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Political Transformation: Role of Electronic Media in Pakistan

Abstract: *This research study aims to analyze the role of electronic media in Pakistan and highlight the contribution of news channels in society. It explains the mechanism of the political transformation of society with the help of news channels. This study analyzes the role of electronic media with respect to the political transformation of society and reveals the contribution of electronic media to society. The study also discusses that news channels deviated from the right path of journalism with respect to time and space. This research paper aims to identify all the pros and cons associated with the electronic media of Pakistan. People spend hours watching television on a daily basis which shape and build narrative in viewer minds. The social construction and deconstruction of society affect the socio-political norms, values and ethics of society. All these issues are analyzed through this research paper to provide and identify solutions regarding the role of electronic media.*

Key Words: Electronic Media, Pakistan, Political Transformation, Socio-political Construction, Narrative Building

Introduction

Electronic media is basically used for communication with the masses using electronics and the 20th century is known for the “Century of Communication”. Electronic media is considered a powerful tool to build and change the narrative. It influences the minds of people belonging to different segments of society. Electronic media’s most important medium is television and news channels dominate television in Pakistan. Electronic media play an important and essential role in society. Pakistani society depends on television news channels very much for information related to the news.

Media is considered as the fourth pillar of the state which reveals its importance in a democratic country like Pakistan. PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority) is a concerned institution that looks after electronic media affairs. It regulated all the affairs independently. This independence means that change in government from one political party to another does not give authority to the new government to change Chairman PEMRA. Ministry of Information & Broadcast also formulate policy and have direct control of the institutions like PTV (Pakistan

Television News), APP (Associated Press of Pakistan) and PBC (Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation). Print media has its own press council but there is no council for electronic media in Pakistan.

Today the most common mode for electronic media transmission is the cable which accounts for nearly 65% of the total transmission. (PEMRA Report) .Electronic media can be divided into two major categories. Firstly, state-owned electronic media such as PTV (Pakistan Television) which was a private project in 1964 but was added to state machinery in 1971 under Nationalization policy. State-owned media is often tagged as Pro-Government, Biased but its news is genuine, authentic, credible and official. The second category is for private electronic media which is financed by private people after fulfilling all the requirements of PEMRA. These private investors come from different backgrounds to invest and gain power in return.

Private news channels number rapidly increased with a dramatic boom during Gen (Rtd) Musharraf’s era when he allowed private media channels to flourish in Pakistan. News channels at the initial stage were very simple and sober in nature but with

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time they evolved and deviated from the right path. News channels with time stop following the core ethics and norms of journalism. Currently, electronic media is associated with sensationalism and subjectivity, which is very unfortunate because news channels should be known for their fairness and objectivity which can increase the credibility of the news channel.

Electronic media is playing a role for every segment of society but it is controlled by a few young elites. Electronic media is considered a vibrant source of information. For electronic media “New is News” and this generates a never-ending rat race among news channels for breaking news and getting rating. Breaking news culture unfortunately badly affects the authenticity and credibility of news. Verification and cross-check for the news is bypassed. Electronic media is politically transforming society the nature of this transformation needs further analysis.

Media trends also play a significant role in setting a particular agenda or specific perspective in the viewers' minds. These trends are considered as hot-topics, which proliferate through news channels. These trends produce Ripple-Effect in society which affects viewers in its own domain. For this purpose, news channels use different means and adopt methodologies to register particular perspectives in minds of people.

Electronic media is being commercialized with time. Electronic media is seen as a source of “Wealth and Power” which attracts all the financiers from all walks of life. Electronic media is seen as a pressure group and money-making machine, which is creating loopholes of propaganda, sensationalism and biasedness. Contrary to this media is considered as a bridge between “Rule and Ruled”. Media raises the voice of common people from all parts of society irrespective of any kind of discrimination. Both of these perspectives exist in the minds of the audience which needs further clarity to determine the role of electronic media in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The literature review for this research is based on books, research journals, government reports. Many scholarly published articles such as “A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TOP PAKISTANI CABLE NEWS CHANNELS” discusses in detail the role of news channels. It discusses how the news channel creates and build images according to their own wish in the public's mind. It tells how poverty makes it easy for

news channels to manipulate the public. News channels in past were sober and simple an example of Ishrat Fatima is also quoted in this article.

