



Mass media and the promotion of human rights discourse

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Abstract: *The present age is called the “age of communications”. In other words , because of the existence and application of mass media whose influence and effects are increasing ,they have developed a new form and have overshadowed the developments within the human societies. As a part of the new social structure and one of the comprehensive systems available to all , the media play a very critical and important role in the economic, social-cultural and political arenas. This research aims to investigate the role the media play in expanding the discourse on the human rights. The mass media as information highways and as effective communication means on the public opinion and on the civil society watchdog ,plays an important role in informing people ,strengthening the social cultural-thinking basis and expanding the human rights discourse and etc.... . They are of the most important leverages for education , advertisement and culture building affairs . they also make public opinion and are components in creating civilization. This research is of descriptive-analytical type. Analyzing the research concepts and theories reveal, mass media , despite future challenges through adopting different communication policies ,are believed to have a strategic role in bolstering and expanding the discourse on the human rights as well as on democracy.*

Keyword: *Mass media , Discourse, Freedom, Human rights, Democracy*

INTRODUCTION

It looks that advancement and qualitative and quantitative developments in the “mass media” , have transformed the nature of the exchange and the symbolic production in the world intensively and irreversibly. The present age is called “ communication age “ . In other words , because of the existence and application of mass media whose influence and effects are increasing ,they have developed a new form and have overshadowed the developments within the human societies. In such a way today such media for the colonial powers are of high importance for consolidating and fixing the cultural and political domination and are regarded effective tools for capturing identity and public opinion (Broadcasting service, 111:2002). With the status the mass media and communication tools have found from the birth of man till his death in the modern life , they could be categorized in the social institutions and be regarded as major effective factors in the process of the accepting norms, social values and socialization. People usually learn values, norms, beliefs, inclinations as well as behavioral theses from the others and through the process of the social education and socialization or within the various framework of the social, recognized and institutionalized values.

Meantime , the collective communication tools play a peculiar and strategic role in the process of identity making and the discourse governing the society for they deal with the socialization of the people directly and indirectly. In the new counter ideological environment , which in Clifford Kurtz ‘ s words is hermeneutical, the “ media message” –whether in the press form or in its recent form like TV and the Internet- has actually become a part of the increasing process of the identity seeking and identity making in the direction of “new

selves". In this transformation and " due to the formation of the bio cybernetic environment ,one can raise philosophical questions and contemplate the concepts of the super human or mega human on the back of them ".(Qeselfsky,322:2010). Mass media have become dominant and main sources in shaping the identity and culture of the youth . Hence, the youth leadership in utilizing the capability and application of the modern media as well as their skills in using them , has formed a new communication pattern among those youth encompassing both the private (the family in particular) and public sphere(Zokaye,121: 2010). Globally speaking , the effective components on the cultural and political relations have changed and in addition to official players and diplomats , unofficial players including multinational companies ,non-state entities, and media play fundamental roles.

Today concepts like public diplomacy in general, and cultural and media diplomacy in particular, are evolving which their influence in shaping international relations and communications are very well evident, thus drawing the attention of the international and states worldwide. The role of the mass media in promoting the nations' awareness level, expanding the discourse and modern concepts like human rights , democracy and peace are obvious. They also affect the way governments function . Today , using the media within the international context for planning a major strategy of the great powers possess an important status. The level of using the new media includes communication satellites, large news agencies, press and numerous radio and TV stations as well as Internet sites ,for they cut across geographical borders with the least cost and target minds and the way people think in other countries (Saeedi, 31: 2012). This subject not only embrace opportunities and potentialities but also faces with challenges and resistances . Hence, the main questions of the research could be the following :

- 1.What roles do mass media play in expanding the human rights discourse in societies, culture building and institutionalization of it ?
2. What effects have mass media had on decision making processes and nation-states approaches towards such a discourse and intercultural communications ?
3. What challenges and reactions by governments do mass media face in the process of expanding democracy and human rights ?

