



THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Putha Yarram Reddy

Research Scholar, Dept. of Journalism, Dravidian University, Kuppam, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

KEYWORDS :

1. PRELUDE

The word "media" comes from the plural of the Latin word medium, and it is used as a collective noun to refer to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, films, the International Network (Internet), etc. The media can be examined either in terms of broadcast media, or print media. Further, a medium is described as hot, meaning a high definition channel of communication, such as print or radio, which focuses on a single sensory receptor. It is cool, meaning a low definition channel of communication, such as television, which stimulates several different senses and requires high sensory involvement. In certain instances, the word "press" is used to refer to the print media, while in other instances the word "journalism" is used to describe the business or practice of writing and producing news. The phrase "mass media" is sometimes used to describe the collective entity of the media. In this study, the word media is used to refer to both the print and broadcast media.

National development involves political, economic and social factors. Development is a qualitative change, which entails changes in the structure of the economy, social environment, and political disposition. The targets of national development are the people, because it is focused on human population. The overall object of national development is human development, the purpose of which is to enlarge people's choices for greater access to knowledge; better nutrition and health services; more secure livelihoods; security against crime and physical violence; political and cultural freedoms; and a sense of participation in community activities.

• **H.No.11/52, Post office street, S.V.Nagar, Tirupati-517 502 (AP)**

Media are crucial in national development. They influence public opinion; promote democracy and good governance; influence people's behaviour; and support people-oriented policies. The media are therefore vanguard for political, economic and social development. Media role can be negative for the society if they are selective, bias, sensational, and inclined to propaganda and media vices (pornography, violence etc). For the media to effectively play their role in national development, they must be free and independent. Free press is a crucial factor in the performance of the media.

2. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives are:

- Examine the role of media in society.
- Determine the extent of media role in national development.
- Evaluate how the media influence events in society.
- Analyse the role of media in strengthening democracy, economic growth, peace and security, and nation-building.

3. MEDIA'S ROLE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Media's role in national development can be analysed from political, economic and social perspectives. In the political sphere, media's role can be found in the areas of democracy and good governance, political transparency, foreign policy, human rights, war on terrorism, and public relations. In the economic sphere, media can play their role in the areas of economic policy and growth, economic empowerment, advertisements and tourism, business and investment, etc. In the social sphere, media's role cover social issues,

such as corruption, criminal violence, communal conflicts, prostitution, war on drugs, population control, education, food security, and public health (especially on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and Severe Acute Respiration Syndrome (SARS)). Some of these areas are examined below.

3.1 Media and Political development

The media can affect politics and culture, supporting institutional change and development. Communication is not only a tool for the expression of ideas and opinions, but very often acts as catalyst for development of the society. The exercise of free expression allows all sectors to debate and construct solutions for political problems. Some of the areas in which political solutions are sought through the role of the media are discussed below:

(a) Democracy and Good Governance. The mass media form an important and influential bridge, a crucial channel, between government and people. The right to democratic governance is a fundamental human right to be exercised by people through free and fair elections. Accountability of political leaders to the people; transparency in political, economic and social affairs; recognition of the views and opinions of the public in the formulation of policies; and providing citizens the opportunities to discuss, without fear of intimidation, policies and issues, constitute the measure of good governance.⁴⁹ Free, fair and accurate media is essential to a healthy, functioning democracy. Media are required to enable the public make informed electoral choices; have effective input into public affairs; ensure that the rule of law is upheld; and that the mechanisms designed to check abuses of power can function properly. Overall, the media therefore act as "facilitators to check dictators, arrogant leaders and political elites that think they can get away with their actions."

(b) Political Transparency. Transparency refers to the political values of openness and democratic accountability. According to Balkin, it encompasses three political virtues; informational, participatory and accountability. The media can make the political system more transparent by helping people understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions, and hold government officials accountable. It is however worthy of note that the media can be manipulated by politicians by diverting audience attention, and "supplement politics with new realities that crowd out and eventually displace other political realities and political issues."

© **Foreign Policy.** "National policy," observed Schlesinger, "is determined by the plight of the Kurds or starvation in Somalia, as it appears on the screen." Dubbed the "CNN Effect," it refers to the media's ability to affect the conduct of US diplomacy and foreign policy. A commonly cited example is the Clinton administration's response to the mortar attack on a Sarajevo market in Bosnia in 1994. Natsios however points to the shortcomings of the "CNN Effect" theory. According to him, if one examines the record of US policy involvement in overseas humanitarian crises, it may be concluded that "the so-called CNN Effect has taken on more than it deserves as an explanation for responses emanating from the policymaking process..." Rather, media attention follows official actions. Appendix 'A' (1) shows that the White House announcement (D) to send relief supplies precipitated the first wave of US news

media attention in Somalia which jumped fivefold overnight. The announcement of planned troops deployment (H) caused a second expansion of coverage. The conclusion was that CNN coverage of Somalia prior to the announcement of emergency relief was sporadic or non-existent as in Appendix 'A' (2). In general, the literature on media's ability to affect foreign policy process suggests three conceptually distinct and analytically useful understandings of media's effect as policy accelerants, impediments and agenda-setting agents, to the achievement of policy objectives (Appendix 'A' (3)).

