



Role of Media in the Politics of Pakistan (2000-2019)

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Abstract

Media has become an important part of every society. However, the role of media differs from society to society. Media in Pakistan has also become an important pillar of State. Before 2000, Print media and electronic media were the key tools of information and communication. However, since 2000 media is enjoying liberty to express the reality and facts. In this regard, President Musharaf has played positive role to allow the freedom and liberty to media. Moreover, now social media is also playing significant role to provide access to all citizens to rest of world. Media plays significant role in the general elections of Pakistan. Media has the ability to affect the elections via giving more or less coverage to some specific candidates and parties. Therefore, during elections and after elections, media keep an eye on the policies and actions of ruling party. However, there should be consensus among different channels on sensitive issues especially related with the security of Pakistan like Civil-Military relations, role of army, centre-province relations, and terrorism, religious and ethnic issues. As media is a key tool to create harmony and peace in Pakistani society.

Key Words: Mass Media, Communication, Social Constructivism, Internet, TV, Face Book, Twitter

Introduction

In contemporary world, media has become an important part of our daily life. Media is also a source to get relax because of its entertainment programs. It also helps to know about politics, economic, social happenings throughout the world. However there are different sources of media, for instance; Print media, newspapers, journals, books, radio, Television (TV), and social media such as Face book, Twitter, Instagram, Google, internet etc. One cannot deny the role and significance of traditional and modern media.

Mass media is a key source of communication to access the huge majority of public. From 1400s radio, cassettes, DVDs, tape recorders and CDs, since 1800s cinema, and 1950 TV, internet since 1990 and mobile phones since 2000 have become a key source of information throughout world. Since Arab Spring (2010), the role of social media such as Twitter, Face book etc has increased. Social media is also playing an influential role to spread information as because of

internet and technology it is easy for a common citizen to get access to information, news and entertainment.

Radio Pakistan was established on August 14, 1947 as first Broadcasting Service of Pakistan. At that time, there were three radio stations in Pakistan, first was at East Pakistan (Dhaka) and it was established in 1939, second was in Peshawar (1936) and third was in Lahore (1937). Moreover, the first TV station was commenced on November 26, 1964, and later on in Dhaka, Rawalpindi in 1965 and fourth was established in Karachi on 1966. Peshawar and Quetta centres were created in 1974. However, now we have more than ninety Pakistani TV and numerous foreign channels.

Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan (1973), also states that all citizens shall be given the right of freedom of speech and expression, freedom of press. The role and influence is undeniable fact and it is the need of every society. However, the attitude of

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audience, content creator and the mindset of a society also play an important role. Therefore, the impacts of mass media could be positive or negative. The role of media is essential in the formulation of public opinion, perceptions, and awareness. The relation of media and politics is also vital in this regard. Media is a bridge between government and common citizens. According to a Report, “a modern democratic society cannot exist without communications media.” Moreover, the role of media becomes more important in democracy and it highlights the policies, achievements and failures of government and opposite parties.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of media in the politics of Pakistan (from 2000 to 2019). This will help to understand the importance of mass media in the formulation of public opinion. This paper will also help to analyze the role of media to frame the government policies, achievements and failure. This paper also aims to highlight the role of different opposition parties in the politics of Pakistan. This paper is mainly covering the role of media in the politics of Pakistan especially from 2000 to 2019.

Analysis of Role of Media in the Politics of Pakistan through Constructivism Approach

Constructivism highlights the role and importance of norms, values, ideas, perceptions and their influence in politics. The identities, actions and values are shaped by the ideas of actors. States are constructed socially and the policies of a State are also influenced by its values and identities. The term ‘Constructivism’ was coined by Nicholas Onuf in his work “World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations (1989).” Alexander Wendt (1995) also highlights the social construction of world politics. Moreover, this theory also emphasizes on the importance of culture to explain the different events which are happening within a society.

