A Perception of Balochi People about Electronic Media Coverage of Balochistan Province

Shamsullah, Nasrullah

Abstract

Public Perception is basically a term used or processed when people think about certain events, issues, situation or any particular belief or ideas in the form of knowledge, patterns of culture or any other activity which they have performed or experienced. Media has very constructive role to play while highlighting the public socio-economic issues to raise the awareness among common people on issues and also influence the policy makers to address these issues. Balochistan as the largest province of Pakistan by territory has specific socio-economic issues and all the major national and international media houses has their presence in provincial capital of the province. it is observed that mainstream media doesn't give proper coverage to the socio-economic issues of province. The current study was designed with a general objective to analyze the public perception about electronic media coverage in Balochistan. A sample of randomly selected 200 informed citizens of Quetta city from different walk of life. The perception about the electronic media was evaluated. The result reveal that the role of electronic media is negative regarding highlighting the socio-economic issues of the province and overall general perception of Balochi people is negative regarding electronic media coverage. Furthermore, the study revealed that national media ignore socio economic issues of province due to state pressure and less financial resources outcome in terms of advertisement. Based on the findings, it is recommended that role of electronic media can improve in the province if government make legislations in the parliament and national assembly and implement new policy of electronic media regarding advertisements.

Keywords: Electronic media, Imbalance Coverage, Socio-Economic Issues, Negative Perception, Advertisement Outcome, Legislation

1.1 Introduction

Pakistan has a vibrant and diverse media landscape in South Asia region. The media organizations are enjoying limited freedom of expression instead of government direct and indirect control and pressure from other political parties. There are almost 117 electronic media channels which telecast different programs such as news, current affairs, entertainment, educational programs and films etc. In the same way, the channels total combined viewership is 124 million (Ashraf, & Islam, 2014).

Electronic media industry of Pakistan has grown up since 2002, when former president General Mushraf who liberalized mass media and formed separate authorized governing body for regulating coverage of different private media channels. Before that in 2000, only three broadcast channels were functioning which were state owned. After that from 2002 to 2010, in one decade, almost 89 private channels started their broadcast transmission in Pakistan including 26 international channels (BBC Action Media; media of Pakistan, 2013, chapter; 3, p.7).

The Electronic Media expanded in Balochistan since 2000 with the mushroom growth of private media channels, which set a trend of media landscape in the rest of the country, by opening doors to private ownership and integration of media market, provided news and information to the larger public of Pakistan (khan, 2010). The electronic media growth has also increased in Balochistan, the provincial bureaus of each channel was started working in the province after 2000. At the same time, majority districts of the province are still disappeared from the media coverage except Quetta which has become the provincial hub of media activity, generating consume information on daily bases. The National media bureau offices are based in capital city of province Quetta. The city has given the revolutionized facility of broadcasting since 2002 when Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued its first license for private TV and Radio in the country (khan, 2010, p.7).

Public Perception

According to Sadaf (2011) that "Public Perception is basically a term used or processed when people think about certain events, issues, situation or any particular belief or ideas in the form of knowledge, patterns of culture or any other activity which they have performed or experienced". The research project further explained that public perception raised a notion that media specifically print media gave coverage to the issue of judiciary restoration. While concluding, she indicated that media not only give information to the general audience but it can be used as a great tool for highlighting the socio-economic issues of society and bringing up social change in the society (Sadaf, 2011).Perception is being defined an activity by specific organs of human body, which process and interpret sensory data (Lahlry, 1991, Sadaf, 2011). The views and ideas expression of other people what actually shape and influence our perceptions and opinions (Diana, 1989, Sadaf, 2011). Public Perception is basically a term used or processed when people think about certain events, issues, situation or any particular belief or ideas in the form of knowledge, patterns of culture or any other activity, which they have performed or experienced (Sadaf, 2011). According to Maxwell & McCombs (2005) that electronic media influences the views of people in a very successful manner, the ability to tell us in a certain way that which issues are more important.Basically, Public Perceptions are influenced by various psychological factors which shape and change people's attitude, behavior, needs, expectations and experiences about certain topics (Severin ,2001 Sadaf, 2011) Selective exposure is a theory for reducing tension while seeking information that is in harmony with pre-existing beliefs and actions (Turner and West ,2007 Sadaf, May, 2011)

How Media Influence the Public Perception.