Another research article “ROLE OF NEWS TALK SHOWS” explains and discusses the news content which needs the attention of media houses. It finds out the influence of news channels which creates political efficacy to produce desired results. News talk shows affect the state policy, developing national interest, political system and structure. It also explains that electronic media decides the “HOW FACTOR”.

Another published research article under the name “TO ANALYZE THE NEWS CONTENTS OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN PAKISTAN” explains how private media channels flourish due to political instability, terrorism and economic crisis. It quotes the example of “Abbottabad Operation “ where media was not allowed at operation site but still news channels instantly without any verification telecasted facts and figures mostly based on speculations and rumours. This kind of irresponsible reporting causes the flow of disinformation to spread in society.

The latest PEMRA report (2015-18) reveals information regarding news channels such as regulating policy. It reveals that current affairs are the most favourite topic of news channels. Socio-Political issues dominate news channels' content and coverage. PEMRA ordinance of 2007 is applicable over all electronic media of Pakistan. Today which ordinance is applicable is the 2018 Amendment PEMRA ORDINANCE (2007). PEMRA also point out major violations by satellite television channels such as:

- Airing anti-judicial remarks
- Hate speech and False allegations
- Excessive foreign content
- Fake news and Sensationalism
- Manipulation of Multi-media effects
- Incident advertisement
- Crime Re-enactment

PEMRA (2015-18) report says that 618 Show Causes Notices and Warnings were issued to TV channels for violating the Code of Conduct 2015 devised for the electronic media. As a punishment, 25 programs/advertisements were banned, licences of 13 TV channels were suspended and a fine of Rs.106.53 million was imposed.

The book by Alexander Wendt is for a better understanding of the theoretical part of the research. Chapter V of the book makes a strong connection

with the research. Whereas, government statements by concerned people have been analyzed such as Chairman PEMRA and Minister of Information and Broadcasting of Pakistan

International surveys have been reviewed such as Gallup International Surveys. Gallup 2019 says that 34% approve media performance as it faces a decline of 8 % as compared to 2012. In April 2018 survey reveals an average of Pakistani spend more than 2 hours watching television from their active time. Viewership in cities is 35 % more as compared to rural areas. In Oct 2018 survey reveals that 39 % of Pakistanis think that media performance is admirable whereas, 33 % disapprove as not up to the mark.

Research Gap

This particular issue is not specified in the literature available on the role of electronic media. Pakistan's society is facing a transformation in which issues related to the role played by news channels is not addressed. A lot of research questions are being developed due to this research gap that will be bridged through this research that will analyze the role of the news channels.

Statement of Problem

Electronic media in terms of news channels are increasing day by day and their role can be termed as "Double-Edged Sword". There is a spread of depression and tension instead of information. Likewise, the news channel's role is highly questionable among Pakistani society as it disturbs the social and political fabric of society. Electronic media content, coverage, priorities need to be further analyzed for the general public to produce an outcome for better understanding of the public because media houses are deviating from the right code of ethics. Revenue generation, being a pressure group influencing government, yellow journalism and biasedness are prevailing in news channels with time. All these issues are having mushroom growth that needs serious attention by relevant people and institutes.

Hypothesis

"Pakistan's electronic media is politically transforming the society"

Variables

- 1) Electronic media role (Independent)

- 2) Political Transformation(Dependent)

Research Questions

- 1) Why News Channels are considered a double-edged sword for Pakistani Society?
- 2) What kind of political transformation is being done through electronic media?
- 3) How do electronic media build and change the political narrative of people?

The Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyze electronic media role, television news channels represent electronic media. It mainly focuses on the news channels' role which is increasing day by day in Pakistan. This study gives a better understanding of electronic media itself and its connection with the political transformation of society. It points out all the pros and cons associated with electronic media and how narrative building of viewer is done which build and change the political perspectives of people.

