and operations of government have to change and that is the greatest economic and social crisis and opportunity today. Media can be instrumental in this aim to handle social crisis and resolve it.

It is also important to build positive public opinion to facilitate change that is generally resisted.

Media can significantly contribute towards building the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. It is first, essential that the learners should be oriented towards recognizing social needs. They should identify technological gaps in what the end user or consumer needs and what is most beneficial for this user or consumer. Thus, social, technological, economical and political solutions to existing problems have to be found through participation. It is to be understood that technology should exist in service of society and for profit of all stakeholders to use John Elkington’s phrase coined in 1994. People, Planet, Profit should be the triple bottom-line and technology should be put to the service of society. If during learning years, the learner is exposed to media that inspires then the purpose of education will be fulfilled. An individual with independent spirit, critical thinking and yet possessing great social sense will be chiseled out. Sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility and eco-friendly technologies will not be just buzzwords but action plans.

Conclusion

Media is the message, said Marshall McLuhan. Media should shift focus from the problem to explore for solutions. Since, it aids communication and bridges or barriers to communication define internal and external affairs of a country- media becomes of prime importance to the government. Recall control of press during emergency. Freedom of media is important in the democracy but of course, not at the cost of integrity of the country. However, press should be monitored by ethics not policing. It should not just be ‘a keeper of conscience’ but take its role as ‘thought leader’ more seriously.

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