Kargil war

Role of Media in Kargil Anshu Bhatia PGP2- 18012 Table of Contents

Abstract This paper attempts at evaluating the role of media in the Kargil war, which broke out in the summer of 1999, at a time when the Indian media was equipped enough to set the media agenda as well as present the war at an unprecedented scale.

As mortals, we have never seen the war situations Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq or Afghanistan but only can perceive the images seen through media reportings. Therefore, many of our perceptions are based on the realism as created by the media owners. Introduction The function of media through which they frame the news stories is called as Agenda-setting function of media. In the words of McCombs (2002), in a typical daily newspaper, over 75 percent of the potential news of the day is rejected and never transmitted to the audience (p.). (Maxwell E. McCombs, 1993) Media (or the press) has been said to inhere three basic roles, also called as the " three I's". i. e. information, interpretation, and interest. (The Press - The press's many roles). The limitation of media capacity to enable its thorough surveillant function explains their selectivity. Also called as the ' Gatekeeping theory' in mass communications, this along with Agenda setting media theory is closely related to Theory of Framing, according to which , gatekeepers (or the edia), certain parts of an event/news are given more attention than the rest. This incomplete revelation can lead to biased opinions amongst different sections of the society, but all the three theories seem to have one point of parity- Media is empowered, has an agenda and transmits only that information which it wants to be channelized across to the public. Literature

Review " Journalists will say that war is too important to be left to generals. Reporting of war is too important to be left to reporters.

Soldiers need to get involved in this. " -Maj Gen Patrick Brady - 1990 (former Public Relations Chief of US Army) (HALI, 2000, August) As opposed to the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, Kargil was the first war that witnessed an emergingtechnologydriven media in the era of television. Indian media had experienced live war coverage and broadcast for the first time, and therefore exploited the opportunity to bring forth the war in front of the people as if it was being fought right in front of their naked eyes.

With daily updates and minute detailing covered, it was also the first time for the Indian military when fearless correspondents and journalists , armed with their satellite artillery made sure they covered the Indian army's every step towards victory to make us proud. It was rightly said after the First World War, is that " war not only creates a supply of news but a demand for it (Ajai K. Rai) .

Media is definitely able to ' sell war' to its consumers given that it's targeting and coverage is able to engage its consumers, which are mostly geographically concentrated in areas related to war. Armed by legendary conflict stories with Pakistan since Partition, media enhanced the platform available during war to display Kargil at its best, with one side devoted to the coverage of acts of superordinate bravery on the patriotic Indian side, and Anti-Pakistan agenda to display an adequate palette of sellable war at Kargil. The essence of successful warfare is secrecy; the essence of successful journalism is publicity," says the preface to the British Ministry of Defence (MoD's) instructions to Task-Force bound correspondents during the

Falklands war. (Ajai K. Rai) Military on one side is a hierarchical, disciplined and a closedculturecontrasting to the independent and blurred code of conduct inhering Media. The latter is believed to have vested interest with prior set ofgoalsfor the agenda setting.

Also known as the Fourth Estate, Media acted as the Force Multiplier during the War of Kargil, where it not only helped built public awareness about the intriguing war but also played a crucial role in enhancing public morale by disseminating information about activities of the Military to their friends and families. Media, especially television media has always been debated to have shown the ' real war' that arguably been far away from ' reality'.

At times deviated from its root purpose of information dissemination, and masked by ' entertainment mantras', often the images and broadcast are televised in a manner to sensationalize the eyeballs of its viewers. During Kargil, Military on one side, was biased with the emerged Media perceptions of narrating ' Masala-extrapolated-tales' which according to them could harm their efforts at war. On the other hand, to set the right sellable agenda for the war, Media had to equip itself with the right policy interventions allowed at the right war locations to make the coverage a successful live war show for its viewers.

According to Bernard Cohen's conceptualization, " The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. " (The Press - The press's many roles) Informational dissemination role of media is always accompanied by Interpretation, often stirring public interest. It was during

Kargil, that the main functional aspect of media as ' agenda setting' was argued in public discourses.

Media in compliance with the Government played a pivotal role in determining role of media, route ofcommunicationvehicles and defined their agenda as ' framers' for the Kargil war's narration to the public with immediate effect. Kargil saw the media as being harnessed as the mass channels for portraying the goodwill of the existing Vajpayee –NDA government as well as the justification of the war. Where on one side, the government made sure the agenda was rightly set to harness it for vote bank for the 13th Indian General Elections, held a few months after the Kargil

War. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's pivotal role as an anchor, a ' de facto Head of State' during the Kargil war helped the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) attain a majority reinstating him as Prime Minister. Media can play very important roles in War and peace making. On one hand, Media could forge bonds between conflicting nations but, Media under strict scrutiny by the Central government agencies was regulated to portray the implacability of the enemy nation at the war front with their anti-social strategies.

Also, media was mobilized to gather the nation under the banner of national integrity to fosterpatriotismamong civilians and enhance their involvement with the war, inclusive of their roles both as spectators as well as participants at war. Discussion of the case War reporters, during Kargil were portrayed as extraordinary individuals who risked their lives without any means of self defence to garner news for public information. It was observed that media reporters, Journalists, photographers and media personnel

returning from Kargil LOC ceased to be mere observers but, eventually had become participants in war. It may be argued that Reporters employed operated upon a unanimously agreed agenda by print and television media, but at the same time it can also be said that they were ' sole masters' of decisions determining not only which news stories/or war fronts were covered in their narrations but also how were they framed for the public.

