

The Importance of Media: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract

The basic functions of mass media are to provide information, education or instruction and entertainment for the people. Mass media motivate people directly or indirectly. The media are the tools of communication. It is the key element to make information come alive and function to fulfill the needs of the people and nations. The enormous global problems caused by growth in human race and uneven distribution of energy, food, weapons and the resources are liable to be resolved to some extent, through media interaction. To accomplish these functions in any country or community, the mass media institution should be clear about their communication objectives, which provide guidance for their day to day work. Media contribute effectively in promoting awareness about human rights and educate people to matters of peace, justice and freedom. This article highlights the role of mass media in the development as well as

bringing changes / modifications in cultures and their effects on individuals and society as a whole.

Keywords: Technological Explosion, Global Media, Communication, development and change

Introduction

Mass Communication is an inter-disciplinary subject it is linked with politics, economics, history, anthropology, sociology and psychology. In electronic revolution survival the media has come to regulate the whole of society and revolutions social life. Mass Media have cracked a “mass society and mass culture”. It would be different to imagine life without mass media. All the technologies and innovations have led to the expansion of mass media. It opened the door of larger audiences, expanded sources and resources of information and supported important culture and social changes.

The growth of the satellite communication has directly and indirectly been influencing the daily lives of majority of human beings. The communication satellite system of regional, national and international levels are now functioning and have become an integral part of media industries.

Significance

Problems related to the collection and storage of information is the concern of all societies. In the contemporary world not only the high and standard quality information but enormous and continuous supply of relevant information, is required by

individual and organizations through the media and information providing agencies for their daily consumption.

The developments of communication industry have various implications on the structure of the national economy as a whole, and resources for economic growth on employment patterns and opportunities and so on. The communication issues and information services in many countries are now a field of planners and those concerned with economic policies. Such a trend needs to be strengthened. But the industrialization of communication has another consequence that is called information explosion. McBride Communication has indicated the following factors with relation to “information explosion”.

- a. Rapid access to more abundant information.
- b. Broader participation in social development through fostering of a greater awareness of reality.
- c. Balanced pluralistic interaction in the culture fields of a kind that fosters democratization.
- d. Consciousness of a common destiny in the development of global society.”(Mc Bride,1980,p97)

However, the technologically determinist view of communication was promoted by Marshal McLuhan when he said “the medium is the message” and maintained that media technology had more social effects on different societies and cultures than media content. Mc Luhan argued that “printing technology contributed to nationalism, industrialism and universal literacy”. The rapid changes in international communications expanded the area of direct satellite broadcasting in 1980 and the internet in 1990. The term “information society” originated in Japan and received ardent intellectual support in USA.

Global Media Industries

As the main medium of communication, radio has given way to television, but still it is an important source of information. In 2005, the BBC World Service has been reaching, an average, 145 million listeners a week. The BBC world service is the best known international broadcasters in the world. Its influence will more and more be left in the daily life of the individuals in almost every sphere of human activity, at “national and international” levels. All early broadcasters recognized the radio’s function as instrumental in disseminating information and organizing society (Shamsuddin,1989,pp83-108).

The Voice of America (VOA) reaches more than 1100 affiliated radio stations, most of these receive programming via one of the 42 satellite circuits. In areas of the world where television has not yet reaches to a great extent. Like Africa radio has emerged as an important medium. The VOA Africa Service produces 31 hours English broadcast each week, reaching up to 15 million listeners in 19 countries.(Tunstall,n.d,pp84-89) Thus, the West, led by USA, dominates the World’s broadcasting and information networks. The western corporations are the major global players in most sectors of the print and electronic media.

The technological explosion helped to emerge the debate for new information order which has become one of the most burning issues of our time. The developing countries of the third world are seriously considering the role of news agencies on international horizon and surveillance of news is becoming more and more popular. Perhaps in future the theory of surveillance may emerge. “Surveillance” refers to the collection and distribution of

information. The News messages through news agencies are so designed and delivered to gain attention of the intended destinations. The role of news agencies is not confined to providing useful day to day news but also to explain and interpret the events, to help the members of societies to understand the sense of what is being said. Traditionally, the role of news agencies were confined to reporting which offered only information but now the function of interpretation gives the knowledge which is essential if the societies are to function smoothly in different parts of the world. Apart from this traditional concept; news agencies also provide other news contents such as pictures, cartoons, opinion columns and commentaries. Because of the role of news agencies the debate, biased and unbiased, is erupting at international level, that is why international bodies are redefining the role of the news agencies, with the articulation of set of various groups that span a range of various interest groups involved in the events and issues of the society.

