

The Media Dynamism of Good Governance in Democracy: A Critical Focus

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Abstract

The active and vigilant participation of mass media is essential in a democratic society. It is an important assumption that the Media speaks for the people, represents the interests of the society, and serves as a check on the government. This process holds government accountable and transparent. Through this function the media helps to ensure good governance.

The media in a stable democracy are considered the principal institutions from which members of the public can better understand their society. Ideally, the media contribute to the public sphere by providing citizens with information about their world, by fostering debate about various issues and by encouraging informed decisions about available courses of action. The media are also a site of contestation in which diverse positions are advanced, significant opinions are heard, interests and inner-workings are exposed, and input is received. These all contribute to public debate. The media are also expected to act as “watchdogs” on government and industry.

Media is a pillar of democracy and for good governance its role and functions are inevitable. Media dynamism and freedom significantly affect the good governance in democratic states.

Keywords: media, Democracy, good governance.

Introduction

It is always true to say that the media is a vital element in democracy. Without media the existence of a democratic set up is almost impossible. Democracy, at its core, is concerned with the people, their fundamental rights, participation and the good governance. It refers to the ‘rule by the people’.

The role of media is essential in a democratic society where people must know what their governments are doing. The primary democratic function of the media is to act as a check on the state. The media should observe the activities of the state, and fearlessly expose exploitations of official authority. It is an important assumption that the Media speaks for the people, represents the interests of the society, and serves as a check on the government. This process Holds government accountable; makes visible what it is doing, so that people can judge. Through this function the media helps to ensure good governance in a democratic system. Good governance entails the principles of transparency, accountability and participation. Democracy is the government which rest on the active consent of the governed. As an important source of public information Media could be expected to be a vehicle to encourage the promotion of these principles of good governance. But in the changed social milieu, the sanctity of the media has been questioned from various corners. Along with the transformation of the media from a mission to a profession, then to a business, its role in democratic system also has been transformed. Like any other business, the profit has become the ultimate goal of the media industry.

The purpose of this paper is to critical examine the role of media in improvement and effectiveness of good governance and democracy.

Media, Good Governance and Knowledge

The Dakar Declaration on “Media and Good Governance” made on World Press Freedom Day in 2005, 3 rd May, called on UN member states to respect the function of the news media as an essential factor in good governance, vital to increasing both transparency and accountability in decision-making processes and to communicating the principles of good governance to the citizenry. The media fulfils a crucial role in good governance in a democratic state. It is almost impossible to imagine a democratic state without the media.[Baldwin Chiyamwaka, 2007]

The mass media are presumed not only to have certain objective effects on society, but also to serve a social purpose. The means that some of the effects that have been observed are both intended and positively valued. These include the effects of disseminating information, expressing different voice and views, helping public opinion to form on issues and facilitating debate [Denis Mc Quail, 2010]. The media carry out a number of significant and essential functions in a contemporary society and it is in the general interest that these are performed well. Simply put the media and society share a reciprocal relationship. The media reflects the society, upholds the public interest and creates a process of societal development. According to Mc Quail, “we should have a media system that is operated according to the basic principles governing the rest of society, especially in relation to justice, fairness, democracy and reigning notions of desirable social and cultural values”.

It is clear in terms of public interest that the media don't cause social problems or extreme offence. But media are usually established not to serve the public interest as such, but to follow some goal of their own choosing. The objective is sometimes defined in cultural, professional or political terms but more often it is the goal of making profit as a business. Sometimes it is both at the same time. This points to the key problem of determining just what the public interest might be and of who should decide it. There are always different and conflicting versions of what is good for a society as a whole, and there is even support for the view that it is better for the media not to follow any normative goal at all, rather, the many different media should be left free to do what they want, within the limits of the law. Where media are run on a commercial basis, as the mainly are, the media's view of what is the public interest tends to equate it with what interests the public. This shifts the responsibility for norms, ethics and values to the society'. However, all aspects considered, media should play certain roles in certain contexts for the good governance so essential for the success of a democracy. Let's discuss these important roles in some detail.

