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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Gilani, Ijaz Shafi.</td>
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Media Research: In Search Of Good Governance, Progressive Economy And Fair Society

By

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MEDIA RESEARCH

In Search of Good Governance,
Progressive Economy and Fair Society

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The paper was presented at the seminar on "Media Monitors in Asia" organized by AMIC and Chulangkorn University Bangkok, Thailand on June 29 - July 1, 1994.

June 29, 1994
Media Research:
In Search of Good Governance, Progressive Economy and Fair Society

Transparency and Accountability are the two key words in our recent public discourse. They are aesthetically inscribed on a coin, the other side of which reads: Liberalisation and Good Governance. Popular political vocabulary is undergoing rapid transformation in Asia, as elsewhere in the world. Not to say that older notions have been abandoned, but you hear much less of nation-building, development, charisma and self reliance, concepts which were very popular in an earlier era. Technology, economy and political structures are fast changing. Alongside, there is a change in the media which both lubricates this process of change, and in some aspects is itself its cause. The basic parameters of our discussion regarding Emerging Media Trends and Developments in Asia should be defined within the context of a changing world order or paradigm: A shift in the global social and political structures, a change in dominant intellectual trends, a new vocabulary of public discourse.

Every emerging trend has its heros and villains, its major and minor characters. The heros of a previous period were public sector enterprises, charismatic leaders and a cadre of nationalist elite. The heros of the new period are free enterprise, democratic leaders and a new entrepreneurial/professional class clubbed together in the epithet of "yuppies". It is a different age. The media is a major force in creating this new age, and is in turn itself shaped by it.

In the earlier period, media was expected to mobilize and develop the dormant energies of the poor and the under developed in Asia. This corresponded with the causes of nation-building, development and charismatic leadership. In the new period the media is expected to integrate Asia in a global net-work of social and economic forces, to facilitate the new information-driven economies and to check the emergence of demi-gods amongst political leaderships. The two sets of expectations, both the earlier and the recent ones, are tall and idealistic; each is an exaggeration of the "good" as perceived at the time.

I believe that the role of media as a monitoring mechanism rather than a developmental tool is considerably greater in the new and emerging period than it was in the previous one. The three dominant characteristics of this new age are the ideology of liberalism, Information economy and a political system of Governance without direct and centralized control. Each of the three have their peculiarities regarding media, which this paper shall try to explore.
LIBERALISM

Liberalism is essentially rooted in the notion of producing "good" through the competition of various forces in politics, economy and society. The media is a vehicle for promoting this competition, whether through commercial advertising or reporting on politics and society. It is here that the issue of fairness becomes critical: Competition with or without fairness is a perennial issue on the merits of liberalism. The ideology of liberalism would in part be upheld or discredited on grounds of its ability to match competition with fairness. Consequently it is critical to focus on the means to monitor the elements of fairness in commercial advertising and in reporting on political and social activities. Monitoring fairness should be one of the principal guide-lines.

I

FAIRNESS

Monitoring fairness is easier said than done. Fairness is hard to define, and even harder to practice. It requires a practical yardstick for measuring the element of fairness in media as a vehicle for promoting competition among a variety of commercial, political and social interests. Fairness, one must begin by asking the question, in coverage or the content?

FAIRNESS IN COVERAGE

The coverage issues requires measurement of space or time allocated to competitors in different media vehicles. Since different media vehicles are not of equal importance, space and time would have to be considered with reference to the given media vehicles. Furthermore, the effectiveness of different media vehicles may vary from subject to subject; one would have to make that additional qualification when debating the question of giving fair coverage to competitors. The list of such qualifications can easily expand as we proceed with this discussion.
In terms of methodology, the exercise to determine fairness in coverage requires:

1- Measurement of Space (Print) and Time (Electronic)
2- Audience Analysis

FAIRNESS IN CONTENT

The second dimension relates to content. The complexities of monitoring fairness in the content of media are even greater than those relating to coverage. Fairness in the content of political news may require a different yardstick of measurement compared to the one required for measuring the content of entertainment programmes or programmes for children. The yardstick to measure the content of advertising may yet be a different one.

Since there can be no meaningful monitoring without measurement and no measurement without a measuring instrument, it is extremely critical to focus on developing the tools for measuring media content. In this respect, I do not find a major difference between what is required to be done in Asia as distinct from what is required elsewhere. When they are available, the tools for measuring media content should be borrowed and adapted. In the absence of any standard criteria, we have developed certain elementary measuring mechanisms for Political News, Drama Series, Children's programmes and Advertising messages framework.

*Our research project has done these two exercises for the year 1992.*
POLITICAL NEWS: Framework for Content Analysis

We have proposed five dimensions for measuring the content of Political News.