The social interaction of different actors also constructs behavioural changes. For instance, social interaction between different politicians and public, between media, government and public also produce some vital changes in the society. Constructivism also stresses upon the significance of human rights, perceptions, norms and their impacts on society. Moreover, Constructivism highlights those norms, values, ideas, and perceptions are socially constructed. Media either it is print, electronic or social always plays significant role in every society. Media plays vital role in the construction of different facts, incidents etc. Nicholas Onuf states that, “people

always construct, or constitute social reality, even as their being which can only be social, is constructed for them.”

Social constructivism theory helps to understand the role of norms, values and identities in contemporary politics. This study mainly focuses on the role of media in the politics of Pakistan. So, the analysis of constructivism is also revolving around the norms, values of Pakistani society. Katzenstein called it “a standard of appropriate behaviours for actors with a given identity.” Media highlights and helps in the making of public opinion on some particular lines. Different politicians in Pakistan also rely on media to shape and re-shape the public perceptions. Constructivist scholar such as Alexander Wendt believes that this world is socially constructed. Media highlights different events, programs, etc with a specific agenda and purpose. Like media has the ability to affect the general elections. In this regard, the positive image building, providing full coverage to some candidates may help to increase the voters of that political party. During election campaign the anti-corruption and accountability of politician agenda of Imran Khan was getting the attention of many people especially youngsters and media was also providing it maximum coverage. ‘Naya Pakistan’ notion of Imran Khan was also a topic of debate among all channels and general public.

However, less coverage of some politicians and political parties may also affect their support. Moreover, media actively highlights different issues and public response which ultimately force the ruling elite to take actions according to the public demands. For instance; Kasur incident, the removal of Atif Mian from the post of economic advisor to Prime Minister, price control actions by Imran Khan etc. Constructivism also gives particular attention to norms, values and identities. Every society has its own values, norms and identity. Therefore, politicians remain careful because media is a watch-dog of their activities and policies on one hand. On the other hand, the role of media is also expected to comply with the norms, values and identity of Pakistani society. Public response and acceptance is equally important for media to get enough audience to follow them.

Some Key Functions of Media

One of the key functions of the media to report things and events those are happening in society. Besides coverage of different news, it is also the responsibility of media to provide information to public. Moreover, media also plays significant role to create awareness

among public via informing them about all social, political, economic affairs of State and world as well. Media in Pakistan also highlights the weaknesses and good policies of governments, corruption of political elite, nepotism in politics, misuse of power. Media is playing a vital role among public about social, political, economic issues in Pakistan. Media in Pakistan is free and its role cannot be ignored especially before and during elections.

The New Role of Media in Pakistan

Media plays significant role to reflect the government policies and the nature of a particularly society. Previously, government controlled and dictates media to follow a specific approach to highlight the policies of ruling parties. Therefore, media was dependent on government especially during the era of President Zia-ul-Haq. However, the credit of bringing freedom for media goes to President Musharraf. His era brought new ways and space for media in Pakistan. On March 2002, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was established. As a result, now there are numerous TV channels which are providing news and entertainment to the public. Currently, there are more than hundred TV channels in Pakistan. These channels are using English, Urdu and local languages such as; Pashtu, Hindku, Punjabi and Sindhi etc. Therefore, it is also helpful for the promotion of different languages and cultures in the society of Pakistan.

The Role of Media During Election Season in Pakistan

The importance of media cannot be ignored in democracy especially during elections. During the era of Presidency Musharraf Broad media was allowed to enjoy the liberty to express the facts. Before that, media was under the strict control of governments. As a result, media in Pakistan is also playing vital role especially since 2000. Within a decade media become so powerful and emerged as the important pillar of State. Quite interestingly, media also played a role in the downfall of dictator regime of President Musharraf.

Moreover, in the general election of 2008, media was relatively liberal and provide good coverage of elections. Pakistan People Party (PPP) was the first Democratic Party which has completed five years tenure. In the general elections of 2013, media was developed enough to highlight the political campaigns and facts of political parties. In 2013, social media also plays significant role along with electronic and print

media. PTI, PPP and PML (N) emerged as three key Political parties of Pakistan. These parties used print, electronic and social media for the advertisement of their manifesto, posters, and agenda etc. The political debates of different politicians on talk-shows also helps people to think which party, agenda and manifesto they want to support. The freedom of media also creates awareness among public to think about the value and importance of their vote. According to Regina Lawrence, "Research has shown that some candidates can be literally left invisible because they can't win enough interest from the media."