The Electronic media influences and shapes "public opinion" in sense that when the media practitioners select and process some general content of media through gatekeeping techniques, so it forces the audience to think about certain ways and content choices adopted by them are basically the elements of media theory ((Fourie, 2001 cited in Nwankwo, 2011).Chan (2007), described the role of media in guiding public opinion, he mentioned that guidance of public opinion is more indirect, flexible and subtle way of dealing with public opinion**.** He further elaborated. According to Chan (2007) the electronic media

guides the public opinion in a very indirect way and it is somehow related to the concept of propaganda by changing the attention on “what people think” to “what people think about”. This is main trick of broadcast media, to give issue to think about and sometime media channels also give directions to think and perceive in a certain way,andmost of the societies of the world are affected by the information function of media

The electronic media is also setting the agenda as bullet instrument which used to shape public opinion in a sense that media may not tell you “what to think” but “what to think about” and often issues are highlighted by media would take more importance in public (Wanta 1997, Wallinger, 2010 cited in Nwankwo, 2011). The agenda setting theory has two basic assumptions; First, the electronic media doesn’t reflect reality rather they filter and shape content through gatekeeping techniques. Second the concentration of electronic media on some issues force the public to select such news and perceive it accordingly and give more importance as compare to other issues (Weaver, 1984, &Wanta, 1997:2 cited in Nwankwo, 2011). On the other hands, it is said that media sets the public agenda but sometimes situation could work opposite of it and public’s agenda influences the media’s agenda (Uscinki, 2009:797 cited in Nwankwo, 2011).Uscinki said about these two competing frameworks that “there is often competition among the researchers; in agenda setting frame work, the electronic media agenda influence the public agenda, and in opposite to this framework, is audience driven public agenda which sometimes change the news agenda. While expressing this situation, straubhaar et al (2010) pointed that powerful people such as elite or president of a country could influence media agenda in regard to public agenda (also cited in Nwankwo, 2011).

According to Wilbur Schramm *(*father of communication studies) that

> *"By making one part of a country aware of other parts, their people, arts, customs, and politics; by permitting the national leaders to talk to the people, and people to the leaders and to each other; by making possible a nation-wide dialogue on national policy; by keeping the national goals and national accomplishments always before the public--thus* ***modern communication****, widely used, can help weld together isolated communities, disparate subcultures, self-centered individuals and groups, and separate developments into a truly national*

development" (schramm, 1984 cited in [MDIF] Media development Investment fund,2014).

Role of Media in societal transformation

According to Dexter (1964) that two powers; industrial technology and mass media of communication which make modern society different from the previous one, while he was aware the consequences of mass media that it will create some problems for modern society. This imbalanced and badly used information made a digital divide that some people see a reason to demand for the new world information and communication order. According to Nwosu (1986) said that a need for drastic change shows the pattern of information flow between and among nations should gather momentum. According to UNESCO report "Many voices, One World" (1980) which reviewed the communication problems in third world countries and pointed out that all human beings are faced global inequalities and threatened by fear of ethnic violence and both these problems create tension and uncertainty may lead to hazardous future and severe survival of people. So, this contemporary situation required a practical solution of "A BETTER MORE JUST AND MORE DEMOCRATIC SOCIAL ORDER, AND THE REALIZATION OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS". The McBride report recommended following areas for improving communication problems. **(1)** Strengthening independence and self-reliance (2**)** Social consequences and new tasks for communication technologies **(3)** Professional integrity and standards (4**)** Democratization of communication **(5)** Promotion of international co-operation. The third world nations such as Nigerian people who are complaining that "not only is every little said about them but also that every little said about them but unfavorable'' (Masmond,1979). Such information about the third world is usually about tribal war, disaster, violence, minor crimes and coup detect but not the actual core issues of society.

The Electronic media also plays vital role globally to highlight the public Socio-Economic, governance and over all democratic and political issues globally. it is observed that electronic media did not play their expected role in the province of Balochistan and if some channel tries to cover the public issue that did not find the space in national telecommunication of the country.

In result the public perception about the very effective tool of mass communication in current era is getting negative perception. This negative perception creates a gap between masses and electronic media and also enhances the already existing information gap. This research study is designed to explore the electronic media policy in the province, to investigate the overall situation of electronic media structure in the capital city Quetta of Balochistan and also to lash out the major reasons of this vacuum; Study has significance to provide the recommendation to narrow this information gap between people of Balochistan and electronic media.

This is first ever study in the province Balochistan regarding public perception about electronic media So, in this regard, the study has lots of significance, it will contribute in the field of mass-communication specifically the pluralistic and societal role of electronic media in less developed areas. Moreover, keeping in mind the geographical, social and economic situation of Balochistan, this study will facilitate the policymakers and media practitioners for conducting advance level researches in the area of imbalance coverage and growth of broadcast communication in disconnect areas. The objective of this study is to explore and assess the people overall perception about electronic media at provincial and district level in the province of Balochistan.

Study Area:

The province of Balochistan has covered about 43 percent of territory and has only 6 percent of population of Pakistan the largest province the province is situated in the South-West of the country. In the west, province is bordering with Iran, in the north Afghanistan and in the south Arabian Sea covers the province. The areas selected for research study was district Quetta which is the provincial capital of Balochistan and most populated district of the province. All the national and international electronic media has their bureaus based in district Quetta. The Population of district Quetta is according to census 2018 22 million consist of multicultural and linguistic people.

