

Study of Political Communication in reference to democratic societies

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Abstract

This article is the qualitative study of the relation between elements of political communication: political organization, media and audience, in relation to the key changes in the society and media that have shaped political communication process in the modern democracies. The study, using descriptive case study analysis, determines the impact of developments in political techniques: political marketing, political advertising and political public relations and media on the journalistic practices and public opinion formation in the society. This study also describes the function of media in the theoretical framework of agenda setting, hegemonic model and cognition. The study that has been done through the available data, verify the importance of political communication process and utilization of its technique in modern and developing democracies, agenda setting goals of the political actors and media proprietors that

affect the public opinion and shape the political reality

Keywords: Political Communication, Media, Political Actors

Political Communication, the term is the combination of two words Political and Communication. Before studying the complete process of Political Communication. It is very important to understand the two terms because both are separate and complete fields of study in itself in terms of definition, functions and importance (McNair, 2003, pp. xiii-xv). Political Communication process is amalgamation of Society, Politics and Communication. (Negrine, 1996, p. 1) Development of Society raise the process of politics through communication.

As per Online Etymology Dictionary term Politics, modeled on Aristotle 'ta politika', 'affairs of state' was used for the science of government as Politic or Politicks ("Politics", 2016). Politics even today refers to the running affairs of State, Governments and related organizations. The word Communication is derived from Old French 'comunicacion', Modern French 'communication', Latin communicationem mean to share, divide, impart, inform and make common ("Communication", 2016).

Besides Communication is referred as the process or means to convey and construct meaning through language. Language is comprised of easily understood signs and symbols in society, developed in a particular culture (Kraus, 1990, p. 37). From the above two explanation the Political Communication is the process of imparting and informing about State, Government and related actors in the society.

Denton and Woodward describes Political communication process as: Pure discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decision), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes).Doris Graber an American writer also adds in definition the political language – the body language and political acts (boycotts, protests etc.)Denton and Woodward gives another definition of political communication as: The crucial factor that makes communication ‘political’ is not the source of a message [or, we might add, referring back to their earlier emphasis on ‘public discussion, its form], but its content and purpose.

‘Purposefulness’, means the communication is considered as political by its purpose or intentions, therefore Brian McNair precise the definition of political as

1. Any sort of communication by politicians or political actors for certain objectives
2. Non-politicians and Voters communication with political actors
3. Communication about the political actors or their activities in any journalistic form

Communication include any form – verbal, written, symbols, images, gestures, body language, attire, hair style , make up etc. through which political image is developed or any message is conveyed (McNair, 2003, pp. 3-4).

Political Communication in the Contemporary World

All social systems are necessarily communication systems; conversely, all communication systems are necessarily social

systems. Further, every social system processes information and the information digested functions to regulate the “distance” between its members. Assuming that the “fundamental concept of social science is Power” and that politics is about defining, distributing, and justifying power dynamics, then every social systems is also political. I assume, therefore, that political information processing refers to investigations of the messages in circuitry that regulate the “distances” between members of human systems (Kraus, 1990, p. 37).

The process of Political Communication revolve around three elements:

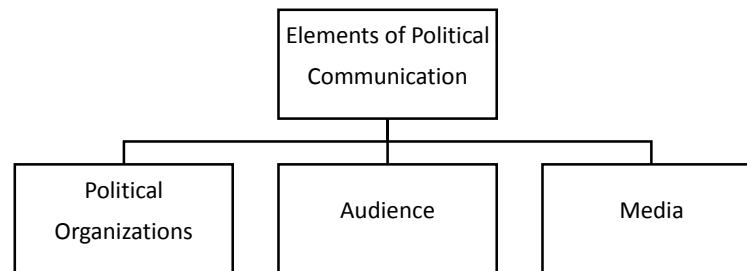


Figure: Elements of Political Communication

1. Political Organizations

In political organizations political actors acquire political power in government or constituent assemblies, make efforts to influence the state decision making activities.

Political Organizations may include: *Political Parties, Government, Public Organizations, Pressure groups and Terrorist Organizations.*

Political Party is a gathering of like-minded individuals allied in an organizational structure having agreed ideology and goals (McNair, 2003, pp. 5-6). The political party with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office. Britannica Encyclopedia defines Political Party as a group of people organized to gain and exercise political power. The political party may seek political power by democratic elections or through revolution.