The news agencies give certain common assumptions, values and beliefs not only by reporting but also analyzing. Traditionally the news agencies did not provide philosophical analyses. Nevertheless, they are drawing attention and seeking out abuses and indicating conflict of interest. Thus the news agencies are in the process of socialization. The debate is going on whether the news agencies should contribute to social process or should confine to news reporting only.

The word communication belongs to the Latin and Greek words “Communis” and “Communicane” both stand for makes something common between two or many people (Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 1960). Thus communication both as concept

and as process is an integral human activity whereby someone sends a message to someone else and receives a response.

The term communication has no uniform definition in the literature. To the contrary, communication is found in a confusing variety of conditions, Thomas R. Nilson “Said “Communication is at once both clear and obscure. It is clear enough in conventional usage but obscure when we seek to determine the limits of its applications” (Andrew, et.al, 2002,p137) Communication is an “action from the perspective of the communicator has its goal a transmission of message to one or more other persons by means of symbols”, Carl Hovland States “Communication is the process by which individual transmits stimuli to modify the behavior of other individuals”(Ibid).

Communication is meant the mechanism through which human relations exist and “It includes the expression of the face, attitude and gesture, the tones of the voice, work, writing, printing, transport , telegraphs, telephones and whatever else may be the latest achievement in the conquest of space and time” (Berelson & Janowitz,1966,p147). Without communication the mind does not develop its true human nature. There is no sharp line between the means of communication and the rest of the external world. In a sense all objects and actions are symbols of the mind, and nearly anything may be used as a sign.

Communication and Communication Media

The changes that have taken place since beginning of the nineteenth century are such as to constitute a new epoch in communication, and in the whole system of society. They deserve,

therefore, careful consideration, not so much in their mechanical aspect, which is familiar to everyone, as in their operation upon the larger mind.

If one wants to analyze the mechanism of intercourse, he might, perhaps distinguish four factors that mainly contribute to its efficiency, namely:

- Expressiveness, or the range of ideas and feelings it is competent to carry.
- Permanence of record, or the overcoming of time.
- Swiftmess or the overcoming of space.
- Diffusion, or an access to all classes of men.

Language is crucial to communication. Symbolic interactions i.e. what we see, hear or know is limited to our language. We search for meaning in ambiguous situations or when confronted by the unknown. In this way, we cognitively structure the environment. It is essentially a creative act that involves isolating, interpreting and selecting various aspects of the environment. The theory of cognitive dissonance is an offshoot of the cognitive structuring idea. "An individual can tolerate only so much psychological inconsistency (dissonance) whereupon a structuring for restructuring may occur to restore balance (consonance)" (Festinger,1957,p3). The theory of cognitive dissonance sometimes, helps to explain why certain messages may be ignored, distorted interpreted or singled out by an individual. Thus, language and culture are intimately related. Language treats culture entirely as a form of communication.

Edward T. Hall outlined ten basic activities under "Primary Message Systems", that combined together produce a culture. These include associations, territoriality, subsistence, bisexuality, temporality, learning, playing, defense, and exploitation and their

interaction involves language. “The Message Systems” is so complex that it may be the subject of lifetime study. Hall, Says “Culture controls our lives in many ways most of them unexpected. It hides much more than it reveals”(Hall,1959,p17). Hall said that silent language is operating in terms of associational patterns such as in the rank order deference relationship of nurses to doctors, privates to captains, pupils to teachers and workers to bosses. In some cultures the stress is not to work with hands but to assign another person to do this in an inferior status. Some culture implies to pitch in and get the job done”, while cultures not only tolerate but “encourage putting off jobs until tomorrow” (*Ibid*). Culture shapes our communication behavior in ways which are not readily apparent to us. It hides much more than it reveals.