Providing Information and Knowledge

Information is the key for every decision, people can judge the services of the government when they are informed about the reality done by the government. The overload of information in every walk of life has made the time information-rich. It is influencing democracy in a big way. It is desirable that the media system overall should exhibit a range of output that reflects the diversity of the society, especially in the key dimensions of region, politics, religion, ethnicity, culture and so on. Media channels should be open to new ideas and movements and give reasonable access to religious, ethnic and other minorities. The media should meet a wide range of public communication and information needs and the citizens should have access as senders and receivers to media that reflect their ideas.

Education

In the present time, the media education role is highlighted by many prominent scholars. It plays a key role in educating people about the different dimensions of democracy-may it be representation, political power, culture or socio-economic issues-through various approaches and projections. The media should also educate the public mind and contribute actively to the creation of positive citizenry for a better societal transformation.

Facilitating Participation and Cooperation

Participation and cooperation are the two vital components of the good governance, without people's participation and cooperation, no country can achieve the major objectives of nation-building. Media is the mean for people to participate in the affairs of the state and strength accountability of the government. The participatory approach of media is best prescribed in the process of socio-national development. And the media must arouse a sense of involvement among the people in a democracy and make them cooperative in a democratic way to reach a common consensus and/or start-up point for action.

Generation of Opinion

Media is the best tool for the country to generate and accumulate the new and fruitful opinion regarding governance and policies within the country. The media should highlight the informed opinion or general view of the more educated and aware members of the society. By generating opinions and ideas the media supports the process of good governance to a great extent. This contribution is made through publishing full, fair and reliable information on public matters, assisting in the expression of diverse points of view, sensitizing the public thinking, giving access to many voices in society, facilitating the participation of citizens in the socio-political life and so on.

The 'WATCHDOG' Standpoint

Government activities controlled by various means such as parliament, judiciary, institutions within the government and media, except media (private channels) other sources for controlling are somehow connected to the government, therefore media is impartial, even governmental sponsored media could be impartial and neutral if the laws guarantee that. Media is the watchdog of the society, especially of the government. It safeguards the fundamental rights of the citizens which is guaranteed in the constitution and reacts to any violation against that. In a democracy there are so many differences and discrepancies. It is the media which brings everything to a common platform for the purpose of developing awareness and understanding. Media must keep a strict vigil on the emerging social problems and issues like corruption and the other social evils. While the media are not normally required to do the work of the police or other authorities, on whom they should keep a critical eye, there is a widely held view in democracies that there are some matters on which they do have a duty to assist authority for a good governance.

Cultural Promotion

Respect of the dominant values and moral standards in the society and to give expression to the traditionally valued culture, and the arts and language of their own national society or region is the main duty of the media. The mass media, in a democracy, plays essential role in development and nourishing culture and it can be effectively used to preserve and promote the precious cultural impressions. Cultural values are very sensitive for every nation and media works for its promotion.

Supporting the Democratic Process

A frequent argument, offered particularly by those involved in media development projects is that, freedom of expression and of the press are essential for democracy. Without these basic freedoms, the argument goes, totalitarian and other undemocratic societies cannot become democratic. In a recent technical publication, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID, 1999) argued that access to information is essential to the health of democracy for several reasons. First, this access “ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices” rather than act out of “ignorance or misinformation.” Second, the information “ensures that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them.” In addition, the rule of law is expected to be strengthened by independent media that keep a check on the judiciary. Finally, independent media contribute to transparent elections by giving candidates access and by reporting on the “relevant issues in a timely, objective manner.” [Patrick J. McConnell and Lee B. Becker, 2002].

The right media attitude is the basis of the democratic process. The approach of the media in a democracy should always be constructive and it should keep away from excessive commercialization and intense sensationalism in the interest of a positive society.

Theoretical dimensions

There are several theories of media that explain the role of media in the society, especially in the contexts of democracy and good governance, few of them discussed here.