1.2 Methodology

The research study is investigatory in nature. A random method of survey used to know public perception about electronic media coverage in Balochistan. The Primary data was collected through a questionnaire

which was developed and tested and filled randomly from a sample of 200 people belonging to eight wards of metropolitan city Quetta. The participants were from different walk of life. Similarly, the scrutinized secondary data support in outlining the national, regional and international perspective of the issue and also guide the researcher in primary data collection. In this regard, the secondary data collected through published research journals, articles, internet websites, published books, reports of different national and international organizations used as source of secondary data in research study, more this secondary data also examined to grasp macro magnitudes of the issue under study. The collected data (survey questionnaire) was analyzed through SPSS software by using "Frequency and Percentage" descriptive statistics.

1.3 Results and Discussion

Electronic Media Perception:

Limited role of electronic media in the province:

40.0 percent respondents strongly agreed that electronic media has limited role in terms of giving coverage to socio-economic issues of the province, similarly 32.5 percent also agreed that electronic media has limited role in terms of giving coverage to the real issues of province, and, 15.0 percent respondents disagreed, so majority of respondents said that electronic media has limited role in terms of giving coverage to socio-economic issues of the province.

This implies that there is no specific role and structure of electronic media exists in the province while giving coverage to the socio-economic issues. Similar findings have supported via in-depth interviews taken from local bureau chiefs who said that electronic media role and structure is limited just to capital city Quetta bureau offices, rest of other rural district still waiting to plug in the mainstream media. More, they argued that all private channels operate from outside of province and there is no representation from province.

Due role of electronic media is missing:

The 75.0 percent respondents said that there is no program titled for Balochistan in the mainstream electronic media of Pakistan, whereas 24.5 percent respondents said that there is segment or program titled for the province in the mainstream electronic media, and 0.5 percent didn't know about the statement. So majority of respondents said that there is no program titled for province in the mainstream electronic media of Pakistan.

This implies that due coverage role of province is missing in the mainstream electronic media of Pakistan. Similar, findings supported from via in-depth interviews taken from local bureau chiefs who said head offices don't give positive response to province and there is no program on-aired for the province.

Violence based coverage:

However, 62.0 percent respondents strongly agreed that electronic media channels just only give coverage to violence-based reporting in Balochistan, similarly 23.0 percent also agreed with the statement, whereas in contrast 9.5 percent respondents disagreed with the statement that electronic media channels just only give coverage to violence-based reporting statement. So, majority of respondents said that that electronic media channels just only give coverage to violence-based reporting in the province.

These findings show that there is no public media coverage role (such as using electronic media for people awareness by providing the civic information to individuals for highlighting development and governance issues) is given to the province by electronic media channels of Pakistan, only violence based incidents get little coverage as (ticker or breaking news) in the television screen. This implies that due role of electronic media is missing in the province.

Similarly, these findings further supported from the in-depth interviews taken from local bureau chief of electronic media who said that head stations mostly give negative or inappropriate coverage to the province, while explaining they claimed that province gets violence based coverage (huge causalities and showing dark side of province as Ticker News) & sometimes general topics related to provincial government routine proceedings get a little space in the electronic media transmission.

Negative perception about national media in the province:

The data reveals that 52.5 percent respondents said that electronic media has negative coverage role in Balochistan, whereas 22.0 percent said that electronic media has positive role in terms of giving coverage to province, and, 16.0 percent respondents satisfied with the actual coverage given by electronic media, so majority of respondents said that electronic media has negative role (no coverage to the socio-economic issues of province).

This implies that majority of people keep negative perception about electronic media in the province because people's real issues are not highlighted in the routine transmission of media channels. These findings further supported from the in-depth interviews have taken from bureau chiefs said that people have concerns with the denial role of mainstream electronic media in the province and majority of them are unsatisfied with performance of national media because they experienced that media channels till now didn't give positive response to province. Explaining the situation, local bureau chief added that mostly all the channels give negative coverage to the province in terms of showing violence and the darker side but no public interest content take place in the routine transmission. Moreover, he claimed that Army's celebrations and parades in the province get coverage on the television screen but public issues are ignored. In the same way, he added that soft content (local culture & pluralistic aspect of province) is also ignored by national media channels. Thus, it defines that due role of electronic media is missing in the province

Mediator role of electronic media:

Another question was asked about the actual role of electronic media whether they can play as mediator role or not in solving socio-economic issues of province.

The data reveals that 46.5 percent respondents strongly agreed that electronic media channels can play as mediator role in solving issues of the province, similarly 35.0 percent also agreed with the statement, whereas in contrast 13.0 percent respondents disagreed with the statement, so majority of respondents said that electronic media channels can play as mediator role in solving issues of the province. This implies that majority of people have strong belief that national media can fix the

socio-economic issues of the province if they give specific coverage. This finding further supported from the in-depth interviews have been taken from media experts saying that electronicmedia channels can play as mediator role while solving socio-economic issues of the province if they look towards miseries and due right of province instead of looking to viewership and rating.