1. Accuracy
2. Loading
3. Slanting
4. Prejudice
5. Quality

Each of the five dimensions requires further definition and should be operationalized. Thus 24 items of scrutiny have been identified.

Specifically, **Accuracy** has been defined through the following operational items: A news item lacks **Accuracy** if:

- The source has not been identified
- Contradictory information in two vehicles
- Speculation
- Feeler
- Credibility of source is questionable

Similarly a news item qualifies to be treated as "loaded", (that is loaded to produce a certain effect) if it contains any of the following items:

1. Language is harsh and partisan
2. Negative aspects disproportionately highlighted
3. Positive aspects disproportionately ignored
4. Accusations without evidence
5. Accusations have been reported, without providing the right of reply
6. Out of context references
7. The news item in its own text contains evidence against the accusation
A news qualifies to be treated as **Slanted**, if any of the following items is present:

1. Headline is inconsistent with text
2. Headline ignores the most significant in the text
3. Only one side of the story has been highlighted
4. Important aspects of the issue have been ignored
5. News has been **Played up** in terms of:
   - Headline
   - Space allocation
   - Placement
   - Text or description

6. News has been down played in terms of:
   - Headline
   - Space allocation
   - Placement
   - Text or description

A news qualifies to be treated as **Prejudiced** if any of the following items is present:

1. The write-up is not objective
2. Lacks "news value"
3. Sounds propagandistic
4. Appears a "diversion" from facts or real issue
5. Contains material unrelated to the real issue

A news can qualify to be of **Poor Quality** in terms of:

**Reporting or Editing**

**TOTAL SCORE ON DIVERSION** (Researcher's informed judgement)

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A Manual was written by a team of Communications expert for training the Research team, assigned to carry out the scrutiny.
In order to carry out the measurement for a set of comparable media vehicles or their reporters and authors, one would require to build-in the following identifications for each news item in the scrutiny.

i. Newspaper
ii. Place of Publication
iii. Date
iv. Type of Item
   - News
   - News analysis
   - Column
   - Feature
   - Editorial
   - Others
v. Date-line: City
vi. Placement
   - Page: First _____ Last _____ Other (specify) _____

vii. Presentations
    - With Picture
    - Headline Columns
    - Measurement (in CCM)

viii. Source (specify)
    - Agency
    - Reporters
    - Author
    - Other

This exercise was carried out on a daily basis for nearly four months and covered seven dailies. It showed significant differences across newspapers and over a period of time. It also showed significant differences between various correspondents and authors, and it showed significant differences between types of items, such as, news, news analysis and editorial comments.
Three types of reports were prepared to present the results of the scrutiny:

1. A daily report which contained the text of the scrutinized items and a statistical picture.

2. A weekly report for which a system was designed to present statistical analysis through a computer programme.

3. A quarterly statistical report was designed to observe the longer term trends.

ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMMES: Framework for Content Analysis

After careful consideration and experimentation which spanned over a period of two years, the following framework was developed to monitor the content of dramatic productions, which are the most popular section of entertainment programmes.

CONTENT

The content of dramatic productions was analyzed on nine dimensions

1. General Themes
2. Themes specific to Social/Ethical Behaviour
3. Themes specific to Violence
4. Themes specific to Sex and Obscenity
5. Themes relating to the concept of Achievement
6. Themes relating to the concept of Affiliation
7. Themes relating to the concept of Power
8. Stereotyping
   - Ethnicity
   - Gender
   - Age
   - Religion
   - Occupation
9. Programme Quality
These nine dimensions were further operationalized through 74 different items specific to various themes. The following table identifies the 9 dimensions and the 74 items.

This framework was applied on 50 episodes of some 18 dramatic productions, spanning over a two year period. These included 15 domestic and 3 imported productions (Miami Vice, Dark Justice and Full House).

The same framework was also applied to 25 telecasts for children covering 6 major popular children's programmes including two cartoon programmes, one in Urdu and the other in English (imported).

The study was an attempt to see differences across programmes and programme types.

A compendium study on Audience Research showing viewership of the same programmes among relevant audiences enhances our understanding of the total picture. The audience research was conducted through a combination of survey research and focus groups.

