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CULTURE AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA



AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF
MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES ON COMMUNITIES



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Abstract

Cultural boundaries of communities are not etched in stone but have slippery divisions dependent on the self-adopted labels of groups. It is often said that television and internet has changed the world. In the same way, people often speak of a new world, a new community and a new phase of history being created by the latest media technologies. Old values are being supplanted by new ones and a new hybridised culture is strengthening its position in the communities. Internet has emerged as a convergence technology and new virtual communities transcending territorial boundaries are interacting with each other and posing new challenges to the nation-states, which according to liberal scholars, is in retreat. This study examines the influence of media and communication technologies on communities and the role mass media plays in bringing communities together. In the backdrop of glocalisation and cultural hybridisation, this theoretical paper advances our understanding of the cultural implications of communication technologies.

Keywords

Communication, ICT, Culture,
New Media, Community

Community and communication go hand in hand. Man is a gregarious animal and since time immemorial, he has learnt to live in communities to save himself from the hostile environment around him. Communication has been a fundamental feature of these communities and various media have been used to convey messages from senders to receivers (Hodkinson, 2016). These media have had varying impact on the structure of the communities where these operated. Some media had fostered relations among members of a particular community by bringing them together and acting as social cement (Hamelink, 1994). On the other hand, there have been media which were instrumental in undermining the communities by creating a new social space which was not in existence before (Scholte, 2000). This theoretical study seeks to explore how media and communication technologies have affected communities and what have been the cultural implications of the role played by the modern mass media of communication (heavily dependent on technology) in the society.

The community is an aggregation of groups which vary in social class, economic status, often in political or religious affiliation and also in outlook and opinion (Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009; MacBride Report, 1980; Skovmand & Schroder, 2016). Anderson (1991) has defined the nation as an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. There is no denying the fact that all communities whether large or small are held together by a nexus of communication. Communication links promote communities of sentiments and communities of citizens which result in the development of a national entity (Sorensen (2004). In all communities, exchange of information is necessary to learn acceptable norms and values related to political and social life and if possible to join in pursuing agreed goals, or at the minimum to live together in peace. The trend in ascendance is to seek solutions for social problems in a flexible and decentralised manner through community organisations which create a need for incessant and multifaceted communication – a need that is beyond the capacity of communication resources available in a local framework (Perse & Lambe, 2016). The community, thus, have to depend on other technologically advanced sources of communication, the mass media, which may not directly address the issues related to a small community. In fact, radio and television brought into being a culture in common to whole population and a shared life of a quite new kind. The idea of public service broadcasting is necessarily linked to the notion of community.

It is obvious that the way a community meets its communication needs and shapes the content of the communication vary extensively from one community to another. The ruling principle and actual practice may be more

or less egalitarian and more or less tailored to the interests of the dominant groups. Seldom is the media imaginative enough to allow a full expression of all the interests of the people. The cultural implication of this proclivity is the dominance of the culture of powerful over the culture of the weak.¹ There is a tendency in media to over-represent the elite and the societal top in news by giving more access to official sources, experts and leaders (Golding & Elliot, 1979; Zelizer & Allan, 2011) and in fiction by having more higher status characters and locations in urban middle class surroundings (DeFleur, 1964). At the same time, in the location of either news or fictional events portrayed, there is a quantitative bias towards some favoured countries and places – especially the United States, Western Europe and leading international cities (McQuail, 2005). Tuchman et al. (1978) also argues that media content tends to employ stereotypes of minority, women, ethnic groups, the poor, and immigrants. In this way, the communities in possession of better communication technology gain the capacity to propagate their cultural ideals and the weak communities are undermined. Whatever the social or political system may be, communities and individuals need more facilities and rights to develop communication to its full potential.²

Role of media in various communities: A historical perspective

The functionalist scholars view mass media as a positive force that builds consensus among members of the communities on core values and trusses the society together. We are living in an interconnected world now which has been brought together by the forces of media technology. George Gerbner (1967) highlighted the role of media in community:

This broad public-making significance of mass media of communications – the ability to create publics, define issues, provide common terms of reference, and thus to allocate attention and power – has evoked a large number of theoretical contributions.

Media are the carriers of communication through which individuals and communities transmit messages interwoven in their respective cultures. They enjoy a mediation power as they bridge the gap between the audience and the world. McQuail (2005) suggests:

Media are windows that enable us to see beyond our surroundings, interpreters that help us make sense of experience, carriers that convey information, interactive communication that brings feedback from audience, signposts that provide direction, filters that screen out parts of experience and focus on others,

mirrors that reflect ourselves back to us and barriers that block the truth (pp. 52-53).

The modern technological advancements have made the institution of mass media ubiquitous. It affects other social institutions in the society and introduces cultural change by transmitting cultural traits from one culture to another through the process of diffusion (Rogers, 1962). Media have an impact on individual and society irrespective of the content they transmit. Littlejohn (2002) discusses this idea as medium theory. Quoting Harold Innis and Marshal McLuhan, he goes on to say that what happens and what seems significant in a historical period is biased by the predominant media in use. According to him, speech as a means of communication requires knowledge and tradition and, therefore, supports community and relationships. On the other hand, written media being spatially arranged produce a different kind of culture that is related to the growth of empires across the land.

Therefore, it can be argued that the human culture was more uniform and the communities were more cohesive before media technologies outshined the traditional modes of communication (Howard & Hussain, 2011). For example, before printing was invented, tribal people were primarily hearing-oriented communicators which had made them emotionally and interpersonally closer. Profound changes were witnessed by the society when printing was invented. New classes came into being having the ability to manipulate. Knowledge being a commodity, divided the society into those who had the truth (knowledge) and those who did not. The advent of electronic media was another giant leap as these were not tied to a particular place and could be accessed everywhere. Electronic media created an information explosion where information was sold like a commodity, which created pressure for information to be attractive. This development also led to the creation of a new kind of public not bound to space (Scholte, 2000).

Thus, the role of media has historically been different in various communities. Ellis (1999) notes that predominant media in a community shape behaviour and thought and as media change, so do the ways in which we think. In a community associated with oral culture, differences would be minimal and decisions would be made collectively based on the wisdom of tradition as it has been passed down generation to generation. In a print-oriented culture, decisions would rely on truth stored in documents and those who have access to information would have great influence as a class in community's decision making. While in modern electronic culture, various interest groups vie against each other. In this culture, there are many points of views and societal decisions are made according to the divergent opinions

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in the community by integrating them in some way and creating forms that accommodate as many interests as possible.

Technological growth and changing role of media in communities

Interest in communication has been stimulated by advances in science and technology, which, by their nature, have called attention to man as a communicating creature. Since 1920, the growth and apparent influence of communications technology have attracted the attention of many specialists who have attempted to isolate communication as a specific facet of their particular interest. During this period, individuals were believed to be heavily influenced by media messages because media were a new technology that produced bullet like effects³. Morley (2000) describes the role of media in the construction of contemporary cultural identities which assumes the existence of a unified population occupying a unitary public sphere within the secure boundaries of a given geographical territory.

