

Political communication and the population



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Communication is the process of sharing information. By communication we mean information is sent from a sender or encoder to a receiver or decoder. In a more complex form feedback links a sender to a receiver. This requires a symbolic activity, sometimes via a language. Communication is based on the idea of respect, promises, and the want for social improvement. There are different types and mode of communication in which mass media is one.

Mass media is a term used to denote, as a class, that section of the media specifically conceived and designed to reach a very large audience (typically at least as large as the whole population of a nation state). It was coined in the 1920s with the advent of nationwide radio networks and of mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. The mass-media audience has been viewed by some commentators as forming a mass society with special characteristics, notably atomization or lack of social connections, which render it especially susceptible to the influence of modern mass-media techniques such as advertising and propaganda.

One of the outcomes of the modern mass-media communication is political communication which is presently becomes the most important form of mass-media communication technique to reach-out to the population immediately, completely and effectively. Political communications is a area of communication that is concerned with politics. Communication often influences political decisions and vice versa.

Political communication could be defined as, Pure discussion about 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). The definition includes verbal and written political rhetoric but not symbolic communication acts, which are growing significance for an understanding of the political process as a whole. Political communication can be characterized as, in terms of the intentions of its senders to influence political environment.

The crucial factor that makes communication political is not the source of a message (or we might add referring back to their emphasis on public discussion, its form) but its content and purpose (Macnair, pp 11-12).

Intentionality of public communication is purposeful communication about politics. This incorporates-

1. All forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives.
2. Communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnist.
- 3.

Communication about these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials and other forms of media discussion of politics. By political communication we mean not only verbal or written statements but also visual means of significations such as dress, makeup, hairstyle and logo design i. e. all those elements of communication, which might be, said to constitute a political image or identity. The study of political communication directs our attention to the relationship between its elements in the process by which political action is conceived and realized.

Political organization: – There are political actors, narrowly defined those individuals who aspire, through organizational and institutional means of influence the decision making process. They may seek to do this by attaining

institutional power (political) in government or constituent assembly through which preferred policies can be implemented. If in opposition their objective will be to obstruct existing power holders, and have then replaced by alternatives.

Political parties: – This category of political actors include the established political parties; aggregate of more or less like minded individuals who come together within an agreed organizational and ideological structure to serve common goals. These goals were reflected underlying value system or ideology, state and socio-economic life. Despite ideological drift, which may exists between political parties in modern democracies, they share a commitment to constitutional means of advancing their objectives, attempting to convince a population as a whole of their correctness and putting their policies to the test of periodic elections.

Elections are not just referenda on the performance of the incumbent administration, but also reflections of the issues people consider important. For Example, threats of an impending terrorist attack make people more concerned about terrorism and more inclined to vote for the candidate they see as better equipped to deal with terrorism (Iyengar; “ Who Said What? Issue Advertising and the 2006 Vote”).

Once mandated or rejected as the case may be, they agree to abide by the constitutional rules of the political structure in which they operate, respecting the limitations it put on their power to implement or oppose policy until such time as another electoral opportunity comes along. For parties, clearly the smooth functioning of the process described above is

dependent primarily on their ability to communicate with those who will vote for and legitimize them. When until recently political parties are using various forms of inter-personal communication such as Public meetings, rallies aided by newspaper coverage to reach their constituencies.

Now political communication becomes so important for political parties that they are using all the modern theories and techniques of management so that they can achieve their ultimate political objectives to remain in power. These include techniques of marketing (corporate strategy), which could influence mass behaviour in competitive situations. Driven by market pressures, news organizations across the globe are turning to more entertainment-centered forms of reporting, making it more difficult for lazy citizens to encounter substantive political information as a matter of course.

An important consequence of the shift to “ soft news” has been the scaling back of international bureaus and staff. Heavily “ domesticated” news programming creates fewer opportunities for people to learn about overseas events (Iyenger & Morin, “ Differences in Public Knowledge about Domestic and Overseas”). Big Media is simply in the business of selling products; the people’s media reaches more people. For example a handful of self-serving corporate fiefdoms now control practically all of America’s mass-market sources of news and information (Hightower, “ The People’s Media Reaches More People Than FOX Does”).