The modern form of political parties have been evolved in the nineteenth century in United States and Europe, following the electoral and parliamentary systems. In aristocratic and monarchial regimes, the political process revolve around nobles and influential personalities who attract different groups. Later this was changed into parliamentary system and formation of formal political parties. Princely regime changed into mass supported party regimes in the 19th century in Europe and America.

Gradually by twentieth century this system spread all over world and to developing countries. However, in developing countries parties basis remain dominant by religious, tribal and ethnic affiliations. In developing countries, sometimes political parties are partially political and partially martial. Before, Europe also experienced similar tendencies by socialist and communist. Political parties have also been used by dictators for undemocratic means ('Parties and Candidates', 2016). For instance: In Pakistan we have major political parties of Pakistan Muslim League –Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

In Britain there are Conservative Party (individual freedom & Supremacy of the market) Labor Party (capitalism with a human face & principle of social justice and equality). In US Democrats (relative Liberalism in social policy & interventionist approach to the economy) Republicans (aspire to reduce state involvement in all aspects of social-economic life). However, all political parties within a state follow similar constitutional framework.

In today's modern world political parties use mass media and communication techniques to achieve the goals. These techniques may include **Political Marketing** – the science to influence behavior of masses in competitive environment. (McNair, 2003, p. 7) Political organizations use marketing tools and philosophies and channels of mass communication for policy development, internal organization and to persuade the target audience that are considered as the political consumers in the western and emergent democracies. Political parties' measure success in terms of voting and effective power. (Lilleker, 2006, p. 151) Political Marketing leads to short-termism these days in which the stress is more on win than debate. Also considered as pragmatic use of media. (Negrine, 1996, p. 166)

Another political communication technique is **Political Advertising** that differentiate political products (leaders and parties) from the others.

The third very important technique is of **Public Relations** that is used for the positive image building of the political actors and minimize any negative outcome. In public Relations party conferences are done for positive media coverage, press conferences for setting political agendas and hire PR (Public

Relations) managers for developing leaders and party look and image. Political PR also include lobbying of journalists and the spinning of potentially damaging reports.

Political parties and leaders in modern practices of political communications hire media managers and *PR consultants*. (McNair, 2003, pp. 7-10) In today's complex and competitive political environment the demand of Political Consultants have increased. Political Consultants on behalf of Political parties, politicians and governments run political campaign to influence the minds and hearts of the citizens and voters. This campaigning is based on in-depth study of the target audience minds, selecting patterns of political information. Political Consultants role have become vital in the politics and societies of US and Europe that cannot be reverted and will continue in selling political products by assessing the voters trends, political information processing and forming effective political messages for the target audience. (Kraus, 1990, p. 213)

Public Organizations are not political parties but have political objectives. Like trade unions, professional associations and consumer groups. They are united together because of mutual interests or issues. These organizations have reach to the policy makers and politicians. They use the advertising, media lobbying and demonstrations techniques to address their objectives.

Pressure groups are also non-party political actor that campaign around single issue, like Global Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and effect the political process. It does utilize communications techniques of advertising and Public Relations.

Terrorists Organizations use terror tactics of hijacking, assassinations, kidnapping and bombing to achieve political goals and effect the political process. These organizations also use communications channels and techniques to make their presence in the target audience.

2. Audience

The purpose of Political communication is to persuade audience. All the communication is intended to effect the audience as per the goals. (McNair, 2003, p. 11)

In Rhetoric, Aristotle addressed the importance of audience among source, content and audience but the audience actually determines the affect and outcome. (Kraus, 1990, p. 38)

3. Media

Media brings message from the political organizations to the third element of audience. The Political Actors use media for political programs, political statements, electoral appeals and political campaigns. The Media then deliver the political messages to the audience.

Political Reality is categorized as:

Objective Political Reality i.e. political events as occur in reality

Subjective Political Reality i.e. political events as perceived by the political actors and citizens

Constructed Political Reality i.e. political events as covered by the media Editorials in print and analytical programs in electronic media present editor or producer voice to the Government and policy makers. Besides, media also transmit citizen voice through the letters and opinion polls to the political leaders and give analysis of the political situation. For example Daily Dawn and

Daily Jang newspapers' letters to editor section is given significance by the political leaders and policy makers in Pakistan. Whereas, in broadcast new trends are of public debate forums, where public can directly meet, question and give opinion about the political environment and issues.