Therefore, not only are the stories in media biased by society's cultural, political and economic biases but also by individual preferences For television coverage, where Cost of news acquisition set out during Kargil by media owners was huge, the agenda setting process was impacted by their commercial considerations to a great extent. Much announced by the media to be telecasting ' eye-witnessed real war news', the images, video clips and narration can be debated that ' Kargil news was never value free, form the individual reporter or media house's point of view.

The mere dilemma that whether a reporter's news was free from his comments questions the epistemology of value-free information and its dissemination. The relationship between the Audiences and Media can be interestingly questioned on what the media perceives the Audiences desire to what the Audiences actually expect the media's role to be. Kargil can be established as a benchmark for Indian media where, the public on one hand emanded maximum disclosure of the first televised war; on the other hand they understood the security deterrents that were attached to the same. The ' Vietnam Syndrome' till date reminds people that wars can be lost due to the total freedom and access provided to the media in their coverage of the war. (HALI, 2000, August) The ' right to know' was not much demanded as a

necessity by the masses given the fact that the war was being just and the national integrity and patriotic flavoured gains were much more than the price of death of Indian soldiers at the war front.

Audiences expect the real war to be shown but at the same time, are also driven by their rationality to avoid extreme visuals of war casualties, involving both soldiers as well as civilians. To analyse the sheer brilliance of strategic operations by media analysts and planners during Kargil , one must take into account the efficient use of media to save India from the mangling received on the LOC as well as thesnowcapped peaks of Kargil.

Indian media mobilized its resources as a response to the Kargil crisis and should be given credibility for organizing programmes, handling syndication and conducting in-depth analysis and discussions on television as well as print about Kargil, helping to stir the right essence of Patriotism amongst Indians along with establishing the goodwill of Government support. The wide array of coverage was designed and channelled successfully to convince political as well as social diplomats worldwide that it was Pakistan who had caused many grievances to the Indian side.

To dupe our own Indian masses, the Chanakyan principles of deceit and lies were fully utilized to their greatest advantage (Kapila, 2009) In order to support their campaign headstrong, one of the most communist decisions by the duality of Government and media was to act as a barricade by blocking Pakistani e-newspapers on the Internet, to ban PTV from the cable networks across the nation, minimize the causality broadcast of Indian soldiers but exaggerate the defeated (and dead) army of the enemy nation.

Instead, internet was used a strategic weapon to market their content in such a designed way so as to strengthen the agenda setting and help spread the propaganda. An exclusive website called as www. vijayinkargil. com. Officially trained personnel to handle PR effectively controlled the content that went online, such that any truth about crafted claims regarding any victory or casualties could not be even verified. Amongst the crafted news due to the lip service of the Indian overnment along with media included falsehood spread by telecasting lies like Tiger hill, Mirage-2000 HUD displays with manipulated information on TV News Channel like BBC, CNN a and the likes. Masses were made to believe what they saw or interact with content prepared by media. In a way, it can be said that although media did not tell the masses what to think, they effectively filtered the unfavourable and designed new content such that the propaganda for Kargil success with Patriotic fervour could resonate with equal consistency across Indian, not only in india but worldwide. HALI, 2000, August) The very process by which media gathered reports at source, packaged and disseminated to a wider audience was constrained by a an array of influences ranging from broadcasting protocols and standards, battlefieldcensorshipby the Military, delusory and misleading information campaigns controlled by the central government propaganda. This created the famously known ' Fog of war' during the times of Kargil.

Unfortunately, although Historians should occupy the front seat in drafting of information for Kargil, the ' first cut prepared draft of history for Kargil' prepared by the Media Journalists had so widely been discussed and consumed by the masses that it is due to this reason, that Historians had to

and will continue to dislodge the contaminants that were reasons of causing the Fog of war. (Tasneem, 2011, March) Analysis and conclusion " Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets" — Napoleon Media as a force multiplier adds tremendous impact to the war-inflicted nations.

Managing people's perceptions of the military as a dedicated, sacrificing and dutiful organization is mandatory for nay nation; especially this was followed during Kargil times. Therefore, the need to maintain close and code of confidence between media and the Military was a mandate. (Ajay K. Rai, 2004) Apart from the blood-shed and casualities, Kargil shall be remembered in history for highly successful diplomatic media campaign. One of the most effective ways in which this was demonstrated was the fashion in which the media was censored from critical warfronts (Kargil, Dras or Batalik sector) or from volatile surety information's.

Emotional and patriotic flavoured appeals were instrumented as catalysts by the government and military to mobilize the Media to the best of their media agenda. The revolution in information technology from radio as the media during Indo-Pakistani War of 1971to widespread digitization, enhanced channelled communication methodologies and airpower employment during the Kargil war, 1999, has become the journey through which appropriate lessons have been learnt and assimilated by the Military as well as the media to work hand-in hand for any crisis that occurs in the future.

A joint engagement for study of security issues (posed by real time reporting by media personnel from the battlefield) was one of the significant post war actions that were taken up for mutual benefit. (Ajay K. Rai, 2004) Thus , best

of technology and public relations management helped Kargil anchors manage the ' Media Spin' effectively such that today, India as a diverse and integral nation would always utilize the power of Media both as a ' Force Multiplier' to help root the Agenda setting as well as a ' Weapon of War'.

This has led to increased relevance and importance being laid down in public discourses as well as central standards and protocols for masses to lay greater emphasis on the role of media in war. (HALI, 2000, August)

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