Harold Innis and Marshal McLuhan were among the first scholars who investigated the relationship between media technologies and communities⁴. McLuhan's (1964) often repeated idea, "the medium is the message," stimulated numerous filmmakers, photographers, artists, and others, who adopted McLuhan's view that contemporary society had moved (or was moving) from a print culture to a visual one⁵. The particular forms of greatest interest to McLuhan and his followers were those associated with the sophisticated technological instruments for which young people in particular display enthusiasm, namely motion pictures, television, and sound recordings.

Cultural implications of media technology

The media technology has affected the culture of communities in numerous ways. It is the technology that initiates the process of social change in a community through discoveries, inventions and diffusion (Horton & Hunt, 1984; Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). McQuail (2005) notes that media have achieved two things during the process of technological growth: They have diverted time and attention from other activities between them and they have become a channel for reaching more people with more information than was available under pre-mass media conditions. Early attention to the technologies that enable interaction between temporally and spatially distanced people marked the theoretical domain of McLuhan, Innis and Carpenter who commented on the powerful influence of media technologies which constituted a revolution in social relations around the world by compressing the space and time and collapsing of social distance (Askew &

Wilk, 2002; Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009). Thus, mass media have emerged as actors of gargantuan magnitude in a community and they surpass all other social institutions in terms of power and influence.

The mass media have often been regarded as a threat to the value system of the community, but they are readily accepted in those spheres where innovation is taking place. It is feared that media are a force that pounds the minds and alters attitudes through propaganda. As Lazarsfeld and Merton (1971) state: “There is the danger that these technically advanced instruments of mass communication constitute a major avenue for deterioration of aesthetic tastes and popular cultural standards.”⁶ Add to this thesis that the media are blurring social boundaries and community divisions that previously gave stability and meanings to the lives of citizens. Meyrowitz (1985) is of the view that television has caused us to loosen our sense of boundaries – between private and public, between the physical and social, and between social groups. People are essentially losing their “place” in the world.

Lively controversy centers on the effect of technology driven mass media upon audiences, not only in matters concerning public opinion on political issues but in matters of personal life - styles and tastes, consumer behaviour, the sensibilities and dispositions of children, and possible inducements to violence. Feelings regarding these matters vary greatly. Some people construe the overall effects of mass communication as generally harmless to both young and old. Many sociologists follow the theory that mass communication seems to influence attitudes and behaviour only insofar as it confirms the status quo—i.e., it influences values already accepted and operating in the culture. Numerous other analysts, usually oriented to psychological or psychiatric disciplines, believe that mass communications provide potent sources of informal education and persuasion. Their conclusions are drawn largely from observations that most, people in modern societies form their personal views of the social realities beyond their immediate experience from messages presented to them through public communication.⁷

To assume that the recent technology-based communication is predominantly reflective of current values, morals, and attitudes denies much common experience (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). Fashions, fads, and small talk are too obviously and directly influenced by material in the press, in films, and in television to support this view. The success of public communication as an instrument of commercial advertising has also been constant and noticeable. Present evidence indicates that various instruments of mass communication produce varying effects upon different segments of

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the audience. These effects seem too numerous and short-lived to be measured effectively with currently available instruments. Livingstone (2005) argued that television is changing, diversifying, becoming increasingly segmented, globalised, narrowcast and fan-based. The home contains multiple sets with multiple channels, converging with other information and communication technologies – with telephony, radio, computer and even print. The result is converging viewing with the help of internet and probably a greater impact on the audience.

Therefore, culture, which is the behaviour learnt and shared by the members of a community, is shaped and transmitted through mass media. Media are also a significant agent of socialisation through which people internalize the norms and values of the community.⁸ Modern technological advancements in radio, television, print media, film industry, computers and mobile phones have changed the dynamics of social interaction in a community. Media, thus, emerge as a necessary social institution that has an impact on all aspects of culture. But this impact can be both positive and negative. Media can operate as a constructive force that binds a community together by generating consensus on the values and it has the potential to undermine a community by fanning centrifugal sentiments and injecting divisive tendencies.

Is community being undermined by mass media?

Nation-states and communities in different parts of the world are grappling with the challenges of globalisation mainly being disseminated by the media technologies⁹. The identities are changing and communities are transforming due to the interconnectedness across borders mainly through media of communication (Sorensen, 2004). Easy access to the internet opens opportunities for everybody to reach global audience sans any complicatedness. The new communication technologies open the way for more companies to seek global audience directly at relatively low cost (Vivian, 2006). However, critics argue that the highest levels of world finance have become intertwined with the highest levels of mass media ownership, with the result of tighter control over the systems on which most of the public depends for its news and information. Resultantly, the media content is homogenised and the local culture of communities is undermined.

Some experts claim that the export of US and other Western popular culture is latter-day imperialism motivated by profit and without concerns for its effects on other communities¹⁰. The term cultural imperialism was at its most popular during 1970s and early 80s when concern about such

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developments found expression in a series of UNESCO reports, seminars and declarations (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). Their view is that the media are like the 19th-century European colonial powers exporting Western values, often uninvited to other communities. At stake, these critics say, is the cultural sovereignty of non-Western communities. According to them, the international communication media have their headquarters in the United States and in the former European colonial powers. This result in a one-way communication flow, from the powerful communities to the weak ones and the Western values are imposed in an “impossible-to-resist way” (Vivian, 2006). Schiller (1969) argued that the one-way communication flow is especially insidious because the Western productions, especially movies and television, are so slick that they easily outdraw locally produced programs. As a result, argues Schiller, the western-controlled international mass media preempt native culture of other communities, a situation he sees as robbery, just like the earlier colonial tapping of natural resources to enrich home countries.¹¹

Indian community is a good example of cultural intrusion if not cultural imperialism. India had one television network until 1991 which broadcast indigenously produced programs before the arrival of media mogul Rupert Murdoch’s satellite service from Hong Kong carrying a lot of American-originated media content. Indian media critic Shailaja Bajpai offered the following comments while writing in *Media Studies Journal*:

- Many Indians were dressing like the Americans they saw on “Baywatch.”
- While Indian boys once wanted to grow up to be great cricket players, they now wanted to shoot baskets like Yao Ming¹².

South Africa is also facing American cultural onslaught in a more or less similar fashion. Vivian (2006) quoting Mokone-Matabane, an executive with the Independent Broadcasting Authority in South Africa, says, “Robbers were shouting ‘freeze,’ a word that had no roots in Afrikaans or the indigenous languages, when they stormed into a bank. The robbers had been watching too much US television”.

Media imperialism is not always an international occurrence. When a single company or corporation controls all the media in a country, this too is a form of media imperialism and a threat to the culture of smaller communities. Nations such as Italy and Canada are often accused of possessing an imperial media structure, because one corporation or owner controls much of the media. Even within the United States itself, information flow is controlled

by a few major corporations while the smaller, weaker ones are dying out.¹³ These media conglomerates have been a major force in manufacturing politics and social values. They have almost single-handedly as a group, in their film, internet, radio and television dominance, produced a vulgar culture that celebrates the most demeaning characteristics in the human psyche — greed, deceit, and cheating as a legitimate way to win (as in the various “reality” shows). In 1960, Dwight Macdonald made a virulent case that popular art as presented by mass media is kitsch. The mass media depend on finding large audiences for their economic base are the promoters of pop art and carriers of promotional campaigns that create popular followings. The result is that junk takes precedence over quality (Vivian, 2006).