Semantics studies the relationship of signs or symbols to their meanings and evaluate the psychological and sociological significance of such that mother denotes female parent. But mother has connotative meaning of love and tenderness. Black denotes color, but it can also connote sadness. Therefore, what a communicator has in mind when a particular word is used might not coincide with the meaning given to that word by message receiver. Sometimes words create abstractions.

Communicator places his message in selected channel to reach audience but is subject to “noise” interferences. There are two kinds of “noise”. One is channel “noise”, which is described “anything with the fidelity of the physical transmission of message (such as static on radio or type too small to be read easily)” (Emery, 1965,p6). Channel noise may be conceived of as including “all distractions between source and audience” (*Ibid*). The communicator tries overcoming its effect by getting attention. A

devices and by careful use of the principle of “redundancy”, meaning “repetition of main idea: of the message to make sure it get through even if part of message is lost” (*Ibid*). A second kind of “noise” is known as “semantic noise”, which occurs when message is misunderstood even though it is received exactly, as it was the common , or dictionary meaning is called “denotative”, “the emotional or evaluative meaning” (*Ibid,p7*) is known “connotative”. Semantic noise can be reduced if the communicator makes efforts to define his term and adjust his /her vocabulary to the interests and requirement of the audience he/she wishes to reach.

A message which challenges beliefs and values of society can be misinterpreted or distorted or rejected. An audience whose beliefs on a given topic are under pressure can go out of way to obtain messages bolstering the audience viewpoint. When beliefs and values are fixed, the communicator finds it more effective to redirect existing attitudes slightly than it is to most of them head on. However, the communication gets “feedback” from the audience and reshapes the message if it has not reached its destination. “Feedback” is the reaction of audience to a message. The effectiveness of the message is measured through “feedback”. (*Ibid,p8*).

Communication can be categorized as mass communication and personal communication, with the latter bifurcating into intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. It’s defined as “the act of imparting, conferring, or delivering, from one to another knowledge, opinions, or fact”, (*Ibid*) or as “the interchange of thoughts or opinions by various means” (Shamsuddin,1991,p15). Interchange signifies a give and take situation; passing of

something back and forth. In terms of the first definition, a message moves from sender to receiver. The flow is unidirectional i.e. one way. The second definition refers to more complex act because the concept of interaction is (interchange) introduced. This is an important idea, and we shall return to it again and again.

Two way communication is implicit in the following definition: “communication is all the ways in which one person influences another and, in turn, is influenced”.(Wright,1950,p11) The ways may be direct, as in so called face to face situations, or indirect (mediated), as when messages are received from the mass media. A sociologist, Charles R. Wright, says that communication “is the process of transmitting meaning between individuals” (*Ibid*). And, communication “is fundamental so far in all human societies, primitive to modern, it is founded on man’s capacity to transmit his intentions, desires, feelings, knowledge, and experience from person to persons”.(Berelson & Steiner,1964,p527)

“Communication is the transmission of information, ideas emotions, skills, etc., by the use of symbols words, pictures, graphs, etc” (*Ibid*,p528) and “It is the act process of transmission that is usually called communication” (Freud,1922,p13). From a behavioral standpoint, the act is of a distinct kind and therefore can be differentiated from other kinds of behavior. Also, the act or process need not result in some kind of response.

The act of communication involves internal transmission by means of signs or symbols, and such internalizing may be more common than most of us imagine. Sigmund Freud, for example, devoted a considerable part of his life to studying mental processes which take place below the threshold of consciousness and which, he

believed, greatly influence our behavior. Such subliminal or “hidden” behavior also can be classified as intrapersonal communication and can be demonstrated, indirectly by encephalographs which show activity of the brain even when we’re asleep, or directed by dreams, when we talk in our sleep, or when we talk to ourselves. (Tubbs & Moss, 1994,p10)

Interpersonal communication takes place between two or more persons who are in physical proximity with one another (such as when they are in the same room or can see one another). Contrasted with mass communication, a crucial element in interpersonal communication is immediate feedback.

Mass Communication is different from personal communications in several important ways. Messages are addressed “to whom it may concern” the messages can only be gauged by “indirect” or “delayed feedback”(Ibid). The intended targets of the communicator are out there somewhere, but the communicator is never sure who’s there at any given moment, and whether the anonymous persons really are “getting the message” (Agee, et.al, 1985,p53).