Political marketing is more or less like commercial marketing which target their audiences (customers) from whom (electoral) support is sought using their channels of mass communication in a competitive environment.

Citizens (consumers) have a wide choice between more than one brands of product (political parties). Political parties measure success not in terms of profit but in voting share and effective power. Similarly one of the effective tools, which corporate uses to persuade and to motivate customers is advertising.

It is being used by political parties to exploit presumed persuasive potential of mass media. This form of political communication uses mass media to differentiate political products (parties and candidates) and to provide the population the various options. Political communication can be also categorized at various levels. Public relation is one of the areas where the political parties/party in the government having in power can manage media and flow of information so that they could design tactics to ensure that their party receives maximum favorable publicity and minimum negative image.

Activities covered by the rubric of public relations include proactive devices such as party conferences, which are in contemporary politics designed principally to attract positive media coverage. News conferences permit political parties to set political agenda during election campaign. Even in the crisis situations through public relation techniques political parties strive for damage control exercise including lobbying of journalists, add spin to the potentially damaging stories and suppressing of potentially damaging information. . Media have become an echo chamber for those in power.

Rather than challenge the fraudulent claims we've had a media acting as a conveyor belt for the government's lies. As the Pentagon has learned, deploying the American media is more powerful than any bomb. The

explosive effect is amplified as a few pro-war, pro-government media moguls consolidate their grip over the majority of news outlets. Media monopoly and militarism go hand in hand (Goodman ; Goodman; “ Why media ownership matters”). The importance of informed and knowledgeable population/electorate dictates that Democratic Party politics must be pursued in the public arena.

The knowledge and information on the basis of which, citizens/populations will work as a deterrent for the political parties. Effects of political communication: Purposeful communication behaviour of political actors such as, political advertising, conferences and speeches can influence the attitude and behaviour of the intended audiences at micro-level. The negligible impact of issue ads on voting preference does not necessarily mean that issue ads are a waste of resources.

Advertising is also designed to fan the flames of partisanship (Iyengar; “ Who Said What? Issue Advertising and the 2006 Vote”). At the macro-level individual responses to public communication are aggregated together in the form of public opinion polls and collective political will. Transparent political communication process opens the channels of democratic societies and improves their functioning. It affects all walks of life because it is largely mediated and transmitted through the print and electronic media. Political leaders and parties know that the news media control how those politicians are depicted to the voting public; the more powerful the leading media, the more powerful their influence over politicians and national policy. Prudent politicians treat the desires of all large corporations with care. But politicians treat the country’s most powerful media corporations with something

approaching reverence (Bagdikian , pp28). For example the media conglomerates are not the only “ industry” whose owners have become monopolistic in the American economy. But media products are unique in one vital respect.

They do not manufacture nuts and bolts: they manufacture a social and political world. New technology has expanded the commercial mass media’s unprecedented power over the knowledge and values of the country. In less than a generation, the five intertwined media corporations especially in America have enlarged the influence in the home, school, and work lives of every citizen. Media can alter the messages and their roles depend largely on reporters and commentators. Effects of each message could be identified and measured with reference to individuals or with respect to social, environmental or psychological factors.

Variations in meaning and response will be dependent first on the context of reception of the messages incorporating such factors as the political affiliation, age, gender, and ethnicity of the receiver and second on the type of message transmitted. Party election broadcast on media is one of the examples, which is heavily motivated. Political actors transmit messages of political organization to the public but they transform them through various process of news making and interpretations what politicians wanted to say is not necessarily what the media reports him or her as having said.

Media makes statement about politics of their own through commentaries, editorials interviews to make impact on political environment. Politician feels no compunction about making exaggerated claims before national television

audiences; they expect their messages to be taken at face value. This is hardly surprising that for most Americans the media is their only contact with the world of public affairs. On the flip side, from the perspective of the public, events not covered by news media make no greater impression. The power of media imagery reverberates throughout political life.

