

Function of Mass Communication in the Social Development of Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

Generally communication is one of the inseparable parts of every individual's daily life. In terms of social development a prosperous society is mainly based on mass media which are defined as powerful tools for mass communication. Mass media contribute to various aspects of social developments in a society ranging from education, health, sports, agriculture, livelihood, freedom of speech, human rights, fight against corruption, and to public awareness. Mass media play a vital role in creating and shaping of public opinion and strengthening of the society. This study aims to review the key functions of mass media and its role in the social development of Afghanistan. Reviewed the literatures and Google Scholar was used to find out the recent studies. This study shows that Mass media itself emerged strongly and has played a vital role in the social development of Afghanistan especially public awareness, freedom of speech, sports, education, agriculture, and reconstruction.

Keywords- Mass media, Mass communication, social development, society, Afghanistan.

I. INTRODUCTION

Primarily the term of 'Mass Media' refers to mediums of communication. In addition "mass media is communication that is to a large group or groups of people in a short time." (Hart, 2015) It can be written, spoken or broadcast communication. Print publications, radio, television, internet-based all media new forms, including social media are the most popular channels of mass media.

Social development is basically improving the capacity of the society to make it prosperous for every individual. Additionally, "Social development is about improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential. The success of society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen." (Overview, 2009) Mass media play vital role in the social development of society and social awareness is its great example.

Mass media is one of the powerful tools of communication and it has contributed to various aspects of social development in society ranging from education,

health, sports, agriculture, livelihood, freedom of speech, human rights, fight against corruption, and to public awareness. Therefore, "media of today is playing an outstanding role in creating and shaping of public opinion and strengthening of society." (ROY, 2015).

Contemporary mass media act as watchdog to protect public interest against malpractice and enhance public awareness. Therefore, in terms of social development a prosperous society is particularly based on mass media and "the mass media gradually bringing in community into a new cultural patterns and begin to determine the cultural mindset and people's behavior. Without realizing the mass media have helped set the schedule of our lives and create a number of needs. Slowly but effectively, the media shape public views on how a person sees his own and how one should relate to the everyday world." (Virginia Paul, 2013). Furthermore, "technological advancements in the dynamic field of communication have made dissemination exchange of information faster and easier to mass and undifferentiated audience." (Kihara, 2015).

History of mass media and journalism traced backed to more than one and half century, the first printed publication called *Shams-al-Nehar* was established in 1873, but failed to develop mainly because of unstable political environment. However, the very beginning of 21st century witnessed rapid growth of mass media in Afghanistan, “the broadcasting market is crowded with three dozen TV channels broadcasting terrestrially from Kabul alone. Now over 170 FM radio stations operate across the country; hundreds of press titles publish under a wide range of ownerships- from the government, provincial political-military powers and private owners to foreign and NGO sponsors.” (BBC, 2017). Besides traditional media, more than 4 million of people use internet in Afghanistan, alongside with news websites people mostly use social networks such Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Viber, Google +, Telegram, WhatsApp and LinkedIn.

This paper is mainly aimed to discuss the main functions of mass communication in the social development of Afghanistan. Books, journal articles and media reports are used mostly as secondary data in the article. The paper begins with a brief introduction to mass media and social development and is followed by social development and mass communication in Afghanistan. At the end, it is concluded by summarizing the key role of mass media in social development of Afghanistan.

II. MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFGHANISTAN

After the last three decades of civil war, Afghanistan is just edging toward recovery and social developments have been positively growing since 2002. Along with other public infrastructures, mass media in Afghanistan have been noticeably developed and play substantial role in the core of social development.

During the civil war of 1990s, Afghanistan’s mass media was severely destroyed, people did not have access to information, printed publications, radio and television were not available for public. During the Taliban regime 1996-2000, watching and establishing TV station were legally forbidden. After the collapse of the Taliban regime in late 2001, dozens of televisions station, almost 200 FM radio station, hundreds of printed publications and more than 4 million of netizens in Afghanistan. Since the early 2000s, competition in Afghanistan’s telecommunications market has expanded nearly as quickly as mobile use. Four in five Afghan adults (90 %) access to a mobile phone. (BBG, 2014)

Besides the rapid growth of mass media in Afghanistan, social developments in education, health, sports, reconstruction, public awareness, livelihood, agriculture, freedom of speech, human rights and fight against corruption are considered positive changes. Mass media have been playing a substantial role in the public

infrastructure so far and functioning as a great facilitator in the core of the social development.