There is no denying the fact that information flow is controlled by communities having control over information technology. This promotes a specific kind of mindset, thinking and culture in the targeted communities that runs contrary to the indigenous culture. Since the media moguls¹⁴ have ample resources, their reach is wider and their coverage of events is faster and comprehensive. Their programs are also of a better quality as they use latest equipment, technique and technology compared to the programs prepared in local communities. All these factors make these alien mass media powerful enough to control and shape local cultures and introduce new values which undermine the mores, norms, folkways and social institutions of the weaker communities.

The force behind multinational technology-driven media organisation (mostly located in the US) has been the incessant pursuit for profit.¹⁵ Most worrisome, some critics say, is the bottom-line agenda of global corporate media: profoundly anti-democratic, dedicated to advancing the interests of the power elite and keeping the rabble entertained and docile (Altschull, 1984). Media moguls and the powers they serve want happy shoppers, not freethinking citizens, the argument goes. The ultimate casualty is the truth and culture of weak communities. Therefore, it can be concluded that media technologies have undermined communities. At global level, the powerful media conglomerates have familiarised a media content that is diametrically opposed to the culture of the peripheral societies having feeble, traditional and controlled media organisations. At national level, this process has operated by maintaining the monopoly of a single or few media organisations which has resulted in homogenised and standardised kind of media content at the expense of diverse cultures of small communities.

Are new communities emerging?

There are media scholars who argue that media proliferation and media

technologies do not necessarily have negative cultural implications for communities. Unlike Bagdikian, Heinzl and Stevenson at the University of North Carolina note that many global media companies have learnt to let their local operating companies adapt to local cultures.¹⁶ The global media companies tend to develop respect for the national characteristics and cultural traditions of the communities where they operate. Resultantly, the local culture is promoted and reinforced instead of being undermined. Vivian (2006) says that by and large, the agenda of media conglomerates is profits and they do not promote ideology. Media globalisation is an undeniable fact of the modern era and observers are divided about its consequences. Hjarvard (2003) has discussed Castells' theory of network society which, according to him, offers the most articulated argument and empirical evidence relating the emergence of a new kind of community to date. Castells (1996) speaks of the emergence of a new economy, characterised by two distinct but related conditions, viz., informationalism and globalisation.

Similarly, the cultural imperialism thesis is not equally popular among media scholars. In some way, cultural imperialism is in the eyes of the beholder. Latin American countries complain about American cultural product's hegemony but do not object when Mexico like Brazil and Argentina exports soap operas to the rest of Latin America. Larry Lorenz (as cited in Vivian, 2006) who has studied this phenomenon explains: "What is occurring is simply internationalism brought on by the ever more sophisticated media of mass communication". The cultural imperialism theory is also simplistic in applying the now discredited hypodermic needle model of mass communication. In the presence of modern educated and active audience, media messages do not have immediate direct effects on culture.

The dominance of the Europe and America over news flow to the third world is also exaggerated. A recent study concludes that 60 to 75 per cent of the foreign news in the third world is about other neighbouring third world countries making the coverage that reaches third world audience extremely parochial (Hodkinson, 2016; Vivian, 2006). In fact, concern about Western cultural imperialism is slowly changing due to the following factors:

- The number of international media players located in regions other than Europe and America is on the rise.
- American media companies abroad are creating local content in line with the cultural ethos of the communities where these operate.

To compete, American media companies are investing in other countries to develop local programs.¹⁷ Shailaja Bajpai, editor of an Indian television

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magazine, criticizes this practice by arguing that Indian TV producers clone American programs which are produced in India but the concept is hardly Indian.

Thus, communities are interacting with each other with the help of media technologies and the major cultural implication is a tendency towards hybridisation which means that pluralistic communities are emerging (Havens, Lotz, & Tinic, 2009). Global connectivity has complicated the construction of identity and local cultures are transforming rapidly. Castells (2001) comments that local communities are constructed through collective action and preserved through collective memory. According to him, in most cases, these identities are defensive reactions against the imposition of global disorder and uncontrollable fast changes in the society. Castells says that globalisation is facing grave challenges as new resistance identities and communities are emerging. Thus, communities are passing through a process of transformation in a world which is interdependent and interconnected where communities cannot remain isolated from one another. In this new culture of high-tech media, old values are being questioned and new identities are being formed giving rise to the formation of new communities transcending territorial boundaries.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that cultural implications of the impact of media technology on communities are numerous. Cultural boundaries of communities are not etched in stone but have slippery divisions dependent on the self-adopted labels of groups. It is often said that television and internet has changed the world. In the same way, people often speak of a new world, a new community and a new phase of history being created by the latest media technologies. While philosophical argument about the conscious and unconscious impact of media technologies on our psyche and culture persists unabated, an altogether different debate continues over the application of media technologies in ethnographic research (Berger, 2015). Media technologies have been understood as scientific modes of cultural documentation by anthropologists believing in positivistic approach.

Scholars like McLuhan (1964) have argued that the print media had alienated human beings from their natural state. In pre-mass media times, people acquired awareness about their environment from fellow human beings. The printing press eroded tribal tradition by introducing insular act of reading. To some extent, television brought back tribalisation by engaging the senses contrary to print media that engaged the mind. But television

has also changed due to the forces of modern technology. Star TV, BSKyB and Direct TV satellites beam signals directly to consumers now bypassing traditional television broadcast. These new technologies open the way for more companies to seek global audience directly at relatively low cost. Because of technological growth some scholars (Altschull, 1995; Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010; Chomsky, 1989; Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2008) see a cultural imperialism in place where communities are being undermined and local cultures pillaged. While other scholars (Scholte, 1995; Vivian 2006)¹⁸ see transnational cultural flow in more benign terms and argue that communities are transforming and new supra territorial communities are emerging in which cultural hybridisation/synchronisation is taking place. Indeed, television, radio and the press are in most places, still (and despite globalising tendencies) in many respects national media, based on nationally generated content and, where such material is available, majority audiences often prefer it to imported products.

Without an iota of doubt, it can be said that mass media using latest technologies has affected the cultural values of communities. Old values are being supplanted by new ones and a new hybridised culture is strengthening its position in the communities. Internet has emerged as a convergence technology and new virtual communities transcending territorial boundaries are interacting with each other and posing new challenges to the nation-states, which according to liberal scholars, is in retreat. Thus, old communities are undermined and being replaced by new communities heavily dependent on media technology for their existence. Governments in various parts of the world are striving to keep the national community intact by using mass media. But in a world where technology knows no boundaries and democratic principles are increasingly becoming popular, controlling new media is an uphill task. The result of the media power is an incessant change in local cultures. Therefore, it can be concluded that the role of media technology is central in the emergence of new communities sharing some common values transmitted through mass media. The communities are undermined and strengthened simultaneously by mass media.