Thus this research aims to analyze the functions of the media in expanding the discourse on the human rights on the basis different theories of globalization ,global village , Frankfurt school, hegemony, magic bullet , and cultural studies . The challenges facing the matter using the theory of cultural invasion is also investigated .

Operating definition of the concepts

Media

The century in which we are living is concurrent with a great revolution that man has ever seen. It is the "age of communications and that of the media dominance" on the humans' lives (Saqzade and Karimzade,37: 2000). By the mass media , it is meant that the flow of the information from a public affairs source could be available to millions of people fast and efficiently.(Denis et al,371:2007). The mass media are tools that are created in the new civilizations and are applied widely. The salient feature of them is their expanded scope of power. The term mass media indicates a type of communication whose aim is to establish a relationship with a group of people(Alawi,43:2007).

Discourse

The term discourse has various meanings ; Some researchers and translators define it as a systematic investigation of a concrete subject, yet some believe it to be a series of words ,opinion and etc.....(Political sciences dictionary:17). Generally speaking ,most theorists unanimously hold that discourse is meant all what is said or written : including articles, subjects, written and spoken matters as well as whatever is referred to as dialogue, exchange of opinion or negotiations . Dian McDonnell in the book 'theories of discourse' considers talks or dialogue as introductory terms of every discourse. Since each type of speech ,word or written texts are regarded social trends possessing social nature and structure, thus, discourse too is a social phenomenon that includes social aspects and frameworks. In other words, temporal, spatial contexts, application details, the way the users apply the theorem ,proposition or the subject all determine the form, type and content of each discourse (Discourse periodical,25: 1999). The main objective of the discourse building is to affect the public opinion , culture building , making social processes and giving validity to desired values.

Age of information society

An information society is a place where the quality of life , the scope of the social upheavals and the economic developments increasingly depend on the information and its utility.

Today impressive developments within the field of technology arenas like accumulating, producing and distributing information have occurred. Thus speaking of the explosion of information , communication revolution , and the effects of the media on the formation of the world opinion specifically after the expansion of great communication technologies and the advent of the age of the information society is quite ordinary. Cybernetic networks , satellites, news agencies and different radio and TV stations have challenged the international law and regulations structure.

Increasing the accessibility to the information provided by the media for the citizens and politicians, precipitating the accumulating and distributing information as well as consolidating and expanding them are among the main characteristics of these fundamental developments (Kharazi azar,3:2005). These issues have increased the digital literacy level of the citizens , brought about a framework for cyber democracy , established a relationship between the nations and civilizations and have created a dialogue at the global level.

Human Rights

A. **Ontological definitions of human rights:** Ontologically speaking , human rights could be defined once the status of freedom as the right in the relationship between man and people has been explained.

This definition involves providing freedom as the authority of man on his own destiny in which case man possess the initiative in his behavior personally. Also, by enjoying freedom, he is able to resist against all sorts of determinism. In the first sense , human rights means the known freedom namely the individuals' independent determination and applying it without the others' intervention. But in the second sense ,human rights are “right-claim” that could be dependent on the society; like right to providing subsistence , right to health, and right to education and etc..... (Hashemi,7,8:2005).

B. **Political definition of human rights:** Human rights in the sense of freedom become authentic, independent or near and in line with authority that can be investigated in two senses :

_ The first sense called” freedom-independence” categorized within the personal independence outside of the social compulsion and without political constraints.

_The second sense is “freedom-participation” on which every person has the right to participate freely in administering the public as well as political affairs without social pressures . This sense is related to the famous democratic thinking by Jean Jack Russo (Ibid:9).

C. **Legal definition of human rights :** According to this perspective , human rights are considered as a set of benefits belonging to the people of a society, fixed in established rules and regulations that people will enjoy as being humans and in their relationship with others and with the government accompanied by necessary supports and guarantees.

