

AN ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF PERSONAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ON PUBLIC POLICY MAKING PROCESS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Media forms an integral part of superstructure in any society. It plays an important role in the dissemination of information, imparting education and creating awareness among the masses. Harold Innis observed that when the society is introduced with a new medium; it experiences change in the flow and the format of information. The phenomenon of change in medium results in a shift in power centre. The integrity of the source, the medium and the information so spread is instrumental for the formation of public opinion.

This article traces the advent of various media in the society and its impact on Public Policy making process. It also strives to analyze as to how the Personal Communication Technology has brought a change in the pattern of public policy making process in India.

KEYWORDS: Personal Communication Technology, Shift In Power Centre, Information Flow, Public Opinion.

PRELUDE

Media forms an integral part of superstructure in any society since time immortal. Its prime function is to inform, to educate, and to create awareness. Apart from entertaining the masses, Joseph Devito, in his book titled 'Essentials of Human Communication' identified the functions of mass media[1] as:

- a) To strengthen the thoughts, beliefs, values, norms, ethics, behavioral patterns etc.;
- b) To pursue for change - social, cultural, psychological and other related fields;
- c) To educate the masses on various issues;
- d) To socialize, the process which initiates the churning of thought, values, perceptions and other allied matters;
- e) To provide status to the people, concept, philosophy, culture etc.;

- f) To motivate or instigate the masses and other social elements towards the issues;
- g) To pin point or to draw the attention towards a particular issue;
- h) To create links among various social elements resulting into a common socio-cultural behavioral pattern responsible to initiate a culture;
- i) To propagate moralization.

LASSWELL AND WRIGHT'S FUNCTIONS OF MASS COMMUNICATION [2]

SURVEILLANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

An important function of the media is to keep up a surveillance of all the happenings in the world and provide information to the human society.

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The media has the responsibility of providing news and covering a wide variety of issues which are of some service to the society. Media helps to maintain social order by providing instructions on what has to be done in times of crisis, thereby reducing confusion among the masses.

CORRELATION OF PARTS OF SOCIETY

This function relates to how the media's selection of certain news and its interpretation affects the understanding and response of the society towards it. People's attitudes towards political issues, events, public policy, etc. are influenced to an extent by how the media frames and presents the issue in their discussions and presentations.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

This refers to the ability of the media to teach the various norms, rules and values that exist in a society and ensure its transfer from one generation to the next. Television programs by and large reflect the society in which they are broadcasted and promote the understanding of a society's cultural heritage. Children's television programs are designed to showcase good behaviors and moral standards which children can learn by watching.

Harold Innis, another communication expert propounded the theory of 'bias of communication' and 'empire of communication' analyzing the effect of introducing a new communication medium on the society. He opined that with every new medium of communication, the society experiences change in power structure and a new social/ economic/ political power centre.

Considering the theories proposed by these media stalwarts, it is important to track the impact of various media on the Public Policy Making Process in the society in general and in India in particular. Hence this topic of research was selected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the role of media in change in public policy making, one needs to understand the basics of public policy.

Larry Gerston stated that "Public policy theory is the study or discussion of public policy. Public policy itself includes any policies that are concerned with the public, at the federal, state, or local government level. Public policy theory involves observing, analyzing, and oftentimes comparing public policy to theory, as opposed to actually participating in the creation of public policy. Because theory is not equal to knowledge, or factual information, it is an imperfect study often involving debate and sometimes controversy." [3]

After the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Bill and declared India and Pakistan as two independent sovereign States under the Indian Independence Act 1947, the political leaders of India put their brain and heart to write the basic framework to rule this country, The Constitution of India. The preamble of this document clearly mentions the fundamental principle to design any public policy, along with Directive Principles of the State Policy Part IV (Art. 36 to 51) of the constitution.

The Preamble clearly states-WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation; IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION [4].

In other words, the Indian people agreed to accept the democratic republic political system and a welfare State to rule them.

THE METHODOLOGY

NATURE OF RESEARCH AND APPROACH

The researcher would like to focus on the primary question as to how the change in media impacted the policy making process in India. The nature of the research was ex-post-facto and the research method used was an analytical case study of the Indian policy making process. The approach used in this research is qualitative approach.

OBJECTIVES

Specific objectives were as follows:

- 1) To draw the parallel between technological development of media, its reach and change in public policy making process.
- 2) To pin point the change in public policy making process after the arrival of personal communication technology.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How personal communication technology has impacted the public policy making process in India?

HYPOTHESIS

The initial hypothesis of this research article is Personal Communication Technology is responsible for bringing in inclusive culture in public policy making process.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

IMPACT

Impact for the present study means tangible effects and consequences of Personal Communication Technology on Public Policy Making Process in India.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The new terminology like Personal Communication Technology by Campbell and Park (Campbell & Park, 2008) as often worn on the body, highly individualized, and regarded as extensions of the self. It has been said that they make us individually addressable regardless of where we are.