Notes

- 1 Mustapha Masmoudi, a member of the MacBride Commission from Tunisia, terms this phenomenon as “cultural pillage.”
- 2 MacBride Commission report (1980) describes inequalities in terms of communication opportunities within societies.
- 3 For exploration of the history of the magic bullet theory, see J. Michael Sproule’s (1989) article in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 6, pp 225-246

- 4 Graeme Patterson (1990) has thrown light on the concept of interpretation of history by Harold Innis and Marshal McLuhan in his work *History and Communications*.
- 5 See McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), pp 7-24.
- 6 See Lazarsfeld and Merton (1971) in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* edited by Schramm and Roberts for more details on this issue, p.557.
- 7 Jack Shaheen (1985), for example, is of the view that the greater the distance we are from any group, the greater the reliance upon preconceived images about that group.
- 8 Horton and Hunt (1984) have discussed how media facilitate the process of socialisation.
- 9 Manuel Castells (2001) has thrown light on the identity crises being caused by the forces of globalisation and media technology in the *Power of Identity*, pp 6-65
- 10 Critical theorists have coined various phrases about notions of "cultural imperialism." An examination of the international communication literature will reveal several different terms such as "media imperialism" (Boyd-Barrett, 1977); "structural imperialism" (Galtung, 1979); "cultural dependency and domination" (Link, 1984; Mohammadi, 1995); "cultural synchronisation" (Hamelink, 1983); "electronic colonialism" (McPhail, 1987); "communication imperialism" (Sui-Nam Lee, 1988); "ideological imperialism", and "economic imperialism" (Mattleart, 1994) - all relating to the same basic notion of cultural imperialism.
- 11 See www.scils.rutgers.edu/~favretto/schiller.html for more details about Herbert Schiller including magazine interviews where he explains his ideas.
- 12 See www.onthemedialiteracy.org/transcripts/transcripts_090503_india.html for a detailed debate by Shailaja Bajpai
- 13 See the works of McChesney, Schiller, Bagdikian, and Altschull for more details.
- 14 According to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_mogul, media proprietors are commonly called media moguls, tycoons, barons, or bosses. Some of the most prominent media proprietors of recent decades have been Rupert Murdoch, Robert Maxwell, Conrad Black, Silvio Berlusconi, Axel Springer and Ted Turner.
- 15 According to Shailaja Bajpai almost 60% of film and 25% of music world wide are possessed by U.S. Moreover, Hollywood films are a representative global money maker. Hollywood films command more than 80% of western cinema.
- 16 Vivian quoting Heinzl and Stevenson says that it is impossible to detect even hints of German culture from the product lineup of German multinational corporation Bertelsmann's companies abroad.
- 17 MTV and ESPN have built advanced production studios in Singapore and Viacom has relaunched its MTV service to Asia with local hosts.
- 18 George Steiner has noted that European and American Culture have been enriched, not corrupted, by the continuing presence of Greek mythology over 2000 years (Steiner quoted by Vivian, 2006).

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BRICS:
INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNICATIONS
AND A
NEW EMERGING
ORDER



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Abstract

The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) arose at a time when the Cold War and bi-polarity defined International Relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union has led to fresh theorising about relations and communications in a Post Cold War scenario. While the original impetus for the NWICO lay in economics, it was quickly extended to communication structures and systems. The Cold War period was also characterised by an emphasis on hard power. The post cold war period has seen the growing importance of 'soft power' and information. The past two decades have also been characterised by globalisation, with communications being both a cause and consequence of globalisation. Against this backdrop, what is the role of information vis-a vis the emerging BRICS order? While pondering this central question, countries such as India, China and Brazil are not only large consumers of media content, but they are also large producers of it, including entertainment programming. However, at present there are insignificant communications flows between BRICS countries. This study explores these issues.

Keywords

BRICS, International communication,
Globalisation, NWICO, Soft power

The Non Aligned Movement (NAM) along with the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) represented the heady idealism of the 1970s, when freedom from the colonial yoke was uppermost in the minds of the South. Freedom, dependence, justice, development and equality were all issues to be fervently debated.

BRICS, an acronym standing for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa is an interesting experiment in challenging the uni-polar order that seemed to define the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The BRICS member countries are large, having a significant impact on regional affairs. All 5 are members of the G20¹ group. While BRICS differs from the formal collaborations of the NAM, it is being touted as the new challenge to a uni-polar world. This bloc got together in 2009 as a formal entity, although talks for collaboration with an earlier bloc, BRIC minus South Africa were taking place from 2006. BRICS countries had about 40 percent of the world population (Delhi Declaration, 2012). BRICS seems to be driven by a fresh pragmatism to influence the West dominated global financial order. While the primary compulsions that lead to the formation of BRICS appear to be economic; desires evinced by large developing countries to have a greater say in global financial issues. The BRICS nations have met at formal annual summits since 2009. The 9th BRICS was held at Xiamen in China from 3-5th September, 2017.

At the current juncture, the world seems to be experiencing a de-globalisation moment as evinced by the latest protestations of Donald Trump in America and ‘Brexit’ in the United Kingdom. Against this backdrop it is interesting to see the coming together of the BRICS nations via economic, trade and other cultural ties. The formation of the BRICS development bank is an important initiative which may work as a counterpoint to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

This study explores the communications aspects of BRICS, and the implications of this for international communications. First, aspects relating to the field of international communications are explored. Secondly, the emerging order of politics, relations and communications in a Post Cold War period is touched upon. This is followed by an exploration of communications in the age of globalisation. Lastly BRICS is explored from the point of view of communications.

International communications

The phenomena of international communication emerged in the 20th century (Mowlana, 1996). More specifically the period after World War

It saw fresh interest in international communication flows. In the words of Dennis (1997):

Much of international communication, media studies and related subfields grew up in the Cold War period and were influenced strongly by its bifurcated sense of certainty. The impact, imprint and organising force of the Cold War on conceptions of the world cannot be understated. It simply was the road map, the rules of the road for almost everyone's worldview. The East-West divide, once thought of as a largely European affair, spread almost everywhere as the superpowers looked on other nations as friend, foe or non-aligned.

To reiterate, it appears that the field of international communication was based on the foundation of the Cold War, with its division into ally, enemy or non-aligned.

The field of international communication was heavily influenced by the field of international relations. During the Cold War, international relations were conceptualised around the principle of realism. Realism theorised that the nation-state was the unit of analysis and nation-states acted in a condition of international anarchy, implying the lack of a central authority (Waltz, 1979). The field of international relations was structured around the principles of realism, bi-polarity and containment. The nascent field of international communications was in turn defined by the salient principles of international relations. Another way of conceptualising the link between international relations and communications is to recognise that the paradigm of international relations is centered on the nation-state, so the flows of international communications may have also been closely tied to the State, during the period of the Cold War (Narayan, 2006).