Media especially social media also plays significant role in the emergence of PTI as one of the main political parties of Pakistan. It also depends on different channels and journalist that which candidate or political party is getting preference by them. Such choices of different channels affect the perceptions of voters as well. Media (especially print and electronic) get involves in elections via choosing what to cover, and what to give less coverage. Similarly, Imran Khan got huge coverage because of his agenda of corruption of elite class, political mafia, poverty and to bring reforms in domestic and foreign policy of Pakistan.

The Role of Media in Making of Public Perception

Media has deep effects on our daily life routine and society. Media can make anything especial and promote issues which they intend to highlight. Maxwell and McCombs (2005) states that Media particularly news channels are successful in helping us what should we think about on different issues. Such presentation of media also shapes the perception of public. The role of perceptions is important to make something/issue important, less important or unimportant. However, numerous factors shape and affect the perceptions of people. Perception about social issues means that how we perceive the social world and helps to make sense to know this world. It is also helpful in making of impressions and inference about social realities of this world.

Severin (2001) highlights that different factor such as past-experiences, history, wants, traditions, mind-set, motivations, expectations and psychological factors also influence the perceptions of people. He further says that people react differently to same situation and issue and it is because of decoding process that how specific information reaches to people. However, another factor that plays vital role in the making of perception is exposure and access to

some specific media content. It further affects the perception of people towards a particular issue. Feldman (1999) states that, "Perception is the sorting out, interpretation, analysis and integration of stimuli involving our sense organs and brain". Turner and West (2007) argue that, "Selective exposure is a method for reducing dissonance by seeking information that is consonant with current beliefs and actions."

In Pakistan, Panama papers scandal was exposed as financial corruption of different politicians. The national media of Pakistan highlighted the issue via giving exclusive coverage to Panama Papers. Although International media has also highlighted it as ruling classes of different countries were also exposed in it. Here, one can argue that it was the media who plays vital role in the making of public perception against corruption. As media has created a narrative against the corrupt politicians of Pakistan. Therefore, media has created and shaped public perception against corruption especially on Panama scandal via reporting and giving full coverage to the scandal.

Role of Different TV Programs

Different TV channels and anchors edit their own work as they lack legitimate editors for their program. As mostly channels lack content editors and mostly people also do not look for the reference of the incident. People preferred to watch TV especially because of its visual medium as it is easy to get access to any news. Now a day, our news channels are mostly focusing on the debates of different issues. Mostly Geo anchors are the supporter of Pmln and ARY is the supporter of PTI. Therefore, most programs of these channels are focusing on particular agendas. For instance, Anchor Shahzaib Khanzada in his program "*Aaj Shahzaib Khanzada k Sath*" criticised the PTI government that Imran Khan blames previous government for the failure of policies. Another anchor of Geo News, Saleem Safi also criticized Prime Minister Imran Khan that he becomes the P.M via taking U-Turns many times. He also criticised Imran Khan for his claims of '*Riyasat-e-Madina*,' as he is unable to establish an Islamic state. He further said a Muslim cannot take U-turn to gain his objectives.

Another channel, ARY is mostly supporting PTI policies. ARY anchor mostly appreciate Imran Khan for taking some tough decisions. Such private channels have deep impacts on public opinion. Faisal Vawda took a *BOOT* with him in a live show of ARY. During program Vawda has criticized Pml(N), especially Nawaz Shrif and his Corruption. He said that PTI has

exposed the politics of PMLN. Vawda used abusive language in a live program. He was using an army boot to be highlighted in media. Such politicians should discourage to appear in live programs. Moreover, there shall be some ethical norms and rules not only for anchors but for these politicians as well. Therefore, these channels should play constructive role to create awareness in public, highlight good and bad policies of government. However, one of the main problems is that journalists in Pakistan lack appropriate training which may help to handle different critical, unexpected and challenging situation.