In this regard , one can refer to the human rights and benefits and safeguarding it

Such as : the human right to rule his own destiny, the right to have life requirements , legal structure and human benefits as well as the legal system that guarantees the human rights .(Ibid,10-14)

Theoretical basics of human rights

The theoretical basics of the human rights are divided into two traditional and modern parts which are :

First: The traditional basics of the human rights include religious matters, theory of natural law and theory of positivism.

Second: The modern theories of the human rights include the legal theory based on justice and the legal theory based on dignity.

Generally, the most important personal rights and public freedom within the constitutions of countries and the human rights proclamations could be explained as the following :

- A. Freedom of individual action(right to life, security, housing, immunity, protection, correspondence, communications and freedom of movement)
- B. Freedom of thought(freedom of beliefs and that of expression, education, news and information , press, media and demonstration)
- C. Freedom of association (freedom of assembly, elections, conferences, parties, and permanent organizations)

- D. Social and economic freedom(right to ownership, trade and industrial freedom, profession)
(Qazi,144:2005)

Freedom of information and press in international law

The freedom of information and the press arose by the end of the second world war and at the first meeting at the UN in 1946 where it was proclaimed : The information freedom is one of the basic rights of mankind and the basis of all freedoms that is regarded by the UN as important. According to principle 19 of the human rights proclamation and clause 2 of the international treaty for political and civil rights ,each person has the right to acquire and disseminate information ,to promote thoughts with all means available without border considerations(Hashemi,350:2004).

Positive functions of mass media

For two famous American researchers Laswel and Right, the mass media have four major roles: Controlling the environment (news and analytical role), creating and expanding solidarity as well as strengthening the social identity(expository role),transmitting cultural heritage (educational and advertisement role) and social role , i.e entertainment and pleasure.

The mass media by promotion, confidence building , symbol making and socialization utilize the above roles.

Analyzing different theories on the relationship among media ,discourse and democracy

Theoretical approaches on the effects of the media

Generally speaking ,there are two parts of theories in relation with the effects of the mass media on expanding the human rights discourse and democracy; one part is interested in the globalization theory and deals with the positive effects of the media that includes theories of global village ,the Frankfurt school, domination, magic bullet, and cultural studies while the other part is in favor of the cultural invasion and deals with the negative effects of the media (Larijani et al,149:2007).

First: optimistic viewpoints

In this perspective , theorists like Innes, McLuhan, George Granber, and McCoil in a positive approach to satellites maintain that the social communication media like satellites have a positive role in expanding social relations .

Harold Adams Innes and McLuhan recognize communication media as the stick and civilization and hold that the history is guided by the prevailing media in every period of time. Both consider as unfavorable the period of communication bias or the book domination and look to the era of TV beyond the era of inscription or writing. For them, TV results in a healthy balance of the senses. They assert that the era of TV increases the verbal culture and participation replaces isolation while the global thinking and collaboration replace extreme nationalism(Sarookhani,45:2013)

A. Theory of globalization

The direct broadcast of the satellite programs and disseminating news affects a large number of the audience in different societies instantly and simultaneously, thus resulting in an ever increasing influence and authority through which the different people and cultures of societies become unified (Larijani et al,149:2007).

The advantages of using satellite programs from the viewpoint of globalization advocates are as follow:

Expansion of the collective communications, easiness of the information transmitting , strengthening the trend of social-political socialization , strengthening the cultural-thinking understanding among different nations and strengthening the trend of knowledge oriented development in countries.

B. The Frankfurt school

This thinking school regards the media as a tool for building culture .Based on dominion to the culture arena. This school puts much emphasis on opinions than material goods. In line with this school , the media render in the domination by the superior ideologies. This predominance is made by medias' using pictures and symbols for increasing the interests of the governing group.

Today policy makers have realized the role of the communication tools such as papers, radio ,cinema, TV, satellites in transmitting information and in orienting the public opinion. Hence their foremost goal of is to control and access to these means specifically TV and radio(Alawi,94:2005).