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One issue that gained salience in international communications in the 1970s was the controversial New World Information and Communication Order or NWICO. The NWICO debate was centered on post-colonial imbalances in communications. The developing countries wanted to assert themselves regarding a New International Economic Order or NIEO, wherein they argued for more equal economic relations between the developed and the developing countries. These demands for equality in economic relations widened to include a more fair communications and media structure for the developing countries vis-à-vis the developed world. These demands were expressed by the developing countries in fora such as the Non Aligned Movement and UNESCO (Masmoudi, 1979).

The Mc Bride Commission Report identified the imbalances in communications between the developed and developing countries to be both quantitative as well as qualitative. In fact the crucial communications technology of satellites became the bone of contention between the developed and the developing world. The developing countries voiced the demand for a more ‘balanced’ flow of information via the NWICO (Masmoudi, 1979).

The rapid growth of new communications technologies such as the Internet, television, satellites, computers, ISDN and fax, and the convergence of computers and telecommunications in the post World War II period have helped to expand the field of study of international communications (Mowlana, 1996). This exponential expansion of communications technologies from the 1970s onward may help in establishing a theory of international communications which is more communications centric as opposed to international relations or politics centric.

During the 1980’s, the perception changed and telecommunications came to be viewed as a strategic factor in development. Many factors lie behind this shift in perception. Some of the factors are the globalisation of economic activity, technological change, and the growing importance of information in all aspects of life. The reasons for this change are multi-dimensional, spanning economics, politics and technology. Reaganomics became fashionable; the free market implied that deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation were advocated. In terms of the telecommunication sector, this meant that the state owned Post, Telephone and Telegraph (PTT) entity was restructured allowing for the entry of competition and private players. In most countries this resulted in expansion of telecommunication services as the state owned monopoly provider faced competition (Narayan, 2011, 2014).

The continuing Cold War ensured that communications networks and information were important in the political dimension. In fact, there was a perceived need for surveillance and propaganda during this period (Gorman & McLean, 2003, p. 104-105). The dominant powers, the US and the USSR put in substantial funding into their respective space programmes. This led to the launch of many communications and surveillance satellites during the period of the Cold War.

Changes in technology also helped the proliferation of telecommunications. The growth of new media such as the Internet and mobile telephony has revolutionised the way the world communicates. New

media including both the Internet and mobile telephony have shifted the paradigm of communications towards more interactive and participatory forms. Social media has added an entirely new dimension to how the world communicates with itself.

In most developing countries, the explosive growth of mobile telephony in recent years has occurred at rates much faster than landline telephony. While Internet penetration is still low in many developing countries, in the future this is likely to witness rapid rates of growth. The new media growth has been fuelled by advances in technology such as better silicon chips, digitisation, increased capacity and convergence. It is forecast that in the coming decade, in countries such as India, rapid growth in access to the Internet will be achieved by the low-cost smart phones rather than the computer (Narayan & Narayanan, 2016).

Post-Cold War scenario

The disintegration of the Soviet Union meant that the Cold War paradigm of international relations and communications had to be re-imagined. The assumptions about realism, bi-polarity, nation-state, anarchy and power have to be re-theorised in the period following 1990. Traditional notions of power employed by Nicolo Machiavelli, Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz have been based on tangible resources and ‘hard power’ such as military strength. The concept of ‘soft power’ was suggested by Nye (1990) which includes information as an intangible resource.

The term ‘soft power’ was first conceptualised by Joseph Nye (1990a) in his book, *Bound to Lead, the Changing Nature of American Power*. Nye’s (1990b) conceptualisation of ‘soft power’ takes into account aspects of culture, information and media. Soft power implies an inclusion of intangible sources of power, such as cultural, educational, ideological and information technological factors, which complement or may even substitute for hard power such as military strength. In a subsequent book Nye (2004) developed his theory further to explain that soft power was the power of attraction, to influence others to do ones bidding. According to him there are three ways to achieve this goal, to threaten with sticks, to pay with carrots and to attract or co-opt them (Hunter, 2009).

Nye (2004, p. 8) believes that power exists across a spectrum of behaviours from command, coercion and inducement in the hard power range to agenda-setting, attraction and co-opting in the soft power range. Military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions can be examples of hard power, while economic co-operation, peaceful conflict

resolution and common political values could be soft power strategies (Wagner, 2005).

In the Post-Cold War period, realism has been under siege. Various non-state influences have been taken into account, with concepts of a new world order based on civilisations, economics, self-worth, norms, chaos and others. Yet another model of international politics post Cold War is that of uni-polar dominance, with the US occupying the premier position (Krauthammer, 1990-91). Huntington (1996) and Fukuyama (1992) have proposed models of international politics that have proposed a ‘new world order’ based on principles other than that of the nation- state.

Huntington (1996) following older traditions, suggests a world order based on civilisations rather than states. He believes that with the end of the Cold War, conflict between civilisations will supplant conflict between states. In his view, a civilisation is the, “highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of which distinguishes humans from other species”. He identifies some major civilisations that he considers to be important in the current period; the West which includes Catholic and Protestant Europe, along with the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, Orthodoxy which includes Russia, modern Greece and other Eastern Orthodox Christian countries, Sinic which includes China, Taiwan and Hong Kong and Singapore, Japan, Hindu which includes India and Sri Lanka, Muslim which consist of various Islamic countries, Latin America and an ‘African’ civilisation (Narayan, 2006).

Huntington’s (1996) model takes ‘soft’ variables such as religion and culture and gives them prime importance in determining the integration within a particular civilisation, or conflict between civilisations. He suggests that religion is a major factor in motivating people. In his opinion, the flash points of major conflicts lie along the ‘fault-lines of civilisations.’ Huntington has been criticised for his conceptualisation of certain civilisations, for example putting the Turkic, Arab, Persian and Malay civilisations into a common ‘Muslim’ civilisation.

While this view can be critiqued as a form of cultural determinism, Huntington’s model is chiefly from the field of international relations or politics. This model is useful in explaining phenomena such as ethnic revivalism and religious fundamentalism that has come to define events such as 9/11 attacks in the United States. In terms of communications, the use of media such as audio and video cassettes was vital to the Iranian Revolution

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(Mowlana, 1996, Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997). Other such examples are that of similar cultures coalescing to form common communications systems such as the Arab Satellite system ARABSAT, or more currently the rise of the Arab news group Aljazeera. The Internet also offers many examples of web-based communications based on specific notions of religion or culture. Huntington's model can explain communications and media based on everything from religious based programming and evangelism to hate speech (Narayan, 2006).

Fukuyama (1992), another theorist, posits that the 'end of history' is at hand because liberal democracy has triumphed world-wide, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. His main theme is that humans have reached the end-point of their ideological evolution with the spread of liberal democracy. In his view, scientific progress and an innate human drive for recognition are the causal factors which drive human evolution towards liberal democracy. Fukuyama has been criticised regarding the inevitability of the spread of liberal democracy world-wide, especially in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Also countries such as South Korea, China and others are following different models of development. This model of international politics may be useful in explaining recent developments in the globalisation of communications (Narayan, 2006).