III. MASS MEDIA ROLE IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Education

Today mass media is a great means of information and can disseminate information to the entire world within a very short time of length. It’s easily accessible everywhere even in remote rural areas as well. Mass media message receive in one time to the entire mass and its impacts also expand to the entire society. Mass media have simplified communication and made it easy to be understood, “mass media as means of communication make ideas clear to children and help them to acquire correct knowledge. They help in simplifying and in giving vividness to explanation.” (Z.Khan, 2017). In contemporary education sector, mass media and its influence on the attitude and behavior of society are vitally important.

Literacy level in Afghanistan is improved than any other time before. Today more than 9.2 million children are enrolled in school of which 39% are girls, according to the Afghan Ministry of Education recent figures. Mass media outlets have extensively contributed to increase these figures. It encourages people to enroll children in schools particularly in remote and rural areas where the literacy level is still relatively lower. Media outlets both on local and national level run educational programs, advertisements, films, social media campaigns, some national songs to convey the message of education is to be mention here as useful tools in the core of education development. Children particularly in urban areas spend hours together sitting in front of the television and can visualize, hear and acquire knowledge about the world. In remote rural areas where many people do not have access to television because of the electricity, people usually listen to radio. Afghan Education Production Organization (AEPO) is a local NGO, they produce informative, educational and entertaining radio programs for broadcast across Afghanistan on the BBC Afghan Service and local rebroadcasting partners. *New Home, New Life* soap opera is, for example, the most popular radio cultural education program, particularly in rural areas, where wide ranges of people listen to it. Role of social media in education is also notable in Afghan society. Facebook is particularly the most popular among all social networks and its influence is far visible in society. Many online celebrities encourage people in an effective manner. Sana Safi, who works for BBC world service and its Pashto TV, is one of them. She writes mainly shorts stories, generates short videos and spread it out across the country via her social networks accounts such as Facebook and Twitter. She particularly encourages young women for education and its impact has been felt in increasing the numbers of girl’s enrollment in schools every year.

2. Health

Mass media is a key means of disseminating correct information; its role is substantial to enlighten public opinion about health-related issues. Since mass media is communication to a large group of people, its core importance is to link that large group of public with vital health information. In addition, “the mass media helps health workers expand their audience reach, which is crucial considering the fact that face-to-face channels of communication often require too many human resources and reach only a small number of people in large, underserved rural areas.” (Health Communication Course, 2017). Mass media plays main role in healthcare campaigns as well, polio vaccinations campaign is one example of this. Furthermore, “mass media campaigns have generally aimed primarily to change knowledge, awareness and attitudes, contributing to the goal of changing behavior.” (Catalán-Matamoros, 2011).

Many Afghan families particularly in remote and rural areas, where literacy level is still low, did not take part in polio vaccination campaigns due to misunderstanding. Many parents were not allowing their children to vaccination, they thought its influence of western, it has side effects and not good for their children’s health. Therefore, it’s much needed for greater public understanding of the importance of immunization and encouraging parents to take their children for immunization. The public awareness and knowledge have been raised throughout the country with the support of media and other communication tools. After mass media extensive campaigns across the country, the polio cases have gone down, “at the start of the polio eradication initiative, every year more than 400,000 children were affected by polio. But in 2016, the number of polio cases can be counted on the fingers” (The Vaccine Confidence Project, 2017). Two polio cases have been reported in 2017, one from Helmand and one from Kandahar. In 2016, 13 polio cases were reported, down from 20 in 2015 according to the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).

The same cases can be mentioned for malaria, cancer and HIV as well. Media outlets have been aiding public how to survive and cope with these fatal diseases and its influence is remarkable in the public awareness.

3. Sports

Sport development is another component of social development. It positively impacts social lifestyle and physical healthcare of the society. Mass media could be one of the important means of sport development. In addition, “media is a direct and potentially effective tool for reaching public with means, knowledge and information and helping them to understand the importance of a physically active lifestyle.” (Ali Alshamli, 2012). Therefore, due to mass media wide influence on public opinion, its role is vital to deliver the message to public; how sport is important for their health. In general, media encourage people to change their bad habits into good ones. For instance, media consciously or

unconsciously persuade public to quit smoking and stick to their favorite sports.

