



VALUES, BELIEFS AND MEDIA NARRATIVE

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Abstract

The artifact discusses if current news media can no longer be considered to occupy the position of a fourth estate. In order to hold a discussion on news media's position of fourth estate, it is essential to examine the terms 'news media' and 'fourth estate'.

Keywords

News Media, News Media
Position, Fourth Estate

1. News Media

According to information gathered by Sciencedaily.com, it is understood that news media is a part of mass media which focuses on news content. It is delivered to target audience or public in general. It consists of three categories; print media, broadcast media and the internet. In today's world we consume news from various sources within these three categories like newspapers, television, radio and internet.

Newspaper has been one of the most ancient form of new media, it is a disposable publication printed on newsprint, a low cost paper. Newspapers are published daily, weekly, twice a month, monthly, or quarterly. It contains general interest content as well as specific content on business, sports and entertainment. With advancement of technology, newspaper content introduced illustrations and images to inform its readers of events and occurrences. Broadcasting system, also known as television and radio were introduced by the 19th century (sciencedaily.com). The audience of this form of media is general public or large groups within the public. Broadcasting has been the greatest source of news media since decades. The trends in broadcast news media have changed in recent times due to distribution of audience between broadcast media and the internet. The news content available through broadcast media is gathered, edited and framed by journalists. News anchors, also known as news analysts are members of the broadcasting teams who examine, interpret

and analyze news received from different sources. Broadcasting organizations use audio and video clips to give out news. The length of these clips depends on the news content. Sometimes, special documentaries are hosted for content that requires more detail or is in special interest of the special groups, general public or organization itself.

Lastly, online journalism is now the biggest source of news media. News is given out through internet by formal and informal means. This form of media allows every user to spread and share any kind of content that appeals them.

The dominant culture, political and social picture of the society is shaped by the daily media. News on politics, sports, weather, entertainment and major events create the daily news media in our societies. It is not just the organizations that create the daily news content, independent news sources like blogs and v-logs now report content that present personal experiences and individual perceptions. The changing trends in news media will be discussed further in this artifact.

2. The Fourth Estate

The Fourth Estate is a section of society that exercises a secondary but noteworthy influence on society however it is not an officially recognized part of the political system (Dictionary.com, 2017). News media or the press is the most commonly recognized element of the fourth estate.

The term fourth estate derives from traditional European concept of the three estates of the realm: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners (Dictionary.com, 2017). The concept three states explain dissemination of powers in government into legislation, executives and judiciary. In some European languages it is also termed as “Cuarto poder” and “Quatrieme pouvoir”. The importance of fourth state is expressed by Edmund Burke in the following words, “There are three estates in Parliament but in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder there sits a Fourth Estate more important far than they all (Burke 2005, p. 3).

It is important to understand that why was press coined as the fourth estate in order to achieve most desirable state of democracy. Liberal theorists have debated on the role of press, for strengthening human development, good governance and democracy. It is argued that presence of an unconstrained and independent press within each nation is crucial in the development of democratization (Asante, 1997). It is long debated that press and journalism gives freedom of expression, speech and conscience in reciprocal, validating the compulsion of government’s accountability and responsibility towards all citizens. It is also stated as a pluralist platform for diverse groups and interests (McQuail, 2001).

To further strengthen the argument, it is presented that freedom of speech is recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Norris, 2009).

In particular, Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: *“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”*

The role of media as a watch dog has set the foundation of the whole debate of news media being the fourth estate of realm. The farther a society moves from autocracy, the closer it gets to liberalization. Private ownership of media allows access and reduces state censorship of information and content. Therefore, public receives diverse information, sometimes in raw form, from various sources like TV, radio, internet and mobile phones. The liberalized media acts as a watch dog in

detering corruption, mismanagement, malfeasances by finding ways of enforcing transparency and accountability by government. This process reinforces democratic consolidation, highlights socio-political problems, encourages public debate and reforms policy agenda (Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu, 2002).

It is essential to first examine in detail, the role of news media as fourth estate of a democratic system. The fourth estate implements orthodox functions which collectively aim at edifice of an ideal society, able and vigorous enough to nurture a true democracy. Some of the functions are as follows:

Information: any kind of news or information of socio-political, economic, religious and international nature is what media informs people about. Information transfer is an important element in any democracy. It is media’s role to give accurate information to citizens as citizens base their decisions and opinions on information they are given.

Socialization: every democratic system has ethnic entities having distinct qualities. The role of media as a fourth estate of realm is to maintain co-operation between these entities, especially with regard to national interest. Socialization by ethnic groups is a distinct aspect in itself which highlights them as a strong group. **Motivation:** media is also acting as a fourth estate of democratic system when it releases information to inspire and motivate the citizens based on a specific set agenda. For example, motivation on education and health issues makes citizen aware of their rights and motivates them to achieve better living standards.