By the early nineteenth century, with the development of democratic process – extension of voting rights to wide population and growth of mass media transformed the political Communication process to a great extent. Political actors were enforced, comparatively more now, to use persuasive tactics to influence public opinion and win votes. Autocracy was replaced by democracy after the emergence of capitalist class in Europe and America since sixteenth century followed by French Revolution in 1789. Capitalist spread the idea of freedom of thought, citizens' right and informed rational electorate for the democracy.

Modern democracy provide public sphere where the media provide information, opinion, analysis and criticism in order to form informed citizenry. Public sphere comprise of facts and opinions to build knowledge for political action through the media. (McNair, 2003, pp. 16-19) News provides information about events unknown for the citizens or is felt by the journalist as something to be known by the audience. Whereas discussions are done though broadcast medium. (Itule, 1994, p. 28)

In today's modern democratic world political communication and media is playing very significant role.

First, it performs surveillance role (McNair, 2003, p. 21) i.e. to inform the citizens about the happenings and events, political or

other, in the society. It serve as watchmen in the society. (Dominick, 2002, p. 33)

Second is analysis and explanation of the facts i.e. termed as interpretation. (McNair, 2003, p. 21) Media not only provide factual information and news of the events but also tells the meaning and significance of it. (Dominick, 2002, p. 36)

Third, media provides forum for developing and disseminating public opinion, which is inevitable for the democratic process.

Fourth, media give publicity to the political organizations and Government. It keep watch over their activities and perform watchdog function. (McNair, 2003, p. 21).In traditional liberal theory the democratic function of media is to have check on the activities of the state and expose the abuses of power. (Curran, 2005, p. 122)

And **lastly**, media provide advocacy platform for the political organization for dissemination of their policies and viewpoints, which reaches the audience.

In today's world political communication target audience is global. Mass media channels and communication techniques are utilized to persuade the opinion of international public for political objectives. For example, public opinion about 'War on Terrorism'. Today in the twenty first century, world is changed into Marshall McLuhan's Global Village in the presence of digital media. Today's mediated world has certainly affected the democratic and political process and has increased the roles of press agents,

publicists and professional field of Public Relations Industry.
(McNair, 2003, p. xiv)

Due to electronic media there is change in political pattern of societies like Britain – e.g. change in voting patterns, attachment to main political parties' declined. (Negrine, 1996, p. 3). Today there are more election campaigns, advertising and Public Relations promotions through the utilization of mass media – TV, radio, internet, social media, newspapers, magazines and other print means. Political actor focus more on image building. Today, as perceived, good communicator is more successful than an intelligent or great thinker. Success of politicians and parties are linked to the successful promotional campaigns.

However, the other factor is that the original issues are marginalized in this practice. Money has taken more significance for successful political communication. There is more manipulation of ideas than facts. In modern democratic environment, the capitalist politicians and parties are sold to the audience through process of political communications. Besides, classical liberal theory informed and rational citizens have changed to the consumers of policies and politics.

Daniel Boorstin coined term '*pseudo-event*' that refer to the manufactured and unauthentic realities. As per this point, the political realities are constructed as per the purposes and for successful media coverages by the political actors. However, the Public Relations and media consultants argue that due to the modern political communication techniques and media, the election and democratic process is more open and accessible for the audience. (McNair, 2003, pp. 38-45)

In last 2 decades of 20th century political communication due to the technologies of satellite and cable in broadcasting has given vast choices of information. Trend of 24/7 news channels and rise of internet and mobile phones in the 21st century. This made drastic change in globalization of information. Due to social media like Facebook and twitter many events and news become world news. Today individuals, government, political entities, campaigners all have scope to address to the world through the technology change. Even closed and authoritarian societies get affected due to this information revolution. Today the questions related to political communication are same of content, opinions, understanding, effect and control but is address more in global context.