Political communication is no longer confined to elections and campaigns; media appeals have become standard affair in day-to-day conduct of government and are used by private interests as well as candidates. The habit of playing to the public has even spread to policy arenas not typically associated with partisan politics. The reporting and investigations of 9/11 attacks or Katrina are the glaring examples of political reporting. The use—even the manipulation of the mass media for political purposes has transformed the practice of leadership and governance.

The major news media fails to deal systematically with the variety of compelling social needs of the entire population. Those needs remain hidden crises, obscured in the daily flood of other kinds of news. Yet the weight of most reputable surveys shows that, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, most Americans were deeply concerned with systematic lack of funds for their children's education, access to health care, the growing crises in unemployment, homelessness, and steady deterioration of city and state finances. Policy makers resort to the very same tactics as candidates running for election.

The flood of attacks and counter attacks has bred cynicism towards elections and the act of voting. The role of voters has shrunk from foot soldiers and

occasional activists to disgruntled spectator. Electoral victors are those who excel at projecting imagery and symbolism, but not necessarily those who offer substantive expertise, political experience or pragmatism. The practice of media politics amounts to a tragedy of commons-individual participants may be able to manipulate the media to their advantage, but in the long run both the body politic and the politician are weakened.

The media politics made policy makers more sensitive to public opinion does not necessarily mean that opinion drives policy. Media politics encourages public officials to engage in cosmetic rather than genuine problem solving behaviour. News media are expected to erect a so-called public sphere where voters can sample from a variety of perspectives on the issue that concern them. In effect news and other forms of media /public affairs programming are expected to facilitate the expression of informed opinion. The press is expected to act as an agent of the public by policing the behaviour of the government officials.

Citizens lack the resources to monitor the actions of their leaders on a daily basis; they delegate this watchdog task to the media. Democratic theories cast news organizations as multitasking, public utility. Against the standard of theories most contemporary media system fall short in meeting their civic responsibilities. Profit motive and private ownership as well as control of media by certain few deviates from the basic concept and objectives of media. The domination of private money in public politics, which has subverted so much public policy, also prevents legal solutions to problems in the mass media.

This limitation of the major media extends beyond national policies. The media giants, left largely free to do what they wish, have found ever-lower levels of coarsened culture and models. The control of the opinion-molding media is nearly monolithic. All of the controlled media—television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and motion pictures—speak with a single voice, each reinforcing the other. Despite the appearance of variety, there is no real dissent, no alternative source of facts or ideas accessible to the great mass of people that might allow them to form opinions at odds with those of the media masters.

They are presented with a single view of the world—a world in which every voice proclaims the equality of the races, the inerrant nature of the Jewish “Holocaust” tale, the wickedness of attempting to halt the flood of non-White aliens pouring across our borders, the danger of permitting citizens to keep and bear arms, the moral equivalence of all sexual orientations, and the desirability of a “pluralistic,” cosmopolitan society rather than a homogeneous, White one. It is a view of the world designed by the media masters to suit their own ends—and the pressure to conform to that view is overwhelming.

People adept their opinions to it, vote in accord with it, and shape their lives to fit it (Strom; “why they are biased”). Conclusion: It is quite evident from the above discussion that political communication encompasses each and every aspects of public life. Media covers almost all the areas and so its effects on the population are quite evident especially in the twenty-first century. Political communication affects the society, its people, economy,

political process, public diplomacy, culture, attitude, and behaviour and has ability to influence people in general.

It has been widely perceived that political communication most of the time spin the facts and use information in its own way to gain trust of the public but it is not true at times. Public is not simply respond passively to political communication but they are critically and actively shifting, discarding and interpreting the available information. A more educated and literate public is capable of using the more complex range of news sources and party messages to find information they need to make practical political choices.

Political communication generally increases knowledge about government policies and practices and develop political attitude. There are many deep-rooted flaws embedded in the structure of media such as private control, monopoly, profit motive and flow of money. Unless we could not be able to weed out these flaws, transparency and effectiveness of political communication could not be achieved. If we stop blaming the media coverage of politics and directed attention to the problems themselves perhaps effective remedies would be more forthcoming.