PUBLIC POLICY

It is the principled guide to action taken by the administrative executive branches of the state with regard to a class of issues in a manner consistent with law and institutional customs. The foundation of public policy is composed of national constitutional laws and regulations. Further substrates include both judicial interpretations and regulations which are generally authorized by legislation. Public policy is considered strong when it solves problems efficiently and effectively, serves justice, supports governmental institutions and policies, and encourages active citizenship.

PUBLIC POLICY MAKING PROCESS

Public policy making can be characterized as a dynamic, complex, and interactive system through which public problems are identified and countered by creating new public policy or by reforming existing public policy. Public problems can originate in endless ways and require different policy responses (such as regulations, subsidies, quotas, and laws) on the local, national, or international level. Public policy making is a continuous process that has many feedback loops.

Verification and evaluation are essential to the functioning of this system. The public problems that influence public policy making can be of economic, social, or political nature. Each system is influenced by different public problems and thus requires a different public policy.

DISCUSSION

MEDIA WITH ANALOGUE TECHNOLOGY

The Indian policymakers, since last 68 years, were claiming to use this basic framework to design the public policy. The media studies perspective, since 1947 to 1990, were the days of mass media where in print journalism and celluloid films were the independent media available in the society. Radio and then television were the State owned media run by the government, controlled by Broadcasting Ministry. The technology used by these media then was analogue in nature. The infrastructure and equipments were expensive and consumed considerable amount of time, money and man power to make them work. Those were not even accessible to many. Hence the flow of information was controlled by the handful of people having access to mass media. For instance, Newspaper and other print media were never used by common people for the obvious reason that pre, on and post printing processes were not so easy. Still camera, movie camera, voice recording, and broadcasting were way beyond the reach of the common people.

McLuhan classified various media into hot and cold media. There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or, a hot medium like a movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.' High definition is the state of being well filled with data. On the other hand, hot media does not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience" (McLuhan, *Understanding Media*). As McLuhan observed minimal participation of the audience in hot media providing information, the society would also follow the same principle in other spheres. The commoners were not a part of the public policy making in the era of analogue media technology.

An evident example the researcher would like to quote is from Maharashtra. Dr. Abhay Bang, social activist, researcher working in the field of community health in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, India, published a research paper on the public policy of Government of Maharashtra on minimum wages for agricultural. In the year 1973, the Government of Maharashtra had appointed a committee under the chairmanship of V. S. Page to review the rates of minimum wages for agricultural labors, in the then Employment Guarantee Scheme, renamed as Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. This committee was to decide the minimum wages for about 7 to 8 million landless laborers and farmers with small landholding, in Maharashtra. The committee claimed to apply all the scientific ways, means and methods to arrive at the minimum wages to be paid to these laborers.

The basic premise the committee used to fix the minimum wages was - 'the necessities of life should be covered by the minimum wages'. The Page committee had said: "Minimum wages must be in some way relate to the cost of living. The workers must be able to meet minimum requirements of food, shelter, clothing, medicine and education".

'The guidelines for fixing minimum wages were: a) The wages should be fixed in quantity of not otherwise enumerated kind of staple grain, i.e. jowar in Maharashtra; b) The wages should be calculated in kind first and then converted to the cash at a price at par with the selling price of first quality jowar at ration shop.

For fixing the wages in kind, the committee had considered following factors.

a) An average working man requires at least 2,000 to 2,200 calories for which 625grammes of staple food is a necessity. The committee assumed a family of 3½ units, i.e. husband, wife and three children. Their

requirements will be 2,187 ½ gms. This would be the staple food requirements of the average family. Normally, the committee was advised that staple food requirements were 40 to 50 per cent of the total budget. Working on this basis of 40 per cent was in favor of laborer, and the total budget would come to 5,468 gms jowar. Making some allowances for one weekly holiday, the committee could safely assume that a poor worker's family budget would be 6,000 to 6,400 gms. This concession was also in consideration of the fact that the committee could not assume that there were always two earning workers in family. But normally six kgs should be earned by two persons...

- b) Wages for men and women should be taken as equal...
- c) The committee was advised that 3 kgs could be assumed as the daily wages in kind for an adult...Paying capacity (of the employer) could not be altogether ruled out as a factor in this case. The committee had therefore assessed minimum wages in kind as follows:
 - 1) 3 kg for 3rd zone (drought prone and scarcity rural areas);
 - 2) 3.5 kg for 2nd zone (remaining rural areas); and
 - 3) 4 kg for 1st zone (corporations).

The committee hoped that the level of rates would go up when ruling prices for food grains also move up. The wages must be revised as soon as there would be a rise in the procurement and issue price of jowar... The EGS rates should be at par with the minimum wage in 3rd zone (i.e. 3 kg) and should be uniform throughout Maharashtra.