Role of Different Politicians in TV Programs

Media is an important tool in contemporary world politics. Different politicians throughout the world use mass media to convey their agenda to public. For instance, President Barack Obama held four press conferences during the first six months of his presidency. Previously, President George.W.Bush also appeared in many conferences, talk shows and interviews. The one key objectives of such appearance is to get public support on their particular agendas/policies. Similarly, some politicians used to appear in different talk shows to get fame and voters support. Such kind of TV appearances sometimes increases the number of their followers and voters. Cohen and Tsftati also argue that voters got affect by such media messages.

Political leaders not only in US but also in other democratic states like in UK, Pakistan and India addresses their public to get vote. Imran Khan and his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also relies social media to easily get access to general public. Moreover, Imran Khan (before elections) many time appeared in press conferences and interviews to share his political ideology against corruption, monopoly of two parties in the politics of Pakistan and aims to make Pakistan a real welfare state. After becoming Prime Minister, Imran Khan Addresses his nation on National TV (August 18, 2018) in which he said thanks to his voters and aimed to fulfil his promises.

Previously, different leaders like President Parvaiz Musharaf, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif also appears in different TV channels to address their audience. Now a day, these political leaders have their teams to update their supporters on social media about their plans, manifesto, speeches, and interviews etc. Therefore, role of media has become an important tool for political parties and leaders to stay in touch with their supporters. Prime Minister Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, Sheikh Rasheed

Ahmad, Maryam Nawaz, and Bilawal Zardari all have their Twitter accounts which they use for their political activities and messages.

Significance of Social Media

The advancement in technologies has increased the numbers of internet users. Therefore, now billions of people have access to internet, Google and social media etc. As a result, it is easy for all citizens to get access to latest news and information either it is related with government policies, economy or social issues. Social media platforms such as Face Book, Twitter, Instagram etc have become an important tool to get access to latest updates. According to a study (2012), "Such media attract growing attention on the part of the corporate sector." Dmitry (2013) argue that social media has become top priority of their policies. Since last two decades internet has emerged as more famous platform for all political, economic and social developments.

Social media has played a significant role in Arab uprisings. Mattoni(2016) also says that, "social media have become a tool for political movements coordination around the world ." The State Department of US has also highlighted that one of their key priorities is the defence and protection of internet freedom throughout world. However, with the excuse of 'protection of Internet freedom,' US is supporting different dissenter groups in anti-US regimes. Therefore, with the spread of internet and modern technologies such advanced countries are misusing and influencing the media of other countries to gain their objectives.

According to Nye (2008), "The new media are not essentially democratic or totalitarian. Such social structure may represent a combination of both." A study of Benkler(2006) also highlights that with the industrial transition economic, political and cultural institutions are also in transition. Social media also plays vital role in Pakistan. People response on social media also affects the government policies. For instance; on January 2018, a seven years old baby girl was sexually abused in Kasur and this incident further triggered the anger and grievances among general public. Child molesting law was passed in the parliament of Pakistan on January 10, 2020 after the public criticism on child abuse. Another key incident was the appointment of Atif Mian as the economic advisor of Imran Khan. Atif Mian belongs to minorities Ahmadi. Consequently, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government has to remove Atif Mian after the public criticism.

The Role of Media and the Projection of Foreign Policy

Media plays crucial role not only at domestic level but also helpful in the projection of foreign relations. In this regard, media highlights the Pakistan's foreign policy interests according to our national interest. For instance: The President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan had visited Pakistan on February 13, 2020. This visit was highlighted by Pakistani media with historical and contemporary context as two Muslim States have deep connections and association. Similarly, media always highlight the nature of friendly and trustworthy relations of Pakistan with China and Saudi Arabia as well. Moreover, media also highlights the extremist policies of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Occupied Kashmir. Prime Minister Imran Khan and Pakistani media is criticising the Modi policies regarding Kashmir. The one of the main objectives is to bring Kashmir issue in-front of entire world.

The key point is media either its social media, print or electronic media is a key tool to protect the national interest of a State. Therefore, media in Pakistan is also a medium for the projection and protection of national interests.