Functional Theories

In 1948 and 1960 the renowned communicologist and media scholar Harold Lasswell and Charles Wright explored the functional theory of mass communication. In their respective works on the communication and media- ‘the structure and function of communication and society: the communication of ideas’ and ‘the functional analysis of mass communication’- both of them agreed to one point that the knowledge is universal and it is one truth that the mass communication functions as part of our society. It is a main source of surveillance, entertainment, correlation, transmission and mobilization. The mass media serves many functions for our society. The five elements the theorists put together describe the audience’s use for the media. Surveillance means that the media provides news and information. Correlation means that the media presents the information to us after they select, interpret, and criticize it. The cultural transmission function means that the media reflects our own beliefs, values, and norms. Media also entertains us in our free time and provides an escape from everyday life. Mobilization refers to the media function of promoting society’s interest especially in times of crisis.

Wilbur Schramm also defined the functions of communication, in turn the functions of media, in terms of watcher, forum and teacher. The media plays the role of a watcher by keeping a watch on the environment. It is a forum for debates and discussions. And as a teacher it develops public opinion and persuades the public to be guided by the right thing.

Communication Theory and the Media

A relatively new development is expressed in terms of ‘communitarianism’ which reemphasizes the social ties connecting people, in contrast to modern libertarian individualism [MacIntyre, 1981; Sandel, 1982; Rorty, 1989; Taylor, 1989]. It stresses duties owed to society as well as rights to be claimed. In respect of media, relations between media and audience take on a more mutual character, especially where they share a social identity and a place. One exponent of communitarian thinking stresses the ethical imperative of the media to engage in dialogue with the public it serves [Christians, 1993]. ‘In the communitarian model’, according to Nerone [1995:70-1], ‘the goal of reporting is not intelligence but civic transformation. The press has bigger fish to fry than merely improving technology and streamlining performance ... in a communitarian world-view, the news media should seek to engender a like-minded philosophy among the public. A revitalized citizenship shaped by community norms becomes the press’s aim. News would be an agent of community formation’. In some respects the call is to return to more organic social form, in which the press plays an integrative, expressive and articulating role. Not self-interest but partnership is seen as the way forward [McQuail].

Social Responsibility Theory

Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press which enjoys a privileged position under government, is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in the contemporary society. To the extent that the press recognizes its responsibilities and makes them the basis for operational policies, the libertarian system will satisfy the needs of society. To the extent that the press doesn't assume its responsibilities, some other agency must see that the essential functions of mass communication are carried out [Peterson]. According to Peterson the responsibilities include servicing the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs, enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government, safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government and so on.

Democratic-participant Theory

This theory was propounded by Mc Quail. It emphasizes and supports the media's multiplicity, small scale usage, local nature, de-institutionalization, horizontal approach, reciprocal part of recipient and communicator, involvement and interaction. This theory outlines certain important principles that consider communication and mass media as being very important and should be managed by the professionals. Democratic participant theory allows freedom to associated local data, freedom for answering back, freedom for using new communication means for the purpose of interaction and freedom of taking social-action in community, sub-culture's and interest-group's small scale settings.

MAJOR ISSUES CONCERNING MEDIA DEMOCRACY

There are some issues that always keep on accompanying media in a democracy, important ones discussed below.

Freedom

The normative model of a free press is one in which there is freedom from any government regulation and control that would suggest censorship or limits on the freedom to disseminate information, news, and opinion. In addition, media should have economic and political independence, access to channels for a plurality of voices, and provide a benefit to the audience.

[Patrick J. McConnell and Lee B. Becker, 2002].

It is widely agreed that media should be free from control by government or other powerful entity, sufficient to allow them to report and express freely and independently and to meet the needs of their audiences. Freedom consists essentially in the absence of advance censorship or licensing, or of punishment after the event for publication or broadcast that is not otherwise unlawful. According to **John Stuart Mill**, 'the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation, those who dissent from the opinion event more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error' [1859, on the liberty of the press].