Technological change has brought great change in the political communication process at domestic and global level. Everyday thousands of videos been uploaded on the YouTube. In 2009 YouTube was seen by more than 1 billion viewers each day. Facebook had more than 500 million users in 2010 after 6 years of its launch. But for this technology shift the risks of securities, control and cyber laws violations are challenges.

In cyber war DDOS (distribute-denial-of-service) attacks (to overload and shut down servers) are current practice in political wars and conflicts. As was case of cyber-attack on Georgian government's servers just before Russia's 2008 invasion of the country. (Holli). A distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack is one in which a multitude of compromised systems attack a single target, thereby causing denial-of-service for users of the targeted system. The flood of incoming messages to the target system

essentially forces it to shut down, thereby denying service to the system to legitimate users. (DDoS, 2016)

The relationship between political actors and media is crucial. Edmund Burke termed media as the fourth pillar of the state, in addition with the executive, legislature and judiciary. The media is named as fourth pillar in acknowledgment and expectations of fulfilling the functions of surveillance for the citizens and as watchdog for any abuse of power. Media can provide the authentic information and platform for the formation of public opinion if remain free of political interference. (McNair, 2003, pp. 47-48)

There was no place for journalists in the world of diplomacy of in the early years. Before the First World War, they were not allowed inside the Foreign Office until the doorkeeper had first satisfied himself that there was a bit of news that could be fed to them. If senior officials had decided that there was nothing they wanted to say, the journalists waiting in the courtyard would be sent away and told again another day. (Negrine, 1996, p. 166)

Media is supposed to serve for the democracy by creating informed and reasoning public opinion through the political process. However, media today is more influential in the political process. People depend more on media for information and discussion. (McNair, 2003, pp. 50-51)

People want to be informed and have understanding of our world around for different goals – for our need to know, for the professional goals. However, in today's world public is bombarded with information – and because of lack of time people are selective and prefer and depend on media to fulfill their cognitive need.

Though experience of being present at the event cannot be compared to the mediated information. (Kraus, 1990)

Media is fulfilling the cognitive need of the citizens (McNair, 2003, pp. 50-51) i.e. desire to know about the happenings and events around. (Dominick, 2002, p. 43) But the information and political reality is constructed as per the criteria, policies and agendas of the media. (McNair, 2003, p. 52). In today's era of 'media-centered democracies' media and political entities both claim to talk as representatives of public but unfortunately both are actually pursuing their own self-interests. Media in the name of neutrality and objectivity project its own agendas whereas politicians are also not truly accountable to the public. Eventually they treat public as audience and not as participant. To make a solution to this public need to raise own voice and demand in contemporary societies. (Negrine, 1996, p. 180).

Media has characteristic of dependency and control – people depend on media and it thus control their minds. (Kraus, 1990, p. 77) Media perform agenda-setting roles, consequently undermine citizens ability to form rational opinions or accordingly. Media is playing a hegemonic role by contributing to maintain consent for the power system in the society.

Media is always hungry for the news and its hunger is best fulfilled by the political arena. The Government, politician and political parties long for the image building and promotions. (McNair, 2003, p. 70) Politician these days play active part in making or providing news – their role is not limited to the making laws. (Negrine, 1996, p. 73) Therefore, develops a mutual relationship between the politicians and press. (McNair, 2003, p. 70)

Through political communication citizen's monitor the ruling governments, their activities and also to other political parties. Ruling party remain accountable to people through press. In response to political parties' effort to reduce the media accountability function. Society system will work properly if the citizens are well informed, they can understand and engage themselves with the information and this achievable if media systems produce and distribute information in a better way. This is not always easy to interpret or make sense of news because of different reasons like information is confidential or ambiguous. (Negrine, 1996, p. 22)

Journalism is both an art and profession which records events and opinions and seeks to interpret and mold them for the benefit of the educated public. (Parthasarathy, 1991, p. 166) Neutral journalism concept says to keep media above government and politicians. Keep media superior and judgmental. But in fact the media actually safeguard the interests of its proprietors and is accountable to them. Either playing the role of watchdog, judging governments and politician or making informed citizenry media first take care of the interests of the proprietors and owners.