The 9 dimension 74 item framework is the following:
DRAMATIC PRODUCTIONS: Content Analysis Framework

INDICATORS

Average Strengths on Five Point Scale

Drama 1  Drama 2  and so on

I- THEMES

A. GENERAL THEMES

1. Family Problems
2. Financial Problems
3. Global Issues
4. Occupational Issues
5. Intellectual Issues
6. Conduct Issues
7. Scientific Knowledge
8. Glamour
9. Political Comments
10. Humour

B. ADDITIONAL THEMES

1. Smuggling
2. Environmental Pollution
3. Modesty
4. Obedience
5. Patriotism
6. Information
7. Preaching of Moral Values
8. Sacrifice
9. Honesty
10. Folk Culture
11. Upper Social Class
12. Lower Social Class
INDICATORS

Average Strengths on Five Point Scale

Drama 1  Drama 2  and so on

II. SOCIAL ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

1. Altrusim
2. Delay of gratification
3. Explaining feelings/self/others
4. Reparation for bad behaviour
5. Resistance to temptation
6. Sympathy
7. Violation of Cultural Values

III. VIOLENCE

1. Against good forces
2. Against evil forces
3. Among peer group
4. Among family members
5. Verbal violence
6. Physical violence

IV. SEX AND OBSCENITY

1. Glamour
2. Provocative
3. Romance
4. Victim of Sexual Harassment
5. Flirtation

V. ACHIEVEMENT THEMES

1. Excelling in performance
2. Competition
3. Innovation
Average Strengths on Five Point Scale
Drama 1  Drama 2 and so on

VI. AFFILIATION THEMES

1. Acts for affiliation
2. Acts for Deprivation of affiliation
3. Sacrifices for affiliation

VII. POWER THEMES

1. Act or desire of power
2. Submission to the powerful
3. Explaining Antisocial power
4. Possession and Hoarding

VIII. STEREOTYPING

A. Ethic Groups
   i. Recognition of ethnic minorities
   ii. Dialect and Dress
   iii. Habits

B. Gender Bias
   i. Unconventional Image
      a. Positive
      b. Negative

C. Age Bias
   i. Old Aged People
      a. Positive
      b. Negative
   ii. Children
      a. Positive
      b. Negative
INDICATORS

D. Religion Bias
   i. Recognition of Religious Minorities
      a. Positive
      b. Negative
   ii. Recognition of a Religious Person
      a. Positive
      b. Negative
   iii. Recognition of Spiritual Person
      a. Positive
      b. Negative

E. Occupational Bias
   i. Non conventional
      a. Positive
      b. Negative

IX. QUALITY OF THE PROGRAMME

A. SCRIPT
   1. Rationality in the sequences
   2. Relevance of the issue
   3. Grip on the topic
   4. Crisp and natural dialogues

B. ACTING QUALITY
   1. Main characters
   2. Secondary characters
   3. Extras
INDICATORS

Average Strengths on Five Point Scale
Drama 1  Drama 2 and so on

C. SELECTION OF ACTORS
1. Famous & Popular
2. Suitable for the role

D. MAKE-UP & GET-UP
1. Natural
2. Pleasant

E. DRESSES
1. Attractive
2. Suitable for role
3. Significance

F. CAMERA WORK & LIGHT
1. Focus on Actors
2. Focus on Sets
3. Focus on Surroundings

G. DIRECTION
1. Specific shots
2. General impact
ADVERTISING

As in the case of news and entertainment, advertising should also be analyzed in terms of coverage and content.

Coverage:

The coverage analysis should identify the space (print) or time (electronic) consumed by various product types. It should also analyze the audience size of the vehicles which carried the advertisements and, when necessary, their relevance to the target audiences of those products.

Since part of this information is collected for commercial purposes, it should be possible to utilize the same information for purposes of social analysis. Our research project-under took this work spanning over a few weeks.

Content:

The content of advertisements should be analyzed for such standard considerations as false claims, but the analysis should also measure the social impact of themes projected in advertising. The following framework was developed for the purpose; it covered three dimensions and nearly 30 items which operationalized the three dimensions.

The exercise was carried out for analyzing television advertising of one week. The same framework should be applicable with minor modifications to the print media.
ADVERTISING: Framework for Content Analysis

A. STEREOTYPE

1. PROSPERITY

2. SOCIAL CLASS
   i. Value orientation
   ii. Income
   iii. Education
   iv. Occupation
   v. Type of housing &/OR place of residence
   vi. Wealth

3. MODERNIZATION

4. ACHIEVEMENT

B. APPEALS

1. PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS
   i. Hunger
   ii. Sex
   iii. Thirst
   iv. Sleep
   v. Shelter

2. SOCIAL NEEDS
   i. Love & Belongingness
   ii. Affection
   iii. Acceptance
   iv. Gregariousness
   v. Cooperation
3. SELF-ESTEEM NEEDS
   i. Prestige
   ii. Self-respect
   iii. Status
   iv. Achievement
   v. Reputation

4. SELF-ACTUALIZATION NEEDS

5. SAFETY NEEDS
   i. Physical safety
   ii. Emotional safety

6. OTHERS

C. REALITY
   1. NORMAL
   2. FANTASY
   3. CONTRIVAL
II

INFORMATION DRIVEN ECONOMY

Let me now turn to the relevance of media monitoring to the new trend of Information Economy. The reader will recall that we are proceeding with the premise that there are three new trends in Asia (and perhaps elsewhere) namely: Liberalisation ideology, Information Economy and Good (less and indirect) Governance.