Since last decade, sports in Afghanistan has been growing rapidly. Afghan people love playing nearly all kinds of sports, Buszkashi, a team sport played on horseback, is Afghanistan’s national sport. But the most popular sports in Afghanistan are cricket and football (soccer). Alongside other sports, many people play cricket and football, relevant officials conduct domestic leagues every year. Both cricket and football domestic leagues livestreams are telecasted across the country, people enthusiastically watch cricket and football matches via television screen. Beside domestic sports competitions, many Afghans television channels telecast international sport events as well. Widely telecasting of both national and international sport events encourage public to stick to sports and take care of physical fitness. Therefore, nearly all kinds of sports particularly cricket and football are growing rapidly in Afghanistan and mass media outlets are playing outstanding role in its promotion.

4. Reconstruction

After three decades long civil war, reconstruction process began in Afghanistan. Transition from violence to stability started since 2002 by the international intervention and now Afghanistan is gradually moving toward stability, reconstruction and development.

Although insurgency still exists in various part of the country, government conducts many social reconstruction projects, which are hugely funded and contributed by international donor countries. As noted earlier, with fragile political and security situations, social development is growing well in Afghanistan. Since last decade, communication sector is one of the well-developed sectors in the country. Many national and international investors have invested millions of dollars in communication sector of the country. There are five mobile operators competing in Afghanistan’s telecom sector. The number of telephone lines in the country has tremendously grown up from less than 20,000 in 2001 to more than 25 million with an overall mobile penetration of 80% today. More than 4 million of people using internet and the government is aiming to develop a high-capacity fiber optic backbone network that could link the provinces and reconnect Afghanistan with the world. On the other hand, now Afghans remain relatively well connected to news, according to Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) research in 2014, two in three Afghans adults (64.5%) said they access news daily or more often. Big means of information in Afghanistan is radio and television alongside with internet and printed publications.

Though Afghan society is relatively well connected in terms of information and it has contributed reconstructions and social developments of the country, still “stabilization is the first priority of peacebuilding and reconstruction, the restoration of telecommunications itself plays a part in building public confidence that a

country is returning to normality. Even if prior network infrastructure has been destroyed, emergency wireless and satellite communications can be put in place quickly, facilitating security and the return of displaced people to their home communities.” (Tim Kelly, 2014). Communication tools particularly new media offer opportunities for public expression. Public along with media outlets monitor government affairs in terms of construction, transparency and accountability.

5. Public Awareness

Mass media is a great means of information and its role is vital in increasing public awareness and information. Now media has made a very special place for itself in our lives and its impact is substantial in many ways on society. Media main functions alongside with information, education, entertainment, and monitoring is creating and shaping public opinion.

The Afghan government, politicians and private sector conduct public awareness campaigns in various aspects of life such as, education, healthcare, economy, agriculture, sports, environment, elections, and for peacebuilding-reconciliation. These campaigns positively increased public awareness and information. For such public awareness campaigns, radio, television and new media are widely used in Afghanistan. Polio vaccination campaign is one example of it; many parents particularly in remote areas did not vaccinate their children in the past, but after extensive awareness campaigns, now people vaccinate their children.

6. Livelihood

As indicated before, Afghanistan is moving from decades of conflicts toward stability. Despite some notable improvements in social life, the country remains poor and highly dependent on foreign aids. Many people still suffering from shortage of housing, electricity, clean water, medical care and jobs. The government along with international donor countries try to provide basic live facilities, reduce poverty and create jobs opportunities.

Livelihoods in Afghanistan is mostly based on agriculture, people particularly in rural areas are farming and using resources found in natural environment to obtain food and cash for their immediate and long-term survival. Both local and national media outlets provide informative programs to help people learn how to promote their own business and earn money. Besides that, media bridged public with the government to inform government from the people demands. Advertising is another way that media contributed Afghan` s industries to promote their products. On the other hand, media itself created jobs opportunities to some extent. In general media in Afghanistan well contributed in increasing livelihoods.

7. Agriculture

Agriculture traditionally is a great means of livelihoods in Afghanistan. The economic growth of the country is mostly relied on agriculture. Before decades of civil war, Afghanistan`s agriculture products such as almonds, pistachios, raisins, pomegranates and apricots

were famous for excellence around the world. Afghanistan agriculture products are nearly edging toward taking its previous place in international market.

Despite conflicts in various parts of the country, government along with international donor countries are mainly focusing on promoting of agriculture sector. According to World Bank report, almost 70% of Afghan people live in rural areas, they are mainly involved in agricultural activities and thus earn livelihoods. On the other side, farmers are suffering from lack of technical support, insecurity and poor market condition.