Some Key Challenges for Pakistani Media

- Different channels are mainly focusing on getting high ranking rather than creating a balance views on any sensitive issues. The ranking competition among different private channels also affects the quality and purpose of a positive coverage of any incident.
- TV channels are paying more attention on sensationalizing which could be dangerous in some sensitive issues especially related with national interest of Pakistan, civil-military relations, criticism on army etc.
- Different channels have their own policies and they lack any clear guidance from government. It creates division among general public especially on sensitive issue such as civil-military relations, extremism and terrorism.
- Some private TV channels are supporting their own agenda and particular groups. For instance, GEO and ARY mostly support their own agenda and political groups.
- However, the positive role of media cannot be ignored. For instance, media highlights the weaknesses and failures of governments.

Moreover, public get accurate information on all issues due to media. For instance, mis-governance of ruling authorities, social justice or injustice and abuse of power.

Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

Findings

The significance of media cannot be ignored in contemporary world politics. Media plays critical role in the making of public perception, creation of awareness among general public. Media also keep critical eye on government policies and weaknesses. Through propaganda techniques, media can shift the focus of public on some specific issues and agenda. Therefore, media plays a role to give a dimension to public regarding 'what to think and what to think about.' Media in Pakistan also has influence on public minds. Different TV channels are affecting the public perceptions through different means and techniques.

The use of visual coverage of events also plays significance role in this regard. News papers also highlight different news with pictures along with detail coverage of important issues etc. Since last two decades, the use of social media has been increased among politicians, political parties, anchors and general public. Moreover, the access to social media is relatively easily and affordable to remain in-touch with all current and ongoing scenarios not only in Pakistan but abroad as well.

Recommendations

1. Media should play the role of gatekeeper to protect the national interest of Pakistan.
2. Media should be aware of their role regarding the protection of national interest of Pakistan. Moreover, media should plays positive role in the building of consensus on sensitive issues, particularly on corruption, civil-military relations, role of army, terrorism and human rights.
3. Journalist should get proper training and guidance before joining this profession.
4. Self-regulatory mechanism should be established to improve the standard of journalism.
5. Media especially print and electronic media should adopt more mature, objective and balanced policies to report issues particularly issues related with the national security of Pakistan.

6. Different media channels are focusing more to get good rating and sensationalism. It should be controlled or limited. Media should pay more attention to the standard of talk-shows, coverage of different issues and projection of national harmony and peace.
7. Media give coverage to almost all important issues. Many terrorist individuals/groups also get encouragement when they get such fame by media. Sometimes terrorists spread video message to convey their agenda and such messages go viral because of media coverage. Therefore, media should play more constructive and wise role to give coverage to such messages and terrorists.
8. In many areas, it is also not easy for journalist to get access to information. Many journalists have lost their lives while covering different issues. The government of Pakistan, PEMRA and News Channels owners should ensure the safety and security of journalist as they are playing significant role to bridge the gap between public and government.
9. Mostly, main cities get attention by different anchors and channels. Deprived areas and the coverage of their issues such as lack of basic facilities of life, education and social set-up should be a part of the priority of TV channels. As it may also be helpful to highlight the governance problems in less developed areas of Pakistan such as interior Sindh, FATA etc.
10. The role of media can be improved by keeping a specific education for TV anchors and Journalists. As qualified journalist in all channels will enhanced the standard of news and talk-shows etc.
11. There should be proper rules and regulations to avoid the monopoly of some private channels. Few channels are supporting their specific political parties rather than focusing on highlight the truth and reality and it should be discouraged by PEMRA.

Conclusion

In the absence of media a modern, aware, well-informed public and enlightened society would not be possible. In this globalized world, a State cannot survive in isolation. Media plays vital role to highlight the public and societal issues and in response government has to be vigilant. Moreover, Pakistani media also perform its functions to play the role of gatekeeper to protect public interests. Media also can

bridge the gap between different ethnic groups to construct a peaceful society in Pakistan. Political elite also considered themselves accountable in front of public because of active role of media. Therefore, role of media is pivotal to bridge the gap between people and government. Moreover, media of Pakistan is

actively playing constructive role for the projection and protection of national interest at home and abroad. However, the functions and role of media could be improved through some reforms with the consent of government, PEMRA, TV channels and journalists.

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