

Role of media in Public Policy

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The task of the press in the initial days of capitalism was to consolidate the achievements of the emerging democracy. It was at this juncture where the role of press in the political development was defined. It became the main vehicle of the ideological growth of bourgeois democracy and communicated with the people on behalf of the authorities. Those who came to enjoy power have always claimed that they are forming a government of the people, for the people and by the people.

In the years to come the bourgeois democracies matured and realised that the process of democratising the masses could not be accelerated without allowing a more free press than what it already was. It declared the press as the fourth pillar of democracy. The Press then became the prime agent of free debate in Europe and America.

The legislative, executive and judiciary are three major components of the democratic system. The Press or the media has emerged as the fourth most powerful institution of democracy as it has the potential to mould the public opinion and influence the public policy.

The media is increasingly intertwined with the practice of democracy in various countries. Government officials and political candidates use the media to advance their agendas. People rely more and more on the media to judge how their leaders campaign, govern, shape public policy, and communicate their ideas. The emergence of Information Technologies and the convergence of various communication technologies have changed the nature of media. The media, which earlier meant the press alone, now included radio, television and computers to make it much wider than ever before. However, the growing use of Information Technology has brought many new 'changes in the nature of press.

Today the information is readily available on the net, which has reduced the dependence of the readers or citizens on Newspapers. It can be said with certainty that media shapes the public opinion to some extent.

The public policy refers to the policy established for the public. However, as the public policy is formulated by few government officials, who are entrusted by the government and perform the policy-making function. The mass media, such as the internet, have greatly promoted our involvement in public life.

With the development of information era, we increasingly depend on the information we obtain from the media which have the power of deleting, changing, editing and combining information. Consequently, the traditional books, newspapers and magazines, TV, and movie and the emerging network medium are becoming another major force affecting the public policy.

- Firstly, the mass media act as mediator. By transferring and expressing opinions between the public and the government, between interest group and government and between interest groups.
- Secondly, the mass media have strong opinion appealing which is able to mobilize social concern and promote the decision making of government.
- Thirdly, the mass media act as the supervisor of public policy. The policy effects, such as whether it complies with the public wish, whether it harms the public interest, will be announced by the mass media.

Since the late 1990s, it is becoming more common for the democratic public opinion to influence the policy. It is due to the interaction between media and public that the strong public pressure can come into being and bring attention from the authority.

The role of media is twofold. On the one hand, the media influences the policy makers by putting forth the opinions expressed by various groups including educationists, journalists and experts, leaders of different political parties, religious leaders, workers and peasants Unions, etc. On the other hand, the media pressurises the policy makers or the authorities to act in response to people's interest and demands by opening a debate and educate the masses.

Public policy is an integral part of development process. Press may not generally report the development issues, but it does intervene in case of a conflict of views on development, reports all perspectives, and thus moulds public opinion in favour of one or the other

viewpoint. Through the media, citizens learn how government policies will affect them, and governments gain feedback on their policies and programs.

One of the fundamental roles of the media in a liberal democracy is to critically scrutinise governmental affairs: that is to act as the 'Fourth Estate' of government to ensure that the government can be held accountable by the public. Obvious problems arise for democratic processes, when huge media conglomerates also fulfil the role of powerful political actors; their close links with the corporate economy are widely considered to limit their ability to investigate the government and represent all points of view.

Hence founded on the principles of freedom of speech and private ownership, the media has been widely regarded as the 'Fourth Estate' of government holding the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary accountable within the democratic process.