C. Cultural studies

This group of researchers rely largely on signs and conceptualization and the way the content of the media is interpreted. They're also interested in the cultural concepts of the media products that include dominant and conflicting interpretations. The cultural studies see the society as a field of competing ideas in dealing with expressing the meaning. These studies are increasingly becoming useful and famous methods that can be used to combine the insights of different thinking schools (Leytel John, 740:2005). This thinking school emphasizes on culture building and characterization by the media.

D. Theory of the magic bullet(Strong impact of the media)

This theory was a name given to the first concepts of the impacts the social media exert. This crude and simplistic view which is also called the theory of injection needle or transmission belt , projects that the messages transmitted by the mass media have more or less similar impacts on the audience that are subject to them. This view is under the influence of a power that the advertisement had achieved in the first world war . The view is still supported by many researchers(Sorin,87:2003).

E. Global village

By the global village this idea comes to the mind the mass media have through their encompassing cultural impacts reduced the world to a village .

McLuhan holds “ societies” have formed as a result of the nature of the communication tools than its content. In his opinion, a tool is not only isolated from the content of its message , but is also more important than the message itself that influences it significantly.

Concerning the age of electronic communications and the “ global village” ,he maintains , this era of man’s civilization began with the invention of the radio by Marconi . According to the McLuhan’s ideas , the third era of the man’s social life namely the age of printing and individualistic life caused by the superiority of the visual sense over the other senses is on the decline facing with the advances and expansion of electronic communication media such as radio , TV , and cinema. This new communication method validates the auditory sense and regards the return to the sensual intuition imperative (Dadgaran, 93-95: 2007). McLuhan considers the present world as an electronic world and believes , in the present electronic age , the distinctions are lost and similarities become manifest ,thus a new age is created ; an age that can be called the “ global village “(Rashidpour,8:2007).

F. Habermas’ public sphere

As George Grabner indicates the media are of high importance in the society . The importance of the “generalization” of the public media -ability to generalize , define the subjects, provide terms and common values and utilize the power- has brought about wide ranging theoretical backings.

In all studies concerning social communications , the media have the main role . The media outlets broadcast the message to influence the culture of the society which this makes the mass media as a part of the principle and central force in the society(Leytle John,727:2005). Innes and McLuhan recognize the mass media as the essence of the civilization and state that the history is guided by the dominant media in each period of time . Innes believes that communication media are the expansion of the human’s mind .He added that the main and the primary concern of each period of history is a kind of bias that causes because of the dominant media . So, communications can serve as an important means in order to achieve consciousness ,organization ,policy making and shaping the public opinion . For the communications to accomplish this role , all the involved entities must for the fulfillment of these objectives ,follow appropriately a methodological and philosophical communication point of view .(McLuhan, 727:2005).

G. The highlight theory

Highlight expresses the powerful impacts by the media . Macomb’s and Shaw concluded the mass media have a considerable effect on what the electorate regard as important and fundamental to competition. One of the most important components about the role of the mass media regarding the concept of highlight is a temporal framework which is considered for this phenomenon. In addition to this , different media have different highlight potentialities. It looks, the theory of highlight is a very suitable theory for understanding the comprehensive role of the media.

H. Cyber democracy

Some of the theorists by referring to the expanded communication among the world citizens through the mass media specifically the internet and converting the society to a network, consider it as the basis for a new form of citizenship and democracy under the name of “cyber democracy” or “electronic democracy”(Saeedi:99:2007).

The electronic democracy originated from the IT capabilities is helpful in bolstering the degree and quality of peoples' participation in the government. In fact the internet has the ability to enhance the reciprocal relations between the state and the citizens; hence it can affect the nature of democracy. The electronic democracy actually indicates the way IT and communications are utilized and applied based on different strategies, overshadowing all groups of people like, states, officials, media, political organizations and citizens in political, economic social and cultural sectors as well as domestic and international areas of an electronic state (Sarafrazi and Memarzade,1:2010)

The role of the media in expanding the human rights discourse and democracy

Increasing the political awareness, familiarity with the modern values, cultural –thinking pluralism, expansion of the horizontal, supranational and multi reciprocal relations, preparations for the participation of the people, training citizens and creating digital and cognizant citizens, enhancing the public sphere, growing the electronic commerce, increasing the exchange of information, dialogue, and talks could bring about a new social formation(Sarokhani,2012).