Despite all limitations media and process of political communication is important for providing information, making and giving sense to the citizens, making governments accountable. (Negrine, 1996, p. 22). Media today is more dependent on the press releases and ready-made matter, mostly disseminated by the Public Relations gurus of the political actors. (McNair, 2003, p. 60) This practice is also common in Pakistan journalism, as mentioned by the Zamir Niazi (Fettered Freedom, 2005, pp. 26-28). Communicator of a Political Communication responsibility is

to disseminate factual news with objectivity and also serve as an educator and interpreter of the facts. His/ her objective should be the development of the societies and progress of human being. (Parthasarathy, 1991, p. 302)

Objectivity element is crucial for the professional practice of journalism in the democratic world. It means the journalist must not put his/her own opinions and biases in the news. (Mencher, p. 33) However, due to organizational realities of the media organizations – deadlines, hard, limited or no access to information. Media depends more on sources of political parties, Government, civil servants and given press releases and handouts. (McNair, 2003, pp. 71-72)

Media is dependent on who wield political and economic power. Sources of information now have become so professional to control the flow and impact of communication and information spread. Governments have control over information and many information is so vague to interpret. Therefore there are different factor in which press works and that effect content of press. Public Sphere provides free and well informed sphere to the citizens by non-coercive means. But there are many factors that limit such public sphere - the rise of public relation state, ownership and control of media and social and economic inequalities.

Because of reporting deadlines, shortage of time, competition, limited information sources to the powerful or influential person – journalist depend upon ready-made news. (Negrine, 1996, p. 6) In current modern democratic world media is not only performing the function of surveillance and satiating the cognitive desire of the citizen but also provide them with the analysis, discussion and

conclusions. It not only provide the opinions of the political actors but also help in assessing and arbitrating different political point of views. Media present the stories of political happenings in form of news stories to the world. News is the factual information about any event. (McNair, 2003, p. 76)

Political news is also peculiar as a stimulus because it has social importance for virtually everyone. People, events and policies discussed in the news have direct or indirect consequences for our lives. The news doesn't come to us in a readily interpretable form. (Kraus, 1990, p. 72) The information spread by the media influence the political decision making processes for policies or other. Besides, there are other crucial forms of political intervention by media. These include Editorials, Column, Features, Debates and talks and Political interviews.

Editorial is considered as the most important and influential voice of the newspaper. Editorial also termed as the official version of the newspaper as per its policy. Editorials are published by the newspapers on daily basis about the current event or issue. Editorials of newspapers are especially read by the politicians and policy makers. For example the Editorials of the Dawn and Jang newspapers of Pakistan are considered important by the political actors. Editors if not represent the readers voice but they do effect the agenda-setting process by the media for the audience.

Column can be written by the journalists, politicians or any other learned person. Column is a write up can be written on any political, social, economic, human or any other topic. It is more an artistic piece of writing by the columnist. The writer discuss and asses the issue with the possible outcome and solutions.

Features are a decriptive version and follow-ups of a news event where the writer maintain its journalistic objectivity with inclusion of his or her subjective opinion for agenda setting and public opinion formation.

In broadcast media *Debates and Talks Shows* format are popular, with ideally a neutral host who facilitates the discussion between the participants, considered authority over the issue.

Political interviews of the politicians or of a subject expert are used by the electronic media for news during the analysis of a news event.

The experts writing editorials, columns, and features or talking in a talk show or political interview are termed in today's world as journalist-pundits. These pundits discuss, assess the issues and give their resolutions and predictions. The journalistic pundits are recognized and accepted by the citizens and political actors as the political authority. They serve the source of agenda-setting and public-opinion formation. (McNair, 2003)

CONCLUSION

This study has verified the role of communication in the political development in the society and democratic process. It also discussed the relation between the political actors, media and audience and its significance in the political communication process. It determines that the purpose of any communication plays crucial part to consider it as political in nature. Political parties, government, pressure groups and terrorist organizations in modern democratic societies affect the content, purpose and agendas of the

media. Consequently, construct and affect political realities by even pseudo-events. Media do fulfill the cognitive needs of the citizen as in today's busy world people are more dependent over the media for readymade information. Besides, provide platform for political discussions and feedback by the audience. Editorial, Column, Feature, Debate and Political Interviews are crucial forms of political intervention by the media.

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