

Role of Mass Media in Promoting Human Rights

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Abstract

The mass media as information highways and as effective communication means on the public opinion and on the civil society watchdog plays an important role in informing people, strengthening the social cultural-thinking basis and expanding the human rights discourse and etc. They are of the most important leverages for education, advertisement and culture building affairs. They also make public opinion and are components in creating civilization. This paper examines the role of the media in promoting human rights. Central to the paper is an effort to find out why the media decide to include human rights coverage as part of their programmes as well as the portrayal of human rights elements in such programmes.

Key words- mass media and human rights

INTRODUCTION

The role of the mass media in promoting the nations' awareness level, expanding the discourse and modern concepts like human rights, democracy and peace are obvious. They also affect the way governments function. Today, using the media within the international context for planning a major strategy of the great powers possess an important status. The level of using the new media includes communication satellites, large news agencies, press and numerous radio and TV stations as well as Internet sites, for they cut across geographical borders with the least cost and target minds and the way people think in other countries.

It looks that advancement and qualitative and quantitative developments in the "mass media", have transformed the nature of the exchange and the symbolic production in the world intensively and irreversibly. The present age is called "communication age". In other words, because of the existence and application of mass media whose influence and effects are increasing, they have developed a new form and have overshadowed the developments within the human societies. In such a way today such media for the colonial powers are of high importance for consolidating and fixing the cultural and political domination and are regarded effective tools for capturing identity and public opinion (Broadcasting service, 2002). With the status the mass media and communication tools have found from the birth of man till his death in the modern life, they could be categorized in the social institutions and be regarded as major effective factors in the process

of the accepting norms, social values and socialization. People usually learn values, norms, beliefs, inclinations as well as behavioral theses from the others and through the process of the

social education and socialization or within the various frameworks of the social, recognized and institutionalized values.

Mass Media

The century in which we are living is concurrent with a great revolution that man has ever seen. It is the “age of communications and that of the media dominance” on the humans’ lives . By the mass media, it is meant that the flow of the information from a public affairs source could be available to millions of people fast and efficiently. The mass media are tools that are created in the new civilizations and are applied widely. The salient feature of them is their expanded scope of power. The term mass media indicates a type of communication whose aim is to establish a relationship with a group of people.

Human Rights

Ontological Definitions of Human Right

Ontologically speaking, human rights could be defined once the status of freedom as the right in the relationship between man and people has been explained. This definition involves providing freedom as the authority of man on his own destiny in which case man possesses the initiative in his behavior personally. Also, by enjoying freedom, he is able to resist against all sorts of determinism. In the first sense, human right means the known freedom namely the individuals’ independent determination and applying it without the others’ intervention. But in the second sense ,human rights are “right-claim” that could be dependent on the society; like right to providing subsistence , right to health, and right to education and etc. (Hashemi, 2005).

Political Definition of Human Rights

Human rights in the sense of freedom become authentic, independent or near and in line with authority that can be investigated in two senses:

The first sense called” freedom-independence” categorized within the personal independence outside of the social compulsion and without political constraints. The second sense is “freedom-participation” on which every person has the right to participate freely in administering the public as well as political affairs without social pressures. This sense is related to the famous democratic thinking by Jean Jack Russo.

Legal Definition of Human Rights

According to this perspective, human rights are considered as a set of benefits belonging to the people of a society, fixed in established rules and regulations that people will enjoy as being humans and in their relationship with others and with the government accompanied by necessary supports and guarantees. In this regard, one can refer to the human rights and benefits and safeguarding it such as: the human right to rule his own destiny, the right to have life requirements, legal structure and human benefits as well as the legal system that guarantees the human rights.

Theoretical Basics of Human Rights

The theoretical basics of the human rights are divided into two traditional and modern parts which are: First: The traditional basics of the human rights include religious matters, theory of natural law and theory of positivism.