Based on different theories of globalization, global village, the Frankfurt school, supremacy, magic bullet, and cultural studies, mass media have a strategic role in expanding social communications, facilitating the transmitting of the information and raising awareness, enhancing the social-political socialization, strengthening cultural-thinking understanding among nations, creating common terms and values, enhancing the public sphere and bolstering the process of knowledge –oriented expansion in countries while using the satellites programs, the internet and media, could in addition to having information and communication benefits be a factor for the globalization of the societies, political pluralism, at the world level as well as for the expansion of the culture of democracy and human rights' values.

One can acquire clear evidence through the liberalistic, cultural and functional perspectives that the media and the press in particular pave the way for the growth and development in the society in the direction of democracy and for establishing and expanding a public sphere. It is for this reason that Walter Lampion calls the press the holy book.

Pioneers such as Milton, John Luck, Milve, Liston Craft, as well as Merton, Laswel, Lazars Feld, Habermas, and McLuhan have spoken on the positive role of the media originated from the liberalistic theory that goes back to the 17th century and is the result of the theoretical thinking in the context of the western democracy evolution. Despite disagreements among the teachings and the scholars in the field, all of them through raising scholarly discussions on the freedom of speech and expansion of promoting it have paid attention to the point that how cultural trends after the renaissance and the printing invention by creating the profession of the press have led to the concentration of national governments and the formation of national languages. The media and the press have contributed significantly to the formation of the true nature of modernism and the establishment of new popular regimes.

Second_ Pessimistic viewpoints

Theorists like George Mill, Perry Bram, David Riesman and other Marxists' critical scholars have pessimistically reminded destructive impacts of the media on the audience that are mostly followers of classic Marxism and residents of the third world.

A. Theory of the classic Marxism

George Mill in the book “language and communication” considers the objectives of the mass media as the homogenizing the information and uniting the public opinion in addition to the hierarchical transforming and expressing as well as transiting the public opinion(Sarokhani,114: 1998).

According to the classic Marxism, media are tools for the dominant class and the capitalists to further their lucrative interests.

B. Theory of supremacy (hegemony)

Supremacy is the domination of ideologies or a wrong way of thinking over a right situation. Ideology is not only created by the economic system only but is also present deeply in all activities conducted in the society. Hence , ideology is not created by the force or pressure of a group over the other . It is spread and unconscious . The dominant ideology prefers the interests of special groups over others and the media assume the main role clearly in this process.(Leytle John,739:2005).

C. Theory of the cultural invasion

The advocates of this theory are mostly the theorists of the third and developing world whose concern is to safeguard the national cultures , traditional and cultural values, and historical background . They believe the content of the mass media (the internet and satellites) provided by the western countries will result in destroying the cultures of countries and transforming the people into an amorphous, consuming and controllable mass by the satellites networks .This process in their opinion makes the people be completely dependent on the west's economy and culture.

Challenges facing the media in expanding the human rights discourse

Most of the governments and organizations attempting to restrict the media , the freedom of speech and the expansion of the discourse on the human rights are the third and developing countries whose concern is to safeguard the national cultures , traditional and cultural values, and historical background . They state the content of the mass media and the discourse on the human rights is a threat to the social-political relations and express the following :

_ The impact of the liberalism and nonreligious thoughts on the compilers of the human rights proclamation
_The desire for independence-seeking by the developing countries and their past skepticism towards western countries

_Undemocratic systems and cultures in some developing countries (Hashemi,160:2003)