The information economy is removing the distinction between intangibles (such as information) and the tangibles (such as goods). The two blend into each other. Thus products become rich in information and acquire added value, while information is turned into a product and becomes economically valuable. This latter aspect of turning information into an information product is accomplished through systematic monitoring of economically relevant information. As an example, weather data collected systematically over a longer period of time becomes a product which is of crucial importance in the production and pricing of agricultural goods. The data on environment can also be turned into a product. The data on corporate financial health is an important product which influences investments and the production of goods. The data on world commodities is equally valuable. This list is endless, which is one reason why the world market for information products runs into billions of dollars.

A significant part of this information originates in the media or through media personnel. Over the years it has been an integral part of one of the world's most successful news agencies, the Reuters. The computer technology has given a new twist to this whole field. Our research project has experimented with developing two economic data bases: One on general development indicators and the second on environmental developments in Pakistan. It involves monitoring of the media whose methods bear some similarity with what was described in the section on fairness, but it is basically a very different form of monitoring the media. It is distinguished in the following respects:

Firstly, the process is much more of a cooperative process. It builds upon the work done by the industry, the media and the scientific or commercial users of information. It is not, as was the case in the previous section, an adversarial process.

Secondly, the techniques for collecting, accumulating, retrieving and analyzing the information are different from those described in the previous section on "fairness".

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GOOD GOVERNANCE

After nearly one century during which the world placed great trust in achieving "good government" through regulation and direct intervention in economy and society, we now observe widespread disillusionment with this approach. The change does not signify the disappearance of government, but an increasing emphasis is now being placed on indirect rather than direct government. It is often translated into practice when higher levels of government seek intermediation from local levels of government, private business, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Public Affairs Committees (PACs). This new function of intermediation is highly information intensive, and involves a two way information flow of policies, guidelines and performance status.

The new media organisations, whose staff reaches in hundreds and sometimes in thousands of persons, are an important link in the processes of intermediation between people and different levels of social and political organisation. But, this is not a planned or formally designed process; it would lose some of its benefits, were it to be so. The design has to be created as an after-thought through monitoring the media. Our research project did this on four subjects which interest governments: Crime, District Management, Departmental or Ministerial Management and Foreign Affairs. The staff of the present day media takes upon itself the task of reporting on these subjects as if it is was running a parallel government. In a way it is, and that should be put to best use as a cooperative rather than an adversarial activity. Independent media serves as the ears and eyes of the higher or even parallel levels of governance. The pitfalls of media partisanship, selective reporting, and such other traditional critique of this approach can be successfully overcome through extensive coverage of a cross-section of media and its systematic accumulation and retrieval through the use of computer technology. Research shows that media "spooks" serve as an inexpensive substitute to government functionaries for communicating with and being informed on various levels of government. The project prepared four types of monitoring reports:

The Crime Report kept a daily track on crime reports in the Press, and turned this into a textual as well as a statistical report. The daily report was subsequently compiled as a weekly statistical report. This served as a valuable complement to the traditional reports submitted by the Police Department on Crime.
The District Management Report kept track of the political, economic and social developments in key districts and prepared its monthly analysis.

The Ministerial and Departmental Management Reports kept track of the activities of nearly fifty ministerial departments and ministers. A separate monthly report on each one of them showed a remarkably comprehensive picture about the encounters of each ministry with the citizens. The text and the statistical information on these encounters can be a vital instrument for good governance.

Finally, the Foreign Affairs Reports comprised ten daily reports collected from the domestic and international print and electronic media. These reports are an astonishing reinforcement of the view that the state security apparatuses rely heavily on open information contained in the media. Indeed, thousands of daring and adventurous reporters across the globe are more often than not, the cronies and not the adversaries of governments. A careful monitoring of the world media provides to the diplomats of the poor countries a good portion of what is available to their wealthier counterparts. The global media, its pitfalls apart, is a great equalizer among citizens and governments of different resources and sizes. The equalizing potential can be harnessed through effective monitoring.

To sum it all, I would say that at the turn of the twentieth century, media monitoring has become a far more comprehensive activity than it was a few decades earlier. It is also more relevant to the emerging trends of the Ideology of liberalisation, information economy and good governance or indirect government. The monitoring activity is conducted in the adversarial mode for seeking objectives of fairness. But it works in a cooperative mode when the issue is information economy and indirect government. Researchers must develop the tools of monitoring and analysis suited to these new needs. This paper describes our modest contribution in this direction.