Electronic Media Double-Edged Sword

Youth of Pakistan is a major chunk of Pakistan's society because 65 % of the total population age is less than 29years. All the young boys and girls have access to electronic media as 63 million people have direct access to 3g&4g services. So young minds are the main targeted audience of news channels. Illiteracy and poverty in Pakistan are not hidden and Pakistan stood 125th worldwide in HDI (Human Development Index 2014). Such a situation in Pakistan allows news channels to fill the space.

Positive Aspects

Electronic media in terms of news channels play a very effective role in Pakistan's society because news channels raise the voice of the common man. They keep society up to date with facts and figures such as current affairs programs telling their viewers about the rate of inflation, stock prices or devaluation of Pakistan currency. It raises a political and social issue regarding education, child labour, youth, women's rights, honour killing all these issues are very wisely selected and telecasted. All such issues create awareness and educate people about the country's economic, social and political conditions. The most important contribution of electronic media is in creating political awareness, which helps a society to transform into better shape with time.

News channels expose all the ills of society by highlighting them to get the attention of relevant forums. News channels conducted several sting operations against corrupt and criminal elements of society. It educates viewers by giving a portfolio of different politicians. News channels highlight the progressive contributions of politicians in society. At the same time news channels also expose black sheep in political parties which are involved in corruption or nepotism on which courts and law enforcement agencies like FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) took action. For the betterment of society, it also expose dairy farmers who dilute milk with help of water and other chemicals, butchers who were selling haram meat of donkeys and pigs. Such electronic media news reports got the attention of government institutes like PFA (Punjab Food Authority) which went on a joint venture with reporters against corrupt segments of society. Furthermore, people involved in the business of sex trafficking, child labour or physical harassment were also pointed out by electronic media on which law enforcement agencies and judicial institutes like Courts took action.

Negative Aspects

Electronic media is dividing its audience on the political line. News channels of Pakistan sometimes act as agents of political polarization. Different politicians give different perspectives of their respective political parties. The coverage of news channels for particular political parties after adding personal flavour such as projecting simple mistake of a politician in such way that news channels declare him or her as incompetent and fool. Negative propaganda against political parties is also a very common practice and it is linked with "Yellow Journalism" which is the manipulation of real facts and figures. Negative propaganda damage the credibility of politicians and political parties. Biasedness and discrimination are seen in prime time news talk shows where anchors do not act as neutral people.

Electronic media's main discussion is about political issues that are further linked with multiple issues to politicize it. News channels invite a bunch of politicians from different political parties in their current affairs programs and generate such topics that create political rift on national news channels. Furthermore, many politicians from the ruling party start irrelevant talk as they find it very hard to defend their government policy, which gives space to the opposition party to accuse their governance and

public policy. Sometimes biasedness and discrimination are seen in prime time news talk shows where anchors do not act as neutral people.

In news talk shows using abuses, morally and ethically corrupt language is very common. Yelling, making personal comments and even getting physical during live shows are witnessed by viewers. News channels political debates most of the time turns into a baseless argument without any facts, evidence or legality. Guests blame each other and adopt this blame game as an easy way out. Even if they get a legal notice for such an act they simply request for pardon or pay the fine but whatever damage they did by setting a pathetic trend on national television is irreversible. These kinds of content and coverage bring negative political changes in society.

These acts divide political workers and the general public at different levels. They see their leaders shouting, yelling, abusing and going physical which gives birth to political aggression and radical views against the state, government, institutions and personalities. PEMRA take notice of such incidents but media persons go to courts and take stay over legal matters. Imposing a fine and paying a fine is not a big deal for these revenue giants. They earn more through rating by the occurrence of such incidents as compared to the fine imposed by PEMRA as a result this vicious cycle continues to repeat.

News channels misreport many facts by telecasting them without proper verification, news channels misreported in a few cases by giving wrong facts and figures. Negative propaganda is produced against political personalities and organizations. News channels portray cases in courts by giving a personal flavour which is highly disliked by top judicial institutes like SCP (Supreme Court of Pakistan) because analyst gives their own opinion in such a way that it is telecasted as Judgement. It is a clear violation of law by discussing a sub judicial matter on television.