Second: The modern theories of the human rights include the legal theory based on justice and the legal theory based on dignity. Generally, the most important personal rights and public freedom within the constitutions of countries and the human rights proclamations could be explained as the following:

Freedom of individual action (right to life, security, housing, immunity, protection, correspondence, communications and freedom of movement)

Freedom of thought (freedom of beliefs and that of expression, education, news and information, press, media and demonstration)

Freedom of association (freedom of assembly, elections, conferences, parties, and permanent organizations).

Social and economic freedom (right to ownership, trade and industrial freedom, profession) (Qazi, 2005).

Role of Press and Media

Campaigning is always the first step to a noble cause and aims at building awareness among the masses. In a great country like ours, the largest democracy of the world, campaign is the authentic way to social change. The mass media can be an instrument for educators, educational institutions and Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations for the emancipation of Human Rights.

Can the Media Influence Human Rights Agenda?

If it can be argued that the media can set the public agenda by reporting one news story in place of another, then, the media can take up the human rights agenda by publishing or broadcasting human rights programmes. Media can disseminate human rights information, mobilize human rights NGOs, strengthen popular participation in civil society, promote tolerance, and shine a light on government activity. The media and human rights NGOs are helpful to each other in the fight against human rights violations. These NGOs serve as monitors and sources of information for human rights stories. The NGOs can use the global media to highlight abuses, which in turn will shame abusers to put an end to their attitude, while information released by them could be used by the media as news stories.

Interplay of Media and Democracy in Safeguarding Human Rights

Although there has been the assertion that every citizen can be a reporter, especially in terms of having access to the modem, the journalists intended here are the professionals „with commitment to the essential shared values of the practice of journalism. (Elliot, 2009). Thus, journalism requires

active learning, critical and creative thinking“, in which they are equipped to gather information of significance to the task at hand, accessing its credibility and validity (Burns, 2002). There is a common belief that human rights and democracy are mutually supportive or related to each other by definition (Freeman, 2002). Freedom of expression, and press freedom in particular is an important factor in democracy because of the media’s ability to provide information which serve as link between mass publics, elites and government. Manzella and Leon (2010) argue that the press proved its capacity to be a force for change in Venezuela, when a group of journalists uncovered the hidden scandals of President Carlos Andres Pérez, and this eventually led to his ouster. Recently, the authoritarian government in Egypt was dismantled by protesters as a result of the use of the social media. The protesters were connected with each other and the outside world through the use of Gmail and twitter, hence the social networks served as socio-political tool in the pursuit of democracy (Menon, 2011). The media can control the gateway to the electoral market. They can also elevate the credibility and authority of new politicians, thus enhancing their acceptability by voters. It is therefore evident that the media are useful in ensuring that there is a feasible mechanism for democracy to thrive. The media foster the concept of *collective rights* when minority social groups are given the chance to partake in public discussion. This in turn provides a safe environment for the protection and promotion of human rights. However, the role of the media in nurturing democracy can be hampered by growing commercial constraints prompted by media deregulation and privatization (Chambers, 2000).

The Media: Violators of Human Rights?

Despite the widespread knowledge of the contribution of a free press to a healthy democracy, Fallows (1996) argues that democracy has ceased to benefit from the news media, because the media make it difficult in tackling *public challenges*. Besides, the philosopher, Dr Onora O’Neill in a lecture noted that public discussion has been hijacked by media conglomerates under the pretext of press freedom, and that what is the implication for human rights promotion? The media are expected to spearhead the fostering of peace, international understanding and fighting racism, apartheid and incitement to war. The reach of the media transcends the home, up to the human mind where they shape human opinion and influence behavior. The media can serve as powerful instruments for violence, and if not controlled, could induce large-scale human rights violations through hate speech.

Conclusion

The foregoing paper has highlighted the right of the media which they need to promote human rights. Although the media play crucial roles in the society, especially in the promotion of human rights, they sometimes violate human rights. With a consistent approach to ethical guidelines, the media can stop being violators of human rights.

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