Globalisation and communications

The last century has seen large-scale change in the nature of interactions between communities, regions and nations which has accelerated in the last two decades. This accelerated change is often labeled 'globalisation' (Narayan, 2014). The phenomena loosely described as globalisation is characterised by financial sector integration, growth of transnational corporations, creation of global markets and rapid changes in communications technology (Parikh & Shah, 1999). In addition to the economic and technological factors, globalisation is also theorised in social and cultural terms such as the compression of time and space (Giddens, 1990).

The rise of new communications technologies such as mobile telephony and the Internet have re-ignited some of the concerns first expressed with respect to the developing countries and satellite communications. The liberalisation and privatisation of telecommunications in the 1980s laid the foundations for the globalisation of communications in the next decade. Mobile telephony and low cost 'smartphones' are paving the way for people to get on to the information highway or Internet in countries such

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as China and India. Today China and India are countries with the highest number of mobiles in the world (Narayan & Narayanan, 2016.)

The collapse of the Soviet Union has implied that transnational media conglomerates have increased their market share and even penetrated behind the erstwhile Iron Curtain (Herman & McChesney, 1997). Countries such as India have witnessed cultural hybridity and ‘glocalisation’ in their media in the last two decades (Narayan, 2014).

BRICS and communications

Like its predecessors, the NWICO or the NAM, BRICS appears to have coalesced out of political and economic compulsions and fears of Western hegemony on the part of the developing countries. The difference is that BRICS seems to be marked by a new pragmatism as compared to the overtly ideological position of NWICO and NAM. In the words of the *Joint Statement between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Building a Closer Developmental Partnership* on the occasion of the visit of the Chinese President to India in September, 2014:

The two sides believe that the 21st century should be marked by peace, security, development and cooperation. As developing countries, India and China have common interests on several issues of global importance like climate change, Doha Development Round of WTO, energy and food security, reform of the international financial institutions and global governance. This is reflected in close cooperation between the two sides within the BRICS, G-20 and other fora. The promotion of a multi-polar world, economic globalisation, cultural diversity and information revolution are high on the global agenda. The two sides will make joint efforts to democratise international relations and strengthen the central role of the United Nations in promoting global peace, security and development (mea. gov.in, September 19, 2014).

The two sides were also in favour of a reform of the United Nations, recognising the need for increased participation of developing countries in the UN’s affairs and governance structures.

In a similar fashion, a joint statement on the occasion of the visit of the Russian President, Vladimir Putin to India in December, 2014, indicates India and Russia’s commitment to the central role of the UN in international relations, and that they will work together to promote a

polycentric and democratic world order, and for the democratisation of global political, economic, financial and social institutions so that these better represent the interests of all parts of the international community. The two countries also agreed to coordinate in multilateral fora such as G20, East Asia Summit (EAS), BRICS and Russia, India and China (RIC).

A major step forward in the BRICS journey was the proposed \$100 billion New Development Bank (NDB), aimed at funding projects in developing nations. This was proposed via an Inter-Governmental Agreement signed at the BRICS Fortaleza Summit in July 2014. The establishment of a Contingent Reserve Arrangement will help to insulate member countries against volatility and sudden external pressures on their currencies (The Hindu, Dec 15, 2014). The New Development Bank began operating in July 2015. It has the mandate of funding infrastructure and sustainable development. In the period April 2016 to April 2017, the NDB approved 7 projects with loans aggregating over US \$ 1.5 billion. Six of these were for renewable energy projects (K.V.Kamath, April, 2017, www.ndb.int).

While the above illustrates the economic aspects of BRICS, the interesting issue explored in the next section is what are the communications implications of the BRICS bloc? Is there any significant impact of BRICS on international communications flows? What theoretical frame would fit the case of communications flows related to BRICS? How much are media flows increasing within the BRICS nations? In the first instance, some general trends have emerged:

- One outcome of this bloc is that BRICS member countries are having more news about the organisation and about the individual member countries in their respective media as compared to a pre BRICS period. A large part of the news coverage pertains to economic and political aspects.
- More cultural, educational and social related exchanges between BRICS nations. For example an India-China Cultural Exchange Initiative had been proposed in September 2014 with a view to further promoting the bonds of cultural and people to people contacts. Elements of this included 2015 to be designated Visit India Year in China, and 2016 as Visit China Year in India. The proposal is to encourage tourism in this way and also annual exchange of 200 youth from 2015 to 2019. Exchanges between museums and other cultural institutions of the two countries would be encouraged.

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Translation of classics and teaching of each other’s languages would also be encouraged (mea.gov.in., September 19, 2014). In a similar fashion, India and Russia in December, 2014 expressed their commitment to promote cultural exchanges between the two countries such as annual festivals of culture, exchanges between cultural institutions, tourism, and educational exchanges. Indian Yoga and Ayurveda would also be promoted (pmindia.gov.in/en/news_joint statement-on-the-visit-of-the Russian-federation).

- More media and film related flows and exchanges between BRICS nations. The recent popularity of Indian Bollywood films such as Amir Khan’s movies PK and Dangal in China are a case in point.
- Capacity building in media education, Under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program and Special Commonwealth Assistance for Africa Plan, scholarship programs of the government of India, India has trained the following journalists and government information officers in journalism:

Brazil- 02. It is interesting that the first Brazilians were given training in journalism in India in 2009, which was a landmark year for BRICS.

Russia-13

China-0

South Africa-13 (Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Internal Documents, 2017)

- More joint ventures launched between BRICS countries regarding media related products. There are several examples of such agreements which will fructify at some point in the future. For example, agreements signed on the occasion of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to India in September 2014, amongst a slew of economic cooperative ventures, talked about stronger links between Indian and Chinese IT companies and increasing services trade in tourism, films, healthcare, IT and logistics. Collaboration in the field of movies, broadcasting and television shows would be encouraged. An Audio-Visual coproduction MoU was signed to facilitate the joint production of movies (mea. gov.in, September 19, 2014.). Increased cooperation between India and Russia has recently been proposed in the area of space applications, defence

technologies, aviation, new materials and communications and information technology (mea.gov.in, December 2014).

A brief analysis of the media coverage of BRICS in the partner countries is undertaken in the following section.

Brazil

The acronym BRICS is very familiar to the Brazilian Press and its readers. Reports are mostly focused on the international politics or the economy. The main Brazilian news outlets are critical of the current government, so some times this spills over into critique of the government's foreign policy, including South-South initiatives such as BRICS. The media which are ideologically left of centre are supportive of BRICS (Fagundes, 2014).

There are few cultural products available from BRICS countries that are available in Brazil. So while the BRICS issues in general are somewhat familiar, deeper knowledge about individual BRICS countries is not really present as yet.

One exception was the entertainment program, the novella *Caminho das Índias* ("India - A Love Story"), exhibited from January to September 2009. It was a success and, despite reproducing stereotypes, especially regarding casteism, raised positive attention about India and its culture. Bollywood industry and India's own cultural production, however, remained largely ignored by the Brazilian public. Very few authors were translated into Portuguese. Much of the arts related events in India were unreported by the Brazilian press (Fagundes, 2014).