Political Transformation

Political transformation is basically an evolution of political activities. Political actions bring political change with respect to time and space. Electronic media is considered a political agent of such societal transformation as it covers all the latest political happenings. In Pakistan society, there are issues like corruption, weak political leadership, poor political

system, Mal-administration in governance, lack of accountability and transparency which create enough space for electronic media transformation.

News channels' real purpose is to educate and inform all the members of Pakistan's society. Electronic media is considered an agent for political transformation to bring political change in society. This political transformation allows people to question, analyze and even criticize the political government, its performance and policies. It creates political awareness and consciousness in society.

Electronic media in terms of news channels, the most favourite topic is politics. The politics of Pakistan is a common topic and every member of society is directly or indirectly is linked with politics. Electronic media politically transform society by covering all the political events and latest happenings in Pakistan. News channels focus on the political aspects of all the news. News channels invite politicians from different political parties for their political points of view on different issues. These politicians are the original source of political transformation. Their views, actions, behaviour and statements all originate from the idea of political transformation.

All this transformation process affects society in different ways at three different levels Individual, domestic and national level. On an individual level, it can generate interest or change political perspectives very easily. On the domestic level, it requires more solid reasons to register a political narrative with the help of electronic media to engage the masses in this transformation. Whereas, on the national level political transformation requires a very high profile agenda that can attract the masses from all over the country. Topics that can be easily connected with every citizen such as patriotism, security, religion are politicized through electronic media to bring change. All this process starts at the micro-level and with time politically transform itself into a whole society.

The multi-party system of Pakistan originates very ill political practices which create space for news channels to project ill images on news channels and set wrong political trends for the society. Political issues are highlighted by news channels very frequently. In Pakistan democracy exists in a very weak form because it has a long history of political instability due to civil-military clashes. All these tensions and clashes give birth and space to news channels to exaggerate and sensationalize

current affairs on the basis of past baggage which is still haunting Pakistan's society. This creates political turmoil in the viewers' minds.

There are many factors and events for the political transformation of Pakistani society and the PANAMA case politically transformed society by setting a positive trend. This case highlighted corrupt politicians and their immoral practices. This case set high standards and bars for political leadership credibility. Panama case was taken up to such height by electronic media through its coverage that helped viewers in better understanding of their leaders. This case was against corrupt politicians, such media roles help political workers and voters to gain political consciousness of their rights and duties. This kind of political transformation is very positive for society. Electronic media coverage of this case by giving top priority by giving full 24/7 coverage helped in the process of political transformation.

Electronic media is politically transforming society by creating awareness and consciousness; people are understanding and judging politicians in a better way due to the role of electronic media. News channels groom voters that affects the voting process by increasing or decreasing in election turnout or up and down in vote bank of political parties.

Political Narrative Building

Electronic media is known for its multimedia effects such as visuals and audio. Multimedia has a long-lasting impression on the human mind. These multimedia effects are further dramatised using visual filters such as Monochrome (Black& White), sad background music and Catchy lines like news channels use rhyming words, interesting idioms, sarcastic comments and humour to register specific perspectives and build a mindset. All these elements are blended all together at the same time to produce such an effect that has a long-lasting impression on the viewers' minds.

Electronic media is known for its multimedia effects such as visuals and audio. News channels collect data from their area of interest, then they simply select the right material after filtering, then it is edited with spices of sensationalism and dramatization. Such issues are telecasted on news channels to expose the corruption of politicians, their false statements, their weak academic background, their immoral acts which build a negative image of a politician due to which electronic media convinced

many people that the majority of the politicians are incompetent for the job.