The minimum wages and EGS rates fixed by the Government of Maharashtra in 1974 were based on these recommendations. They were further revised in November 1978 in view of the rising prices. At that time, a fourth zone was created as the lowest one and rates in EGS were made equal to minimum daily wages in that zone - 3 kg jowar,

i.e. Rs. 4. This was given in the form of Rs. 2.70 in cash and Rs. 1.30 in kind (1 kg grain) and the breakdown had been Rs. 3.35 in cash and ½ kg grain.'

Dr. Abhay Bang pointed out the flaws in the basic premise of the above mentioned committee as follows:

The most serious of these is the assumption that 2000 to 2,200 calories constitute the daily calorie requirements of an 'average working man'. In reality, it is 3,900 calories/day. This assumption was apparently based on three different sources: (a) National Sample Survey averages of 10 years; (b) The poverty line accepted by Dandekar and Rath in 'Poverty in India'; and (c) advice by nutrition expert.

The various National Sample Surveys (NSS) do provide some data on how much people actually purchase and consume on an average. But this is not necessarily the same as what people really need since about half of the Indian population lives below poverty line, and the average consumption of such semi starved people cannot be considered equal to their actual biological requirements. Further, the NSS figures and those by Dandekar and Rath (2250 calories/day) are average figures of various age, sex and occupational groups including children, old women and sedentary workers whose calorie requirements grossly vary. One cannot accept such an average of all as the calorie requirements of 'working man'. The nutrition expert consulted by the committee is a famous diabetes specialist of Bombay, and the calorie requirements of the diabetic patients appear to have been accepted to determine the calorie requirements of a male laborer. Since for the purpose of the minimum wages and EGS we are dealing specifically with an occupational group (manual laborers) who do 'heavy work', the calorie requirements of this specific group should be taken into account and not the 'average'[5].

There were many other objections raised by Dr. Bang to prove that the methodology adopted by the said committee for the minimum wage calculation was neither scientific nor accurate. It showed the sheer ignorance of the committee members and also of the Government by accepting and implementing the said report. The fate of nearly 7 to 8 million poor people were at the hands of policy makers and they had no say in the policy making process.

MEDIA WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The decade of 90s was the most significant in the history of Post-independence India. With the Digital Era and the Information Technology revolution that is Computers, internet, email, and then personal communication technology that is cell phone, the people of this country got connected with each other like never before. The flow of information was unleashed. With the digital technology, procurement, storage, processing of information, and dissemination of processed information became easier than before. Access to information, to the people working on key positions, and also to media is also available with the smart phone. Availability of cell phone camera, audio recorder, and internet access has empowered the commoner to present the piece of information of his/her interest. Sharing such information on social networking sites and connecting with like-minded people is possible because of the digital technology. Smart phone in combination with social networking sites can be used for creating awareness about a particular issue among the common people. This is instrumental for creating a strong public opinion which can voice the aspirations of the common citizens.

The 'Right to information', 'Lokpal Act', 'amendment in Juvenile Justice Act' are the conspicuous outcomes of public opinion so created through personal communication technology. One of the silent results of the public opinion impacting the public policy cited by Parth

J. Shah in Social Change & Public Policy is as follows: "The Indian Forest Act classifies bamboo as a tree. All the rules that apply to trees apply to bamboo and the Forest Department controls its use. As a result, only some connected contractors have access to forest bamboo. If it were classified as a grass, however, as it scientifically is, then the bamboo would be out of the Forest Department's control. Tribals would be able to access it as a resource to earn their livelihood. A large scale use of bamboo would also save trees and timber, a tremendous environmental benefit. To bring about this policy change, CCS ran a campaign: Bamboo is Not a Tree. What would be the impact of this small change in policy? It would help millions of tribals all over the country whom we don't even know. It might save millions of trees too. That's the power of public policy."

The State Government banned production, buying and selling, trafficking and consumption of liquor in Chandrapur District of Maharashtra. This important decision was taken due to the rural women and social activists protesting against the liquor business in the District.

The latest example is The Central Government Smart City Mission wherein some cities of Maharashtra are included in the list of 100 to be smart cities. The State Government has formed the citizens' committees to be a part of planning and implementation of Smart City mission. It has invited opinions and suggestions as well as pin pointed the problem areas in the plan from NGS and individuals from all walks of life.

Hence it can be said that digitization has truly brought a considerable change in public policy making process. The hypothesis thus conceived at the initial stages of the research article is proved.

CONCLUSION

Following are the conclusions of the analysis:

1. The public policy making culture has changed from exclusive culture to inclusive culture.

2. Information flow => Public opinion => Policy making => Decision making=> Welfare of many. The public policies will no longer be designed by the people staying in the ivory tower, and the people at the grass roots can also participate in the policy making process.
3. During the analogue technology media period, information was a guarded secret and the common public had no approach to the vital information about public administration and public good. Information has been made available to all and sundry on their fingertips due to digital media technology.
4. The digital technology media has brought transparency in the public administration and public policy making process as compared to the analogue technology media. The Personal

Communication Technology has created an opportunity for common public to probe into the public policy making process.

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