Gandhi is an icon recognised by most Brazilians, even those with little formal education. *Folios De Gandhi* ("Sons of Gandhi") is a group founded by workers from the Port of Salvador in 1949. Another group was named after Gandhi in ROI De Jeanine, around the same time (Fagundes, 2014). Yoga is very popular, though the roots of its popularity are unrelated to BRICS.

Russia

BRICS issues are covered fairly extensively in the Russian media. Brazil and China get a lot of coverage. As in South Africa, BRICS issues in Russia are covered in the business newspapers and online business websites such as the Russian online edition of Forbes. A lot of coverage is related to the investment potential of various BRICS countries, in particular Russia

as compared to Brazil or China (<http://www.forbes.ru/ekonomika>). Some of the stories were related to Russia's preparations in hosting the BRICS meeting in Ufa, Russia in 2015. It is worth mentioning here that a large section of the Russian population gets its news from online sources as compared to traditional print media.

There is quite a lot of news about economic and technology aspects relating to various BRICS countries including India. For example a news item on the TASS news agency website talked about India launching a satellite recently (<http://www.tass.ru/kosmos>).

While historically, there has been interest in India in Russia, in the form of film and cultural exchanges, there are not too many entertainment programs imported in Russia from the BRICS countries. The main barrier is the language. Very few Russians are familiar with Portuguese, Hindi, or Chinese (Garib, 2014). There is interest in Yoga in Russia, and anecdotal evidence suggests that this is growing.

India

As in other BRICS countries, there has been moderate coverage of the political and economic aspects of the BRICS issue in the Indian media. A lot of the coverage of BRICS is in business newspapers or magazines, or the business oriented news websites. There is less coverage devoted to cultural issues. Coverage of China is often in the context of border issues with India, the Dalai Lama or the economy and less in the context of BRICS. There are hardly any media or cultural products from the BRICS countries currently available in India. There was coverage of Brazil in the context of sport and the football World Cup in the Indian media. Again language remains a barrier. This may change in the near future with the new agreements for cultural exchanges signed between India and China and India and Russia.

China

This author had limited direct access to Chinese media observers. Secondary sources suggest that coverage of the BRICS summit in Brazil in the Chinese media were centered on the importance of the BRICS New Development Bank. This bank was considered to be an important tool for the developing countries to use to strengthen their hand in the global financial system. An analysis of the news coverage of some leading Chinese dailies regarding this BRICS summit, imply that China was slowly regarding itself as pre-eminent among the developing countries, even though it denied being

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developed. Secondly, articles in the Chinese Press countered the view in the West that BRICS was doomed for failure (Zhu, 2014).

China is recently evincing interest in Indian media products such as Bollywood films starring popular actor Amir Khan. A recent hit Hindi film *Dangal* starring Amir Khan made history in China by becoming the highest grossing non-Chinese/ non English language film in Chinese history with over \$174.5 million in early June 2017. This film also made news when the Chinese President Xi Jinping personally told the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi that he liked the film when the world leaders met recently in June 2017. BRICS film festivals have also been organised with the second BRICS film festival being held in China in June 2017 (Aneja, 2017). The Beijing Film Academy is also encouraging cooperation and capacity building among the BRICS countries by offering undergraduate and doctoral scholarships.

South Africa

BRICS issues are covered moderately in the South African news media, especially the business related media such as business news portals/ magazines and government websites like www.gov.za www.gcis.gov.za and the website for trade and industry (www.thedti.gov.za). Some of this coverage on government websites refers to BRICS as examples worth emulating in various industry or communications sectors. Some of this coverage is in the form of straightforward information such as the BRICS Fortaleza declaration. China is also referred to in the context of economic ventures and tie-ups between South Africa and China. China is the largest trade partner of Africa, so this is understandable. South Africa's entry into BRICS is generally perceived to be somewhat positive in the media coverage. Out of the BRICS nations, China seems to get the most coverage in the South African Press, followed by India (Van Der M, 2014). There are historic ties between India and South Africa in terms of a substantial Indian diaspora located in South Africa and also the symbolic association with Mahatma Gandhi, who started his freedom struggle in that nation. Some popular Indian television channels are available for view in South Africa via pay television networks.

Daily newspapers and weekend news may cover individual BRICS countries such as India or China. There is increased cooperation between Africa and China and this is also the subject of academic study in South Africa. The South African media company Naspers has invested in the media platform Tencent in China. Naspers has emerged as a global media

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company which has investments in media platforms across the world including in China, Brazil and Russia among the BRICS nations. Naspers had bought a stake in leading Brazilian media company Abril, as well as stakes in internet and e-commerce companies. In India Naspers had invested in e-commerce company Flipkart.com, as well as some Internet related company.

Reflections on Communications aspects of BRICS

Although it is early days yet for BRICS, it is now a formal group that is wielding more clout with the passage of time. The New Development Bank will certainly make its impact in a positive way as far as bargaining power of the developing countries is concerned in the economic arena. BRICS has helped to establish a more polycentric or multi-polar global order. It may fill an ideological and political vacuum in the backlash against globalisation as evidenced by Trump's Presidency and Brexit of the UK. While the political and economic dimensions of BRICS are fairly easy to envisage, the communications dimensions remain more opaque.

In terms of some of the models/theories of international communications and relations explored earlier, Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa, do represent different civilisations as theorised by Huntington. However, Huntington's theory implies a clash of civilisations and conflict based on different religions and culture. Therefore, this theory would not explain the formation of a cooperative bloc such as BRICS.

An alternative theory of international relations such as Fukuyama's model discussed above holds more promise in explaining the BRICS phenomena, and its allied communications aspects. While BRICS nations are committed to economic globalisation and an increased cultural diversity as well as information flows, not all the BRICS nations are liberal democracies as theorised by Fukuyama. Fukuyama's model can explain aspects such as globalisation of communications and increased emphasis given to satellite cooperation and information technologies. However Fukuyama's theory is based on the notion of triumph of liberal democracy, which could not explain the pre-eminent position of China globally and indeed within BRICS. A kind of adapted Fukuyama's theory to take into account a non-democratic country i.e. China, may explain the increased information flows among BRICS nations.

Fukuyama's theory does give more importance to economic factors as well as the growth of science and technology. It could be argued that a

forum such as BRICS allows for the feeling of self worth in the individual or ‘thymos’ as expressed by Fukuyama. This may be because BRICS is also in part motivated by the ideology of a polycentric world, and for the developing countries exerting more power in global fora than they have been able to in the last two decades. The rise of soft power initiatives in BRICS countries is also supported by this theory.

Conclusions

In some circles BRICS is being touted as the new NAM or even a new NWICO. While it is certainly an interesting development, which may tilt the scales in favour of the developing countries, it is still in its inception. The New Development Bank is currently in the process of being established. It seems that the NAM was more ideological and political, while the later day avatar, BRICS may be a more pragmatic formulation.