News channels in Pakistan are very proactive in political matters. These political perspectives build a “War of Narrative” which is basically imposed on viewers by different means and methods. News channels are one of the means through which narrative building is done. Many news channels have a clear cut policy toward different political parties in Pakistan. Usually, this distinction of news channels is tagged as Pro or Anti Government news channels which build and change narrative according to media house interest

An example of a GEO news channel can be taken which is tagged to have tilted toward PML (N) party. It is due to its interest as Geo news got heavy payments in the form of advertisement during PML (N) era (2013-18). Another case of ARY can be taken where it simply boycotted PML (N) leaders as guests in current affairs programs. In return, ARY did not get any government advertisement during PML (N) era (2013-18). News channels build a narrative in the audience's mind based on their own interests. Moreover, news channels are very unpredictable in terms of their policy. News channel policy is in transition every single second due to conflict of interest News channels formulate their policy according to events occurring in their surroundings. Then these events are interpreted and projected in their own specific set of ideas. This policy is either in favour of viewers or not.

News channels focus on news according to their own interest. Electronic media decide news by setting priorities such as focusing on content and coverage like political content is the top priority of news channels. Electronic media control the minds of the common man through the narrative building process. News channels in their news tickers, news headlines and current affair programs portray events after modifications of their own choice

Irresponsible media reporting create disorder and disharmony in society, which negatively affects the process of political transformation. Its example can be traced to 2014. It all started with a shooting attack on Hamid Meer in Karachi (April 19 2014) by target killers after which Geo openly blamed ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence) for this attack. This kind of coverage was seen as an anti-state act by official institutes and the general public. Geo news lost its credibility in the eye of the public. Geo News had to shut down its offices all over Pakistan, even their satellite vans had to remove the GEO logo because

they were unable to go and cover events in public. This kind of media reporting created an anarchic situation in Pakistan by involving security agencies; Pakistan's image on the national and international level was very badly affected. So narrative building of people proved to be a bone of contention for Geo news itself.

News channels with help of positive propaganda build a positive political narrative in the viewers' minds. Its example can be traced in form of Imran Khan although news channels criticize him most of the time news channels portray very rosy pictures of Imran Khan declaring him credible, authentic, honest, educated and patriotic. News channels coverage before elections by highlighting all positive sides of Imran Khan proved to be a helping factor for Imran Khan in winning the 2018 elections.

Electronic media does not project an event as it is in real life. We can understand this by taking an example. Different news channels cover the news from different political angles such as news channels reporting one same event of Police passing out parade in Multan, where CM Punjab was given souvenir by IG Punjab Javed Saleemi. After receiving the souvenir CM Punjab by mistake did not shake hands with IG who forward his hands but after realization, Usman Buzdar turns back and shake hand with IG Punjab police Javed Saleemi. All the news channels reported this simple incident very negatively by tagging CM as Full of Ego, CM ignores IG on purpose, Buzdar faces a lack of familiarity with protocols and Buzdar still learning discipline. This kind of reporting is against the ethics of journalism where one side of the reality is shown and the other side is ignored on purpose. The media did this on purpose to build a specific narrative to create news, to create controversy as high profile personalities were involved, following a trend of biasedness against the ruling party. This created negative political views against political figure CM Punjab.

Significance of Study

Electronic media's role is analyzed from different angles to find out all the positive and negative aspects related to political transformation. Political transformation is further analyzed using a cause-effect relationship. It explains what kind of political transformation is being done by electronic media and how it is affecting Pakistani society. This research also highlights news channels' contribution

to peace-building of the society and at the same time proliferating a conflicting situation.

Theoretical Framework

For this research “Social Constructivism” theory of International relations is being chosen due to its close relevancy with the research. This theory represents the core idea behind the research through its main assumptions. Electronic media and Constructivism theory both prospered in the late 20th century which increases the authenticity of the research.

The term Constructivism is coined by Nicholas Onus. He is an American scholar who is known for his most famous work “World of Our Making”. Whereas Alexander Wendth further elaborated the theory of constructivism in the 1990s. His book “Social Theory of International Relations” explains the constructivist approach very well.

The core assumptions of constructivism revolve around ideas and interest that gives social value to material structure. Reality is always under construction according to the constructivism which can be co-related to the electronic media role which also constructs the reality in the form of simulation while covering real events. This brings a change in perspective as per the perspective norms of constructivism. Likewise, it is also discussed that how REALITY of an event on one side and

PERSPECTIVE of media to project that event on the other side creates PERCEPTION OF REALITY in the viewer's mind.