Discussions

Thus, we can say that communication is a fact in the world of human beings, and is an ever continuing process going on all the times. It is as necessary to human existence as life itself. The need for communication is as basic as the hunger for food and drink, perhaps even more so. Communication is concept of relationship based on common and mutual understanding and feeling communication thus presupposes a shares symbolic environment, a

social relationship among those who participate. What it leads to is Social interaction and in combination with a set of other factors, contributes to sense of community.

Communication is used everywhere for the same general purposes. The communication system informs people, to make policy and exercise leadership and to teach what citizen must know. In traditional society radio plays more important role, while in modern society both print media and electronic media play a role and work according to set strategies. The function of the media is to mobilize the people. The development of mass media goes forward with economic development. The more economic growth, the more likely a society is to use the mass media in its development program. The stage of development tasks also tells us something about the development tasks communication will emphasize. As the society develops it can use communication to implant the idea of change, to raise the aspirations of its people for a larger economy and a modernized society. When the idea of change is once imprinted, it is necessary to teach new skills. Localness enforces by language or geography is likely to be an early phenomenon of development. Localness enforced by the particular needs of a local culture for information is more likely to be late phenomenon. The effort is to get a signed over the geographical barriers.

One of the amounts of described communication is the amount of “two way communication”. Two way communication is a condition of effectiveness which applies equally to highly developed as well as less developing societies. It is considered in planning any campaign using communication. But it is primarily important in developing societies because in such societies there

are significant responsibilities on communicators. Wilbur Schramm (1964) described there is the political responsibility which helps to broaden the base of decision in national development. The less authoritarian the leadership the more essential this task becomes. The communicator has to guide and encourage social change and to further whatever development program is decided upon.

There is a two way communication called “feedback”. In highly developed mass media systems this is institutionalized in devices like program ratings, and audience polls, to tell the communicator who is listening, and, within limits, what their concerns, tastes and interests are. In the developing countries, feedback must carry a still more important burden of information because of the great differences in the audience and the relatively small amount known about them by communicators in the cities. Hundreds of different cultures, languages, and dialects exist in different societies and needs, readiness, customs, and symbol systems may be different from one to the next.

Most developing countries have modernizing elite and traditional elite, the former bent upon change, the later upon conserving privilege. There are usually a rural elite and a rural mass, but these latter are many diverse groups. There is often a skilled technical minority or minorities, whose importance in the development communication flows between a leadership but upon modernizing and a reluctant, if not resistant, mass. There are really many minorities and even the supposedly monolithic mass are really masses , made up of countless cultures and sub group often with relatively little connection between them.

A number of interests arise in a communication situation. Among that the most important are own interest of security, pleasure and self- esteem. After self- interests, the interest of different groups become significant. These include primary, secondary groups, reference groups, language groups, peer groups, social groups and castes and communities groups. These groups are dear to people and vital to their interests we cannot overlook the social, regional and national interests that shape our selection of communication messages and the way we perceive these messages through means of communications.

William Sumner, the most renowned sociologist has given a classification of group namely in-groups and out-groups. He observed that the individual living in such groups develop feeling of oneness and know each other by name, by face or by occupation. The individuals of “in-group” develop fellow feelings and consider themselves as one and the same. In group could be primary or secondary. The important feature is that it members have a strong sense of identification and loyalty and a feeling of exclusiveness towards non- members. In out groups the relations of individuals are not so intimate. Out group includes all persons who are being considered as being excluded from “In-group”.

Ethnic groups are different from others groups in relation to cultural patterns or racial traits. Competition in social, political and economic fields leads to ethnic groups which hinder the progress and unity in the society. Pressure groups influence government functionaries on the basis of special interests by fair or fail means. These groups form a potential source of power for achieving particular objectives and also influence shaping and reshaping the messages through means of communication.

Pressure groups are converted into vested interest group and enjoy under privileged in the social hierarchy of society. The vested interests group hinders any change in the existing social structure in order to retain their power. They have their own interest and can create serious limitation to the success of any social program for the welfare of society. The vested interests groups can be formed on religious, educational, economic and political bias and effects on the working of mass media. The strength and weakness grow from the manner in which an individual is integrated into a network of groups. "Groups dynamics is the scientific study of interaction within small groups (Bales,1950,p25).

