

Media hint

[Media](#)



Introduction

Media has always been in the forefront as a radical voice all over the world, and naturally, it has invited the wrath of all the regimes autocratic and democratic alike. Among the media types, the broadcast media, particularly television has suffered the greatest suppression, whether it is in the Europe, the Americas, Africa or in the East. The most recent example comes from Pakistan, a Muslim nation in South Asia, where the military ruler Parvez Mushrraf had shut down the television stations soon after he suspended the constitution and imposed emergency.

Broadcasting – the transmitting of programmes to be heard simultaneously by an indefinitely large number of people – is a social invention, not a technical one. (Curran J. & Seaton J., 2003). Television is perhaps the only modern media that had played a dual role, as a voice of the radical opinion and as a media of propaganda. The emergence of the global television has made revolts of the people and radical opinion in any part of the world irrepressible. This has always made headaches for the ruling elites to respond in the same manner, to use television itself in order to suppress the opinion.

Revolt against television

Incidents of revolt against television as a mirror of the truth have occurred before the advent of the satellite television, where the regimes controlled the broadcasting system. The history can be traced from the wide spread information suppression and the iron curtain that characterised the erstwhile Soviet regime. Later we numerous incidents around the world, mostly in

autocracies where the official television run by the regime, disseminated the news suppressing any other viewpoint. This has occurred in Iraq, in other states of the Middle East like Saudi Arabia, Iran and mostly many of the Muslim Sheikdoms.

Suppression, ideology and television

Communication has the power to define, persuade, inform and to disinform. An analysis of communication at the level of community and nation is obliged to recognise that truth is not necessarily separated from falsehood; rather, the process of propaganda blurs the elements in order to be persuasive. Taylor (1986) puts the matter succinctly:

‘ Communication with a view to persuasion is an inherent human quality. It can take place in a private conversation or a mass rally, in a church or cinema, as well as on a battlefield. It can manifest itself in the form of a statue or building, a coin or painting, a flag or a postage stamp.’ To the above list Taylor adds ‘ speech sermons, songs, art, radio waves, television pictures.’

Whether they operate between individuals or people in millions, the task of the analyst remains the same – to investigate the intent of the act of communication and the ways in which members of the intended audience respond to that communication. It is arguable that most mass communication, whether it is a party political broadcast, the TV news, a pop song, a soap opera or sitcom is in some way or another, to a greater or a lesser extent is an exercise in propaganda. (Bagdikian A., 1987)

Thompson identifies four forms of power exercised in society- economic, political, coercive and symbolic. Economic power emanates from the possession of wealth or the means by which wealth is generated; political power rests in decision making arising from being in a position of elected, appointed or inherited authority; coercive power springs from the use of, or potential use of, superior strength. Other classifications include position, resource, and charismatic power each overlapping with Thompson's categories and each one somehow connected with communication processes.

Yet the media have never been either separate from or independent of the forces which create them and which in turn they shape and influence. They work as Thompson points out, within institutional frame works. As such, they operate as cultural apparatus, part of the machinery of state or of most powerful interest groups within the state. Historically media have more often served as the voice of the powerful than of the people. They have been classified by Althusser as one of the prime Ideological State Apparatuses, along with religion, family structures and education: that is, they are crucially important channels for the transmission of 'rules of conduct' in society; the guardians of a culture's dominant norms and values. They play a part in all power forms, including - in a contributory sense - coercive power.

The Chinese revolt

The memorable television images that emanated from Beijing on June 4, 1989 indicated to viewers that the China's revolutionary activity had been effectively extinguished. The military show of force at Tiananmen Square preserved the political authority of Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese

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Communist Party for the short term. Following the historic Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee meeting of the CCP in December 1978- a satellite based national television system was made a top priority for achieving a wide range of propagandist objectives.

Television was peaking as a communications medium in China during the troubled 1980s and had itself become a significant symbol of the national modernization. By the middle of the decade nearly every urban household had bought a television receiver. But when push came to shove, televised reports of the military invasion of the student-worker encampment at Tiananmen Square were not transmitted in China. While the rest of the world tuned in to pictures of courageous students, intellectuals, and workers standing up to brute force of tanks and the political power of ageing bureaucrats, Chinese television viewers saw very different visuals and accounts of the tragic events in the capital city, and even those images came very late. Television had been forcibly restored to its original place as a blatant propaganda device.

By managing television coverage of the brutal crackdown and subsequently constructing a massive propaganda onslaught, Chinese government officials hoped to re-establish social stability, reassert the place of the CCP as the nation's legitimate political authority, and minimize ideological damage brought by the economic, political, cultural and social stresses that China experienced in the late 1980s.

Why television news is so fearful? - the other side of television news

The research of the Glasgow University Media Group has been very controversial since the publication of *Bad News* in 1976, as well as the subject of a great deal of criticism, not least from the journalists and broadcasters. *Bad News* was concerned with the television coverage of industrial relations in 1975. the GUMG's analysis of the television news led it to conclude that viewers had been given misleading portrayal of industrial disputes, a portrayal that distorted the real situation.

The group's work continued with *More Bad News* in 1980, which examined the language used to describe the two sides in industrial disputes. The descriptions attached to management were such that they persuaded the audience of the rightness of the management position against demands made by the unions. Trowler (1996) has produced an excellent summary of the major findings of their studies.

The vocabulary of broadcast news is biased against specific groups and this bias structures the listener's perspective.

Stories are selectively reported.

The effects of strikes are reported more often than the causes of strikes.

The 'visuals' used are again selective and help to structure the message being put across.

The tactics of the protestors are reported more often than their viewpoints, especially when the tactics are deemed 'antisocial'.

There is a hierarchy of access to the media, so the voices we mainly get to hear are those of 'experts', specialist and the establishment.

News is reported from a particular ideological position.

The media set the agenda for debate - they tell us what to think about.

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They also act as gatekeepers, thus excluding some stories and including others.

This rationale of these findings can be applied not only in fighting the 'bad news' by television but also in fighting an anti-people regime and sometimes in propaganda. This has been the mainstay in most of the democratic nations around the world. Even the Gulf War telecast by the CNN fits to this agenda. (Jones M. and Jones E. 1997)

Conclusion

Television of course is itself an authoritarian institution of sorts, one that articulates confidently and widely. Critics in all societies around the world, complain that the medium has the power to serve the interest of its owners by creating a narrow agenda and monopolizing public opinion, that it debases culture, and that it nearly mesmerizes viewers psychologically. Thus it has invited suppression around the nations.

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