However, in Afghanistan where the literacy level among farmers are quite low, role and function of mass media are vitally important to educate and inform farmers from the information that they need. Moreover, mass media create opportunities for farmers to express themselves and concerns. Media extensively cover agriculture related issues and try to bridge farmers with government and donor organizations.

8. Freedom of Speech

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, mass media have rapidly grown up and it can be name the golden era of freedom of speech in the whole history of journalism of Afghanistan. As noted before in the very first part, now Afghanistan has more than three dozens of television channels, almost two hundreds of radio stations, at least eight news agencies and along with hundreds of printed publications; a great numbers of netizens. Alongside traditional media, people freely use new media especially social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and so on. According to Voice of America (VOA) Pashto Service website, 87% of social media users, use Facebook and rest of them use Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

Now there are several traditional media outlets that they actively run new media forms such as websites and social networks to inform people from both national and international current affairs in Afghan official languages (Pashto and Dari) along with English.

Freedom of press and expression are guaranteed in constitution of Afghanistan, article 34 explained it. Consequently, media outlets without censorship freely publish their contents and the public also entitle to freedom of speech. Media outlets along with public social networks users can freely criticize government affairs and they hardly report on issues without government official approval. Therefor, “the success of media has played a major role in giving voice to the voiceless and fighting for freedom of speech that is under ominous threat from warlords, conservative clerics and insurgent groups.” (Khan, 2012). However, freedom of press in Afghanistan is also faced with some challenges, it has witnessed violence against journalists especially when report some sensitive issues such as corruption.

Over all, freedom of press and expression is improving in Afghanistan. Comparing to the neighbors countries, according to Reporter without Borders 2017 world freedom of press index, Afghanistan is ranked 120

out of 180 countries while in the same list India, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Iran are placed behind Afghanistan.

9. Human rights

Human rights is the most debatable issues in the contemporary world. According to Afghanistan constitution, every citizen is equally entitled to equal rights.

In a society like Afghanistan where the literacy level is low, mass media has vital role to protect human rights and its role is particularly important in public awareness to inform people form their rights. So, “almost every channel has exclusive programs for women, current affairs shows and reporting on corruption. Despite being carefully watched by conservative clerics and a parliament full of former warlords, many media outlets continue to discuss taboo topics such as women rights of equality, selfish male dominance in society and homosexuality. These programs have provoked debates and have given voices to those women who have faced domestic violence for years. Human rights organizations and international community have helped many such women after their cases were discussed on television channels.” (Khan, 2012). Besides that, mass media is significantly contributing to public awareness about human rights. Public extensively use social media to fight for their rights and to use it as pressure tool against government.

10. Fight against Corruption

Corruption is one of the biggest threats that Afghans are still suffering from. It has affected nearly all aspects of life in Afghanistan, undermining public trust in government and remains an extensive obstacle to the country’s long-term peace and prosperity.

Mass media has significant role in fighting against corruption. Media fulfills the first act of justice in society against every injustice and it helps public to see what is happening. In addition, “media can provide awareness of the negative impact on society and is one of the most fundamental parts of an anticorruption strategy for society.” (brianpinkowski, 2012) The Afghan government committed itself fighting against corruption and the media also efforts anti-corruption and at least report corruption issues. On the other hand, many citizens are actively using social media network and fight against corruption. Now social media websites becoming the significant tools to put pressure on government particularly the corrupted officials.

However, despite some considerable development, Afghanistan is one of the corrupted countries in the world and the government alongside with media are struggling to tackle corruption.

IV. CONCLUSION

As indicated before, Afghanistan, after the last three decades of fatal civil war, is edging toward recovery. Despite sporadic insurgency across the country, Afghanistan is significantly developing. Reconstructions,

sports, education, agriculture, public awareness, freedom of speech, communication and mass media are the illustrious sectors which are rapidly growing in Afghanistan.

Mass media itself emerged strongly and has played a vital role in social development and prosperity of the society. Media massively contributed to social development sectors particularly in sport, education, agriculture, public awareness and freedom of speech developments. Additionally, media main role is to inform, educate, entertain and watch government affairs.

The internet based new media has been a great revolution in communication that has linked the Afghan Society with the world. Many citizens are actively using social media networks and it’s greatly facilitated communication to unify voices against injustice.

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