Thus, group dynamics studies the interaction within groups and the processes of problem solving and decision making to gain understanding and to solve organizational problems.

The motivation is key factor in resolving issues. "Motivation is an internal state of human being that impels his/her to some activity which has some specific goals and which usually originates in some Physiological or Psychological need"(Kumar,1982,p234): It is that something within that energizes and directs our behavior towards a particular goal or aim. What motivates us to switch on the radio or TV is perhaps to relax to be informed or to be entertained. The basic driving force is curiosity or the need to know.

However, it may be noted that emotion is different from motivation, in that there is not necessarily a goal orientation affiliates with it. The attractive messages arouse the attention of the audience. Those objects in the remote periphery go totally unnoticed. But fundamentally, it is we who select what to pay

attention to and our selection depends upon stimulus factors such as color, shape, sound, smell, of an object, and subjective factors, such as motives, interests, mental and physical health and so on. “Attention is the reticular formation of the brain which is very active, and the rhythm of the brain waves undergoes a change”(Ibid). So when a TV or radio program is really attended to, brain activity is involved. However, it has been found that the alpha waves in the brain register hardly any activity when TV programs are being watched. Attention, of course, leads to clearer perception, better memory and a conservation of mental energy, (Distractions dissipate energy). This is perhaps one reason why generally we enjoy a film much more in a theatre than on a TV screen at home. Psychologists hold that past experience are stored in the “Unconscious” while psycho biologists believe that they are preserved in the brain in the form of “memory traces” (Ibid,p236). Socialization is an important factor in molding the attitude of an individual, which is possible by communication and communication media. Human beings are motivated by their original nature according to the cultural environment. Attitude and motive formation has become quite important but different from one another. Same is true to overt behavior, but both are closely related. Attitudes are learnt through socialization process and there is no other way through which attitudes can arise in an individual. In individual attitude towards some person or situation or object or idea is learnt through gradual socialization process. Group affiliations do affect one’s attitude, as a person grows up in a certain group having certain type of cultural patterns. Attitudes are an orientation towards certain objects. These objectives could be person, thing or self or situation which are emotionally toned and relatively persistent. It is specific expression of value or belief of a person. Attitude expression for liking and disliking for certain

objects wholes positive and negative evaluation and readiness to respond to related objects. Thus attitude more or less is consistent. The term personality has different meaning in psychology and sociology. Personality includes all the traits and characteristics, physical capabilities, interests, norms, values, overt and covert behaviors, mentality and intelligence. Cuber said that personality is ‘the sum totals of the observed or observable characteristics of a person’ (Cuber,1954,p164).

Conclusion

Communication plays an important role in information of social and psychological interactions. Interaction is the key factor of every sphere of social life. Interaction is the basis for all processes as it initiates the social relationship among the groups and individuals. Communication is a tool in interaction. The socialization cannot exist until and unless there is communication, when social interaction takes place it convey ideas, meaning, emotion, expressions from one individual to another. The media of communication directly enhance social interaction. “Mass media are the agents of circulation of information and ideas to the people at large and in turn reflect the opinions and attitudes of individual and organized groups within general masses” (Folker & Stephen,2004,p53).

Media are the means for recording and influencing the social behavior of individual and groups. Mass media illuminate the social pattern and transmit the facets of culture from one generation to another and from one corner to another. Most media bring in significant social and psychological messages at local, national and international level. At the same time media are

barriers and hinder the speed of social interaction among various groups and individuals. Variability of attitudes, languages, different dialect may create hindrance in making international communication.

The different attitudes and actions are formulated through communication. It is through successful processing of communication, which facilitates to achieve the desired results. The audiences are ready to be influenced as far as their thinking, attitude and behavior are concerned.

Furthermore, it is important to remove and overcome all the prevalent sociological and psychological barriers before the intended message is transmitted and its desired effects are accomplished. The frame of reference referred to socio political and socio psychology environment of the audience i.e. age, sex , marital status, education, financial position race, caste, religion, occupation , norms, values, traditions of the audience. The intended message should be compatible and in consonance with the audience needs to be realistic. A message designed to serve the audience needs is not only readily acceptable to audience, but strengthens the pace and serves the best. A message nearest to the desires and ideal gets access to the audience.

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