Despite world norms, and the scattering of people in different places as well as the establishment of nations, different cultures and civilizations and even their contradictions have overwhelmed peoples' minds and hearts in such a way that have made the understanding the human rights more different, paving the way for the lack of understanding towards this common mankind cause. It is in this regard that the cultural independence as a national cause on one hand and the world human rights on the other hand, bring about frictions automatically. Despite these differences and disagreements ,governments are obliged to promote and support the basic rights and freedoms of their own people. Mass media both represent and promote the message and objectives of the western governments to achieve the strategic goals in other countries like the political and ideological hegemony, presenting a negative picture of the developing countries ,disseminating chaos and

It is the case that the west's mass media and news agencies by relying on their technological power try to show a negative picture of the governments, cultures and ethnic groups so as to shape the world public opinion in the direction of their own expected beliefs and thoughts. Some decades ago, the Canadian Marshall McLuhan had forecasted " the future wars won't be waged by the warfare and in the battlefield but by the conceptions the media create in the minds of the people. (Khaniki,3-11:1993).

Conclusion

Media have different political , security, social , and supranational functions. The expansion of the mass media is so great that one can regard the media man and the new culture as the products of such mass media. On the other hand concepts and values of human rights as well as international civil and political treaties are being developed as the modern human causes expanded by the media. Based on different theories of globalization, global village , the Frankfurt school, supremacy, magic bullet , and cultural studies, mass media have a strategic role in expanding social communications, facilitating the transmitting of the information and raising awareness, enhancing the social-political socialization, strengthening cultural-thinking understanding among nations, creating common terms and values, enhancing the public sphere and bolstering the process of knowledge –oriented expansion in countries while using the satellites programs , the internet and media, could in addition to having information and communication benefits be a factor for the globalization of the societies, political pluralism , at the world level as well as for the expansion of the culture of democracy and human rights ' values.

One can acquire clear evidence through the liberalistic, cultural and functional perspectives that the media and the press in particular pave the way for the growth and development in the society in the direction of democracy and for establishing and expanding a public sphere. It is for this reason that Walter Lampion calls the press the holy book. On the other hand the third world maintain that the mass media both represent and promote the message and objectives of the western governments to achieve the strategic goals in other countries like the political and ideological hegemony, presenting a negative picture of the developing countries ,disseminating chaos and These countries have been restricting the media in which they haven't been successful.

Information , network society have persuaded a great number of people to participate ,produce, select, and promote data and knowledge and it is the case that people must attempt to contribute to this “ seventh continent”. Should the planning and the interstate cooperation is conscious and is based on the promotion of the values of humanity and acceptance of varied cultural concepts as well as just rights accepted by all, then it is better to use the future opportunities to deepen and disseminate values like cyber democracy , human rights and cultural dialogue very well.

Guidelines

The media policies and functions have a fundamental role in expanding countries' cultures as well as worldwide values based on human dignity, humanity, freedom and justice, human rights and democracy. The media could through different communication policies help support the culture building and discourse, awareness and institutionalizing these components and eventually lead to affecting the social – cultural values and international relations. With regards to institutionalizing the positive impacts by the media, observing the civil and human rights treaties ,expanding discourses based on the human dignity and peace and democracy ,the following guidelines are presented :

- _ A rational and planned utilization of the media and new communication technologies to establish a coexistent condition among the civilizations , cultures and various races.
- _ Persuading the media to continue with their important role in the information society and disseminating the human rights values
- _ Adopting appropriate measures in line with the mutual rights and the freedom of speech among nations to deal with unlawful and unfavorable contents of the media
- _ Educating the media literacy and establishing academic centers for the cultural –media studies
- _ Transforming the media to a trilateral tool among the state, nation and the elite while strengthening the horizontal communications in the mass media in order that accessibility to the current information , dialogue and different analyses can be provided
- _ Establishing competitions and adopting suitable cultural strategies through the international communication system
- _ Maintaining and supporting cultural rights and disseminating transcendental ethical values at the world level

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