Another assumption of this theory is the “Cause & Effect” relationship. This relationship can be tested using variables of electronic media role and Pakistan’s society in particular. Where special emphasis can be given to electronic media content such as adding special multimedia effects such as dramatic audio background and using monochrome (Black & White) filter that can cause sensationalism or dramatization in viewer mind which is the same in case of constructivism which talks about the effect of such ideas and beliefs that construct the perspective in the human mind. All these assumptions of the theory can be co-related with the research that can produce an effective conclusion

Research Methodology

In this research Analytical approach is adopted because the role of electronic media is analyzed in detail using different tools of analysis. This research set its domain by analyzing news channels' role within the timeframe of the last 5 years. The research is quantitative and qualitative in nature. Two types of variables are identified, which are classified into independent and dependent variables. Their relationship is analyzed using the techniques of research methodology.

Data Collection

Table 1.

Modes	Urban	Rural	Total
Terrestrial	3%	39%	25%
Satellite	1%	15%	9%
Cable	20%	45%	65%

**PEMRA Report Survey conducted in 14 cities. Total people 2285 from 15 -55 years old (887Urban: 1397 Rural)*

Table 2.

TV viewership	44 % Everyday	32 % After Four days	18% Weekly
Media Objectivity	52% Media, not objective	49 % lack trust in Journalists	56 % interested in Money-Making
News Dependency	71 % Depends on News channels	18 % Depends on Newspaper	11 % Depend on other sources

**Gallup International Pakistan surveys*

Data from different areas is collected from both primary and secondary sources Primary data include the Government report and Interviews of concerned media personalities. Whereas secondary data is collected from Books, Research journals, online

sources and Gallup International surveys will be used as a secondary source.

Data is analyzed with respect to the statement of the problem, new findings and its application in the current scenario. All the data is analyzed without

any kind of discrimination and biasedness. All the data is cross-checked and data is given a follow up for critical analysis to come up with the conclusion that proved to be extremely important for research.

Recommendation

- News channels should revise their policies such as policies related to the content and coverage of the news
- News channels should use a soft approach to highlight problems of common people such as Political debates in an academic manner.
- The criticism should be fair and free from biasedness
- Guests and anchor-persons of news programs should not be judgmental and should avoid analysis on sub judicial matters
- News reports, programs and headlines should be presented in sober and simple
- PEMRA should increase the price of fines on violations by electronic media
- PEMRA should add a stronger legal team that can defend its stance in legal affairs when news channels violate PEMRA laws
- News channels should be optimistic instead of adding fuel to the fire and media should provide direction to its viewers

Conclusion

It is true that news channels are transforming Pakistan's society and it is transforming the society in different ways. News channels were started to educate people, provide authentic information, bridge the gap between rulers and ruled, raise the voice of innocent, identify ills of the society but with

time electronic media has deviated from the right path. It is now engaged in disturbing and creating tension in society. The element of simplicity and soberness is rare and hard to find in newscasters, news reporters, anchorpersons and content writers.

Electronic media in terms of news channels are increasing in number and the media industry has great potential and opportunities in Pakistan. News channels' top management are young they have a very unique way of interpretation which is reflected through their respective media houses.

Electronic media has the power to influence the minds of people. This influence brings a change in society at the grassroots level. These changes are positive and negative. On one side it is considered to bring socio-political awareness but the very next moment this awareness itself is considered as a source of tension. News channels' method of bringing change is highly objectionable as sensationalism, exaggeration, fake news, corruption, biasedness and negativity exists in electronic media itself.

News channels in Pakistan find it very easy to manipulate the ideas, values, norms and ethics of society. News channels play part in the political system of Pakistan. News channels define the political affairs of Pakistan. Social and Political movements gain momentum through the role of electronic media which engage different segments of society. Political awareness affects the political ideologies and effects are seen in the electoral process. News channels play on both sides; politicians, as well as general public both, are part of the role that electronic media play in politically transforming society according to their own interests.

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