(d) Human Rights. Human rights are the rights which every human being is entitled to enjoy and to have protected. The media can defend these rights as enshrined in national constitutions and recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Such rights include the right to life, freedom of speech, freedom of association, and the right to a fair hearing. By giving voice and information to the people, the media automatically protects the freedom of speech. Media attention can prevent or deter the abuses of human rights by despotic regimes, as was the case of apartheid South Africa, former Yugoslavia and Idi Amin's Uganda, not always by changing the character of such regimes, but more by focusing international condemnation of their actions.

3.2. Media and Economic Development.

Media can boost economic development by promoting good governance and empowering citizens, so that economies can function better. The Georgia Economic Developers Association (GEDA) defines economic development as a sustainable process of creating economic opportunity for all citizens; stimulating business investment; diversifying the public revenue base; and enhancing quality of life. Economic development, according to the US Department of Commerce, is fundamentally about enhancing the factors of productive capacity of a national economy. It is about economic growth, increase in competitiveness, sustainable development, reduction of poverty and inequality, increasing wages and benefits, and industrial policy. The key areas associated with media contribution to economic development are:

(a) Business and Investment Environment. For economy to grow, it requires the enabling environment for businesses and investments to flourish. The media can provide atmosphere for healthy trade; foster business climate of transparency and accountability; and ensure that accurate financial information is available to potential investors. Global and foreign media report on international economic issues, currency markets and international trade. The media can however make or mar the enabling environment. Publications on threats to the national security environment, such as wars, civil unrests, epidemics (AIDS, SARS, etc), violent crimes, corruption etc., are known to have scared away investors. The consequence could be capital flight, disinvestment, and decline in production and services. Freedom of expression as a fundamental right, must go with corresponding media responsibility. It should be noted that the media, though committed to getting the story right, are also in the business of reporting exciting news to sell. If not well balanced, by taking cognisance of national interest, such news can have a devastating effect on national economy.

(b) Economic Empowerment. The poor and women are usually the economically disadvantaged groups in most societies. The media enhances the ability of poor and disenfranchised members of society to make their voices heard. They have the duty to expose the living conditions of the poor and the oppressed, so that the leadership would feel some pressure to act. The media can also help in sensitizing government programmes on poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, so that public services are made more responsive to the poor. On women, empirical studies show that women's access to the media is associated with better income and education, in addition to better health and fertility outcomes.

(c) Economic Growth. The use of media all over the world has not only reduced the gap of information, but has also contributed to the economic growth of nations. Communication, has contributed to the rapid economic development of countries like Taiwan and South Korea, while the "Satellite Instructional Television Experiment" in India contributed to the agricultural production and enrollment of children in schools.

3.3. Media and Social Development.

The World Bank defines social development as development that is equitable, socially inclusive and therefore sustainable. Social development promotes various institutions at all levels that are responsive, accountable and inclusive. It empowers the poor and vulnerable people to participate effectively in development processes. To play a role in social development, the media assist the society in tackling problems of corruption, criminal violence, communal conflicts, public health and related issues.

(a) Corruption. Corruption has been defined as the abuse of public power for personal gain or for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance. Corruption is said to distort economic and social development. It does so by "engendering wrong choices and by encouraging competition in bribery rather than in the quality and price of goods and services..." The media can expose corruption in both the government and corporate sector. According to Staphenurst, media can act as a force against corruption in ways that are both tangible and intangible. For Ogoosoo, it is the media's key role to educate society about corruption, and secondly, as watchdog, to expose the acts of corruption. Media reports can affect the reputation of key individuals. Since people care about their reputation, media attention can provide strong incentives for changing behaviour, therefore reputation penalties and rewards can be powerful in ensuring accountability toward constituents. There are ample examples (Appendix 'B') in which the media contributed to ousting of corrupt leaders, such as Presidents Bucaram in Ecuador, Perez in Venezuela, Collar in Brazil, Estrada in Philippines and Nixon in US.