Debates and Discussions: media provides a civic platform to the public for exchange of views. News outlets often becomes public forums of debate, the exchange of views by members of society gives them opportunity to voice their opinions about the democratic and political situation in the country. This in return also becomes a source of information for political entities and policy makers as they get informed about public opinion on certain issues, the then use it to step up their game.

Education: knowledge and information has now become the new currency. It can work your way out from any situation, anywhere around the globe. The acclaimed fourth estate helps in intellectual development of citizens which enables them to influence society in a positive manner.

Cultural Promotion: the fourth estate also claims to promote and safeguard the cultural heritage of its community. Media often displays the cultural journey of a community; it keeps on reminding its citizens of their cultural legacies and background.

Entertainment: last but not the least, role of fourth estate is to entertain the masses. Media has taken this role rather seriously as it has been topping the list in every society today. Music is given more preference over news, fiction over reality and sports over real life struggles. A large portion of any society is actively involved in entertaining itself via media, at all times.

Theoretically speaking, social responsibility philosophy of media explains that media is obligated to provide right information to citizenry and promote discussion on important societal issues (Moemeka, 2000). The Social Responsibility Theory also “acknowledges the right of the nation, through its government, to ensure the security of the state”. In other words, the media as the fourth estate of the realm help in informing members of the society and also help in ensuring the security of a nation. Its major tenet is “striking a happy balance between the freedom of the media to spread information and the right of the state to maintain national security (Moemeka, 2000).

3. Discussion

Now the actual debate is whether news media in today's world actually deserves the status of fourth estate or is it just an outdated title given to it by liberal theorists. The discussion is further supported by using various theories and examples.

Research on cross national work on democratic institutions depicts that the focus has always been on electoral and political party systems, federal institutions and parliamentary executives, and judicial frameworks, while neglecting the role of press in power sharing arrangements (Lijphart, 1999). However, as part of anti-corruption and promotion of transparency in governments, many constitutions have generally provisioned rights of free press and freedom of speech. This development encourages the role of media as a watch dog over institutes of public sector, non-governmental sector and private sector. It is also considered to be a patent for human rights reservation as nongovernmental organizations argue that free media helps to increase government's response towards human rights (Amnesty International, 2006). This does make sense however empirical research presents that

effects of free media differ across regime types (Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

Roumeen Islam debates that the patterns of information reach and availability vary substantially all over the globe, depending on the statutory provisions set by law makers. These revisions include ownership status, taxation, licensing for broadcasting stations and journalists, official secrecy, libel and intellectual property rights (Islam 2002). The trends on news media have overstepped the limit to these provisions due to access to internet. It is very much possible for every individual now days to attain and share news information from across the globe.

For centuries, governments and public have used different types of media for the struggle of control and power. Is it contradictory to mention news media as fourth estate where it is highly influenced by external pressures like government legislation through ownership and censorship; and commercialization to maximize profits. It is also noteworthy that news content produced all across the globe is strictly manufactured under some agenda. Again, it arises a question on the position of news media as fourth estate, it is very much possible that contradicting agenda holders manipulate and use news media to achieve their desired objectives.

We cannot defy the fact that critical role of free media is to hold government accountable as citizens basically rely on news media to gather information about government's actions, policies and behaviors. However, countries with public ownership of media outlets and less freedom of press have low level of political and economic freedom for its public (Djankov, Nenova, McLiesh, and Shleifer, 2003). It is also likely that their systems have high malfeasance, higher infant mortality and lower life expectancy rates. News media does not fulfill the role of a watch dog or affirms the status of fourth estate as news given out is highly controlled and censored. Furthermore, media owners have strong affiliations with government, their agenda and journalist's approach does not allow criticism or exposing of government's actions thus self-censoring is allowed, depleting the role of media as a watch dog (Djankov et al., 2003).

Government officials are the primary source of information for journalists in this set up, the risk of losing valuable source and inside information restrict them from perform critical analysis of government activity (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007; Schudson, 2003; Sigal, 1986).

On the contrary, study on freedom of media and attacks on journalists by nongovernmental organizations states that media workers in countries where media is not free often report on government repression even if it comes with consequences (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2009; Karlekar, 2010; Reporters Without Borders, 2010). Many attacks on journalists have been witnessed in countries like Russia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, where news media breeds in not necessarily repressive media environment (Karlekar, 2010). This explains that Media workers strive to give real news despite of risks associated with it.

Karlekar (2010) also suggest that journalists are more likely to hold opinionated and public service motifs in a less commercialized and more state owned media. He also emphasizes on considering the different perspectives of news sources in such environment. In his study of the Black Panther movement, Davenport (2010) found that media coverage was increasingly driven “by the political orientation of the source.” This also confirms that niche media or activist-oriented media is less likely to be affected by commercial pressure whilst criticizing the government. The right news coverage of social movements serves the purpose of not only facilitating it, but also legitimizing it (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). Media does play as fourth estate of realm when it defines political opportunities for people power movements in autocratic environments. But this does not mean it carries on like that because this role of media is quickly recognized by governments, as the immediately seek to suppress media coverage during protests and movements. For example, restrictions imposed on news media coverage of protests following elections of 2009 in Iran. The biggest news source of the country, Al-Arabiya network, was shut down for a week and many international journalists were told to leave the country (Associated Press, 2009). Therefore, it is not wrong to state that news media can be easily muzzled by authorities in restricted environments. It has been done in history and is still applicable in current time.