The historical background of the struggle for press freedom was almost invariably one of antagonism between publication and some authority, first church and later government, in many aspects. The main idea goes back to John Milton's pamphlet, [Areopagitica 1644] against licensing of the press in England. It is not surprising that press freedom came to be defined primarily as freedom from restriction. This was the meaning it had been given in legal terms in the United States, in the words of the first amendment to the US constitution [1792], to the effect that congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press'. By contract, reformed constitutions in many other countries have referred to a right guaranteed to citizens. For example, Article 7 of the 1848 constitution of the Netherlands says, "No one needs advance permission in order to make public through the printing press any thoughts or feelings, aside from everyone's responsibility in law".

Similarly, Articles 34 of the Afghan Constitution give to citizens the Right to Freedom as one of the Fundamental Rights. Article 34 enshrines; "Freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution. Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities. Directives related to the press, radio and television as well as publications and other mass media shall be regulated by law". [The Constitution of Afghanistan, 2004]

By the early twentieth century it was clear to many reformers that press freedom in the economic sense and expressed in the purely negative terms of rejecting government interference was failing to give voice to the full meaning of freedom of expression, which includes some notion of a realistic opportunity of access to the channels of publication. Instead of being a vehicle for advancing freedom and democracy, the press was

becoming more and more a means of making money and propaganda for the new and powerful capitalist classes, and especially 'the press barons' [Mc Quail].

Good governance in a democracy is never possible unless the people are well informed and free to participate in public issues by having the widest choice of alternative solutions of the problems. The people can be given the fullest scope for discussion on public issues, if only the media are allowed to represent different points of views without any control or bias; and with objectivity, truth and balance. The freedom of media directly refers to the freedom of the conscience of the journalist to see the reality and let others see it.

The press, and particularly the newspaper press, stands by common consent first among the organs of the public opinion... The conscience and common sense of the nation as a whole keep down the evils which have crept into the working of the constitution, and many in time extinguish them ... so long as the opinion of a nation is sound the main lines of its policy cannot go far wrong' [Bryce, American Commonwealth].

Associated with political development. The relationship between *wealth* and democracy has been along-standing observation which has withstood repeated tests in the social sciences and accordingly the models entered levels of economic development. The non-governmental media funding should be clear and the core idea behind media must not be earning wealth, otherwise, if the media is serving the donors in this case media is not free and may have bad impacts on good governance instead of betterment. [Pippa Norris, 2006]

Development

From the early stages of the introduction of mass media, attempts have been made to expand their potential for development purposes. The terms development communication and development journalism were closely associated with the new world information order [NWIO] debate that centered in UNESCO in the 1970s and early 1980s. The argument that mass media could be mobilized to guide social change originated long before UNESCO, however it derived in large part from the experience of the United States and a few other western countries early in the twentieth century. These countries created a variety of government programs to promote development in rural areas. In the United States, a large bureaucracy called the Agricultural extension service was established to administer these programs. The country 'ag agent' and 'home agent' are, still fixtures in rural court houses around the country, still working to improve agricultural production and rural life in general. Local radio shows and weekly newspaper columns prepared by the ag extension office are part of life in many rural areas of the united states. It was thought that this experience could be used to tackle some of the dreadful problems facing the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa in the 1950s and 1960s [Rovert L Stevenson].

Media is an essential means for national development and social change. Wilbur schramm in his book MAGIC MULTIPLEIR has said that media can do a list of works in a democracy that include being social watchdogs and broadening horizons, focusing attention and raising aspirations, creating a climate for development, feeding interpersonal channels of communication, conferring status, enforcing social norms and helping form tastes. Observed minutely, these are all fundamental elements for the good governance. According to him, 'this is the really exciting question: how much could we increase the present rate of development, how much could we smooth out the difficulties of the terrible ascent, how much more could we contribute to the growth of informed, participating citizens in the new nations, if we were to put the resources of modern communication skillfully and fully behind economic and social development'.