(b) Communal Conflicts. Racial violence in urban America and Europe; widespread ethnic rivalry and religious intolerance in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East; and widespread prejudice and discrimination against national minorities, are all part of the global landscape of daily news reporting. The outbreak of conflict in the Balkans (1992), genocide in Rwanda (1994), and the simmering conflicts based on religious rivalry and ethnic differences in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, India, Indonesia, and the Middle East, are recent examples. The most important question therefore is how should the media foster balance over bias, communication over confrontation, insight over ignorance, when reporting events on conflicts? This is an important challenge to the media. Free from bias in reporting, the media can play the role of enhancing political stability and national integration, especially in multi-ethnic, multi-religious heterogeneous societies like India and Nigeria. The media must therefore "have their fingers on the pulse of the people," because they have "a pious obligation not to jeopardize or harm the welfare of the society."

(c) Disasters. The electronic and print media provide extensive coverage of disasters, particularly those with strong visual impact. Radio and television could broadcast early warnings, evacuation information and increase public awareness about risks and responses (see Appendix 'C'). For example, massive losses from the periodic cyclones in Bangladesh could be significantly reduced by media related action. Likewise, exposure to risk due to floods in Brazil can be reduced through early warning and information on evacuation plan. As a medium, one of the most basic applications of the television lies in its ability to portray the devastation of disasters, both as they occur and in their aftermath. Fry identifies major categories of disasters: natural, such as earthquake, floods, hurricanes and drought; technological, such as plane crashes, oil spills and nuclear reactor failure, such as Chernobyl (1986). A study

in India compared state government allocations of relief spending and public food distribution during natural disasters. Distribution of relief was greater in states with higher newspaper circulation. In another study, comparison was made of India cyclone (1999) and Mozambique flood (2000). As indicated in Appendix 'D', TV coverage of Mozambique floods was more than five times the coverage of Indian cyclone. A similar pattern was found in media coverage of the same emergencies in 23 popular newspapers in Europe and US. It was found that there was correlation between media coverage and the amount of funds that flow into disaster areas. When disasters occur, the media play multiple roles:

- (i) Purvey information on incidents.
- (ii) They can impact news of impending disaster, convey the effects of events that have taken place or are unfolding.
- (iii) Natural disaster coverage can lead to political action.
- (iv) Disaster stories may evoke sympathy, community solidarity, and national action.

(d) Public Health Campaigns. Media are very important for public health campaign, especially against epidemics and other fast spreading diseases, such as AIDS, SARS, and Ebola. Media can improve public health efforts as demonstrated by successful AIDS education campaigns in Thailand and Uganda. The recent media campaign on leprosy in Brazil which has the second highest number of cases in the world, for example, employed the nation's 13 major television stations and 2300 radio stations, resulting in a remarkable response of 600 telephone calls daily on the national helpline. Likewise, an integrated media campaign was successful in India and Nepal, resulting in 200,000 people seeking treatment of leprosy as well as helping to dispel misconceptions about it. With an estimated four million cases in 2001, India has the second highest number of AIDS in the world after South Africa. Media campaign in India involves more than 1000 broadcasts aimed at more than half the population, and more than 3500 video screenings of the programmes planned for villages. The programme involved drama (*Jasoos Vijay*), 'reality' youth show (*Haath se Haath Milaa*), radio phone-in on personal health (*Chat Chowk*), and advertising spots. According to Quraishi, the media campaign will "head off the threat of AIDS to our country's social and economic development." In 1978, the WHO, United Nations International Children Educational Fund (UNICEF), and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) embarked on a crusade, through media campaigns, to combat infant mortality in the developing world, which averaged 200 per 1000 live births, as a result of preventable diseases such as diarrhoeal dehydration, measles, small pox, and respiratory infections. After a year of the media campaign, a sample data from 750 randomly selected families from more than 20 communities in Honduras showed significant results in both disseminating health information and in fostering specific changes in behaviour related to treating infant diarrhoea. The mortality rates for children under five years between 1981/82 had decreased from 47.5% to 25%.

4. CONCLUSION

The media's crucial role in national development is not in doubt. The role covers the political, economic and social spheres. The media set the public agenda and act as the gatekeeper of public issues. They perform the watchdog role especially in political transparency and fight against corruption. As the fourth estate, the media provide the checks and balances in relation to the three branches of government, as created by the Constitution. Media are particularly important in facilitating nation-building, especially of post-colonial societies and those experiencing ethnic and religious diversities. The media must however play their role in national development in an environment that is free and independent, with fair ownership spread. Biases, sensationalism, propaganda, and media vices are inimical to media role in national development.

REFERENCES

1. Busakorn Suriyasarn, internet and national development, Thai media and Telecommunications, May 1998, P.34.
2. F.G. Fowler and H.W. Fowler, The New pocket oxford Dictionary, 2011, P.22.
3. UNDP Human Development Reports (2002), <http://hdr.undp.org.mdg>.
4. Andrew Kohut, Public support for the Watchdog is Fading, Columbia Journalism

Review, March, 2013, P.91.

5. Sultan M.Hali, The role of media in War, Defence Journal, August, 2010, p.11.