In addition to government control, news media commercialization is another aspect which puts its position as a fourth estate, at stake. Gathering information to furnishing it as news is not an easy process, it consumes resources of media outlets and is also time consuming. Media organizations need to commercialize in order to meet expenses. As in this case, multinationals and corporations having ownership of media have intensified news

organizations to maximize profits mostly at the expense of covering important information from public affairs and politics (Hamilton, 2004).

Commercial pressure in such a case can easily affect media’s role as a watch dog. A case in point is the disappointment of most mainstream media in the United States to question the government’s rationale for invading Iraq (Bennett et al., 2007). Where free media is supposed to be a civic forum for public voice, incidents in history represent that commercialization has led to failure of this merit, many times.

The discussion is carried further by referring to some theories of mass media. The agenda setting theory explains the relationship between the importance of an issue and the importance that mass media attributes to that issue (Encyclopedia of Communication Theory, 2009, p. 31).

However, the foundation of this theory was laid by Bernard Cohen in a famous quotation he made in 1963: “The press 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.” In simpler words, it explains that media has a subtle power of making an individual think of an issue in certain perspective. It also presents the relationship between news media and public’s ranking of social, political or religious issues. News media in current scenario can easily make civic forum to discuss matters of priority according to their own agenda. Conglomerate ownership of media is highly vulnerable to this form of news manufacturing. Such news outlets can create notion of any certain issue and create public debate on that. Political reality is designed and shaped by newsroom staff, editors and broadcasters of news media. Audience learns not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue, from the amount of information in a news story and its position (McCombs, 1972, p.176).

It is debatable that agenda setting theory can help establish news media as fourth estate of realm but the vulnerability of using it to serve specific agenda rather than national agenda, makes news media less credible to be titled as the fourth estate.

Priming is another theoretical concept linked with the agenda setting theory, confining to issues and news related to politics. It explains the process of drawing more attention to political news at the expense of other news content (Baran, 2010, p. 295).

Holt (2013, p. 110) states, "Media scholars define priming as a mental process in which certain aspects of an issue are made more prominent by media and thus more influential in guiding a person's judgment. Priming works because people tend to be cognitive misers, paying more attention to information that is readily available or more easily accessed, than that is readily available to them." Iyengar, Peters and Kinder (1982) first identified the facet of media effects that go beyond agenda setting theory. Therefore, political media priming proves to be the process through which only political issues all over the world consume the biggest chunk of news media content, thereby influencing the standard of public assessments of the performance of political actors and entities. However, the process of democratization requires political awareness in public but that does not mean, to keep public less informed of other social issues. This also does not mean that news media has performed its role as fourth estate of the realm. Framing is another theory used to understand the systematic interpretation of actions and texts. This theory provides a rather interesting way of calculating how media can intricately and highlight a dominant public culture (Baran, 2010).

Framing makes us understand the influence of news media and our experience of the social world. Media research is one of the most prominent features in framing with regard to journalism and political communication. Affirming the notion that media acts as the fourth estate in democratic societies, media researchers find framing extremely helpful in analyzing the imbalance of power structures in reflection of political issues. Nevertheless, in terms of news media content, framing can be and is used widely to formulate new context of news, all depending on hidden agendas.

Conclusion

After having considered all factors, the analysis extends substantial support to the claim that news media is still the fourth estate of realm. The role of free press, in a consolidated and democratic system is supported by liberal theorists as a critical one. Although the role of news media is to maintain a check and balance on government activity, but which specific role of media, still remains an open question.

It is ultimately important to understand which role of media makes it eligible to the status of fourth estate, as a watch dog, a civic forum or an agenda setter. The changing trends in these active roles

played by media over the course of history, has also distorted its status as fourth estate.

Conceivably, the effect of free press as watch dog should have greatest impact on eradication of corruption from the system, promoting transparency and freedom of information. Its role as a civic forum it should bring attention towards social issues by specifically and functionally increasing government's responsiveness towards it. However, the role as an agenda setter is the most commonly performed role in today's world of media which does not necessarily guarantee public or national interest.

While seeking transition from autocracy, the fourth estate has to be established in a free environment; however, it has never been the case. Policy makers and private media oligopolies have always tried to impose limitations on news media, either through state censorship, taxation, political reasons, and misuse of power, agendas or commercialization. Thus it is a vague statement to declare news media as a fourth estate in current situation. (Word count: 3349)

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