Numerous development approaches have been made within democracies for the overall transformation of the developing conditions. Everywhere the vital roles of media have been acknowledged. No development program has been feasible in any country so far without the valuable contribution of the mass media.

New Media Technology

The advent of the new technologies and new media renewed environment of the democracy as well. Now the nation is going through the important phase of transition-form action to experience and from experience to vision. Almost all the vital institutions of democracy have undergone transformation; both structural and functional. Introduction of internet and the new media arose the experiences of e-governance, e-commerce, e-learning, e-communication and e-administration. The new process is reflecting the people-centric vision, transparent approach, and easiness of dealing and the realization of time value. The new electronic media have been widely hailed as a potential way of escape from the oppressive top down politics of mass democracies. The concepts of good governance based on new media are quite diverse and different perspectives are involved. Dahlberg [2001] describes three basic models. First there is the model of 'cyber-libertarianism' they wants an approach to politics based on the model of the consumer market. Surveys, plebiscites and tele voting fit this outlook, replacing older processes. Secondly, there is a 'communitarian view that expects the benefits to come from greater grass-roots participation and input and the strengthening of local political communities. Thirdly, there is a perceived benefit to 'deliberative democracy' made possible by improved technology for interaction and for exchange of ideas in the public sphere [Coleman, 2001].

However, the continuing making process of the e-democracy has triggered a real challenge in the form of digital divide or knowledge divide. With the new media social and information gaps widen rather than narrow and there emerges an information upper-class as well as a social under class. Much is made of the digital divide as a successor to the information gap that was once predicted as a result of the coming of television [Norris, 2002; Castells, 2001; Hargittai, 2004].

How the corrupted Media Undermines Democracy and Good Governance

News is to be obviously objective, fair and unbiased and it should keep a clear distance from advertisements. What happens when the difference between news and advertisements start blurring, or when "news" is published in favor of a particular politician or corporate giants by selling editorial spaces? In such situations, the reader or the viewer can hardly discriminate between news reports and advertisements. As a result the readers or viewers are being confused by the media with their wrong and misleading information. Ultimately these practices are undermining the very essence of democracy and the role of the people in decision making process.

The paid news is a serious threat to democracy and good governance. It affects the democratic process in various ways. Firstly, with paid news, the media being compelled to surrender its independence. A media without independence is nothing more than a palm tree of the authorities or interest groups. Secondly with paid news the media deceives the citizens. The reader of the press or the viewer of the television is betrayed into believing that what is basically an advertisement in fact, independently produced news content. Ultimately this practice does harm to the decision making process in a democratic society. How can people judge the government without proper information? The third important question is related to media's role in protection of human rights. No market regulated media can discharge their responsibility to the masses. Their every action might be regulated by the strings of advertisement. When media is being compelled to protect the corporate interests, naturally this will lead to right violation of the vulnerable sections in the society. [P. Ashraf, 2014]

CONCLUSION

Today most of the countries around the globe adopt democracy for the governing of their people and thing that good governance is possible through democratic regimes. It is the main goal of all governments to render best services to their citizens and combat corruption, but how this is possible in democratic regimes? Checks and balance and separation of power was the first step toward controlling of power and prevention of power concentration in the hands of few rulers. In recent times in addition to separation of power for controlling the power of rulers, combating corruption and to engage people in governance role of media legalized through various national and even international rules and regulations. Beside governmental channels and newspapers governments allowed private entities to safeguard the interest of people by using the rights which already guaranteed in the constitution and other laws of the countries. The media facilitates good governance by facilitating the dynamic communication between the government and the people through the socially participatory process of opinion formation. The society is getting more interactive every other day, and this is an essential condition for good governance where the role of media can be felt more intensely. No democracy can ever be conceived without the constructive role of the media. Today most of the democracies are suffering from various problems like corruption and the other socio-moral diseases. Media must assume the role of a catalyst in the process of change in the positive directions. The fundamental role of the media lies in making something better for life and society. For all greater purposes, the media needs to concentrate upon a developed mind-style; rather than just a sponsored life-style.

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