Need of efficient or public media role in the province:

The dataexhibits that 73.5 percent respondents strongly agreed that there is need of efficient media in Balochistan that play role of public media, similarly 22.0 percent also agreed with the statement, whereas in contrast 1.5 percent respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, so majority of respondents said that there is need of efficient media in Balochistan that play role of public media.

This implies that majority of people considered that there is need of efficient media (public media) in the province such as using electronic media for people awareness by providing the civic information to individuals for highlighting development and governance issues because Balochistan is also facing information vacuum problem revealed from findings, so thus it defines that there is dire need of efficient medium which play as a bridge role between masses and government and also highlight the socio-economic problems of the province.

The above findings answer the objective one & three of current study to assess public perception and to understand the role and structure of electronic media at provincial and district level.

1.4 Conclusion

Balochistan as the largest province of Pakistan has specific socio economic issues and people perception about issues and over all governance.

Generally, it is observed that mainstream media doesn’t give proper coverage to theworse socio-economic issues of Balochistan. Only, state owned channel Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation coverage is available to some areas, rest of the areas are still waiting to plug in the mainstream

media. This study is based on perception of Balochi people about electronic media coverage in Balochistan.

In objective one the study sought to find the people perception about electronic media coverage in the province. Whereby about 52.5 percent respondents said that electronic media has negative coverage role in the province, From the findings it is concluded that the overall perception of Balochi people regarding national media is negative. This is due to the fact and findings from current study that media organizations just focus on one side of the story means the ticker or breaking news of violence, killing, bombing, sectarian killing, political crises and exploitation coverage on different occasions (about 62.0 percent respondents said that electronic media channels just only give coverage to violence based reporting)

Moreover, the study found that about 62.0 percent respondents said, electronic media has limited role in the province, there is no structure of electronic media exists in the province except the capital city which has bureau offices of channels, rest of areas are still waiting to plug in the mainstream media. In addition, it also found from current study that that majority of respondents 83.5 percent said that there is "vacuum information" among the people of province. Thus, this limited role of electronic media in Balochistan creates the public perception about the missing due role of public media such as using electronic media for people awareness by providing the civic information to individuals for highlighting development and governance issues as they are playing in other parts of the country.

Policy Recommendations

In view of findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

For making proper structure & management of electronic media in Balochistan; following steps must be taken;

i. Role of Electronic Media only can be improved via legislation in the national assembly and parliament.

ii. Role of Electronic Media can be improved in the province if Government should ensure & implement new policy of Electronic Media regarding Advertisements.
iii. Balochistan should be focused separately from other provinces because their natures of problems are different from rest of country.
iv. Government and other stakeholders should facilitate and increase access of electronic media, especially in rural areas where there is limited access.

References

- Ashraf, M., & Islam, M.U. (2014). Media Activism and its impacts on the psychology of Pakistani society. Retrieved fromhttp://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/articles /issrapapebr/ISSRA _Papers_Vol6_IssueI_2014/03-Media-Activism-Muhammad-Ashraf.pdf
- BBC Media Action. (2013, September). The media of Pakistan: Fostering inclusion in a fragile democracy.Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/policy/briefings/asia/pakistan/policy-pakistan
- Bruder, K. (2007, April 16). Retrieved from http://www.katebruder.com/Writing_&_Design_files/The%20Globalization%20of%20Media%20in%20Developing%20Countries.pdf
- International Commission.(2004). Many Voices, One World: Towards a New, More just, and More Efficient World. New York, NY:Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, INC. Retrieved from https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=dVoviiw7dwC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Khan, A. (2010). Media in Balochistan: Blighted but a brave new world beckons. Retrieved from http://intermedia.org.pk/pdf/BALOCHISTAN%20REPORT%20FINAL-2010%20white.pdf

- Media Development Investment Fund. (2014). *Media development's role in social, economic, and political progress.* Retrieved from https://www.mdif.org/media-developments-role-in-social-economic-and-political-progress-literature-review/

- Nwankwo, V.C. (2011). *The Role of the Media in Promoting Human Rights: An Analysis of the BBC Documentary, 'Chocolate: the Bitter Truth' (*MA Human Rights Practicedissertation). The University of Gothenburg School of Business and Social Sciences, Roehampton University Department of Social Anthropology, Universitetet I Tromsø.

- Shehzadi, S. (2017). Coverage of Minority Issues in the Pakistan Electronic Media. *Institute of Communication Studies, Punjab University, Pakistan,5(7), 1901910*DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/4919

- Sadaf, A. (2011). Public Perception of Media Role. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (5), 228-236.