In terms of communications or information flows, as yet these are very minimal between BRICS countries. Some BRICS nations such as Brazil and India are media powerhouses, exporting in the region, especially entertainment programs. These may fit the bill of ‘contra-flows’. However this is not the case of China, which relies on its large domestic market. These increased information flows between BRICS nations are at the moment more symbolic than substantial. In any case, BRICS may represent a paradigm shift away from the dependency background of the NWICO towards a more participatory role for large developing countries such as India or Brazil in the new global order, with the new media technologies assisting in democratisation of communications within the countries as well as between countries.

Note

- 1 G20 is the group of 20, an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies currently these include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK, US and the EU.

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MILITARY-MEDIA
ENGAGEMENT
IN
CONFLICTS
AND
DISASTERS



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Abstract

The role that both mass media and social media play in the functioning of the armed forces in conflict and disasters has effectively changed the rules of doing business between them. With the explosion of both forms of media, all sides would try and exploit this in a crisis situation. In the absence of active engagement with media, the tendency to sensationalise events would be predominant. There is need for leveraging media and train specialists to handle an ever-evolving social media; as also a need to identify professionals and empower them by creating designated media cells at all levels of armed forces. New Media devices pose a conundrum of problematic issues as well as windows of opportunities within the armed forces.

Keywords

Military, Disaster, Social media,
Real time, Crowd wisdom

In a network-age, media is all pervasive. While it has evolved in many developed nations in terms of accountability and responsibility, in India it is still in an emergent and chaotic state. If this was not bad enough, Social Media has literally pulled the rug away from any pretence of formal structures. The following are just some of the issues worth pondering over for senior leadership in the defence services.

- Why does Indian Media like to project “media relations”, whereas the issue is of interface with public or masses? A more relevant term is *public* relations, as is used all across the world.
- Why do media demand the ‘face’ of the man on ground and not a spokesperson? Is it in the hope of getting: credible information; latest inputs; and, sensational or breaking news inputs?
- Many PR and media-relations concepts are based on corporate world issues where a make-or-break canvas may be the case. Not so for the military, where it takes a while for reputations to be affected. There is time available to react and strive for longer-term management capacities.
- Who is a better field PRO – combatants, combat-experienced officers or generalists who have more time and fewer egos? While it may be inadvisable to distract a combatant on duty during a crisis, an experienced officer who is well versed with the situation may be appropriate.

New Media: Newer perspectives

The Gulf War of 1991 brought wars and combat into the drawing rooms of the world through CNN on TV in a major way. Among many strategic goals, one that was fully achieved by embedded journalism was the hard-sell of a revolution in military affairs and showcasing of very expensive but awe-inspiring weapon systems. Fifteen years later in the Israeli offensive in Lebanon (2006), media was used brilliantly by an underdog to bring the most potent fighting Israeli military machinery to standstill. Asymmetric warfare was redefined by Hezbollah by the use of New Media. It brought home a clear lesson to all – the enemy will not fight the war that you want, but the one that it thinks it can win. On the other hand, an information explosion through increased interconnectedness and a proliferation of media (mass, social and individual) is making it impossible to control and manage information through conventional approaches. It is not clear that whether conventional or unconventional conflicts prevail, the first salvos will be information/cyber

based soft and hard-kill weapons.

Chechen War lessons

The effects of perception management truly reveal themselves when considering the two Chechnya Wars conducted by Russian forces. In the First War (1994-95), the Russians were not only surprised and defeated by Chechen rebels, but were also lacking in any effort towards perception and media management. The rebels had a field day capturing the imagination and sympathy of world opinion and, more importantly, Russian public opinion of an unjust war. The tide was reversed in the Second War (started in 1999), where media manipulation and access denial were successfully done to positively gain support of the Russian public. Tying in with the Global War on Terror (GWOT) allowed creation of a favourable impression of counter-terror operation across the world. Backed with better tactics such as avoiding urban infantry engagement, separating the population from insurgents, using indigenous forces (Kadyrovs) and targeted leadership kills, the campaign was hugely a success (Blandy, 2003).

Media trends

Today perception shaping has become a core component of a military campaign. It is a part of larger trends in an increasingly interconnected world. A post-truth world (a term used in the aftermath of Trump Presidency), demands investment into a subjective reality that can be fashioned appealing to emotions rather than rationality. This is mainly due to the explosion of Social Media platforms that have broken hierarchical and linear structures and cycles of information processing. Today, the informal media (Social Media) has outstripped the formal media (print, TV etc.) in terms of timeliness, credibility, volumes and other such valuable characteristics. News can no longer be late in terms of hours, it is delivered instantly and even as it is happening through mobile phones that act as cameras, computers, network functions etc – all in the palm of a human hand.

Perception shaping in conflict zones has evolved into strange dimensions. It has clearly morphed from dated concepts like embedded journalism (CNN in First Iraq War) to more subtle and clever forms, e.g., the use of term ‘friendly fire’ instead of pure fratricide or collateral damage. From erstwhile media management, the emphasis shifted to engagement because of media backlash at being managed. It now is firmly in the realm of perception shaping in a holistic fashion including satiating media hunger. Since speed is paramount, accuracy and truth suffer and take a backseat. Swift pre-emption and counter-narratives are buzzwords for current PR and

information managers.

Traditional media handling by the military was based on reaction or a longer-term favourable outreach mainly through TV or print. These fire-fighting methods were personality-driven e.g. some chiefs of armed forces have been very media-savvy while many are reticent on the issue. The defence PRO setup of MoD has only been playing catch-up - a reason for each service to go for their own PR setups especially in times of crisis. The synergy between MoD and Service HQ PR setup is still missing especially in the arena of Social Media. A core tenet of “infotainment” is interactive platforms for the public, and this must become a focus area. Just opening Facebook accounts or Twitter handles is not enough. They must be monitored, tracked, responded to and analysed in terms of trends, both short-and long-term, 24x7x365 days.

The first question is whether to communicate swiftly or not? First impressions in the cyber world may not be lasting but are difficult to amend or negate if not handled in the short timeframe of quick response. An appeal to reason, logic, facts and credible negation can immediately kill any monster in the making. However, each and every negative feed may not require a response. The trick may be to monitor trending issues and effect prompt, short and accurate inputs. The larger trend of openness and transparency especially in matters of ethics and probity in society may leave no choice in the armed forces. A key may be to quickly identify noise and focus on being louder to be heard. An important issue is genuine and truthful feedback on own messaging in orders to improve, change or tweak the communication processes.

Opportunities and pitfalls

This is an age of democratised media discourse but also one of information overload. One definition of Social Media could be -- collective online communication channels dedicated to community based inputs, interactions, content-sharing and collaboration. It encompasses forums and platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, micro-blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation and wikis. The term ‘prosumers’ aptly captures the ability of everyone on Social Media to produce as well as consume information. It can be said that Twitter search option is the fastest means to get certain information these days. At the same time, the medium is also flippant and supports some unrealistic aspirations of the younger generation. Also, shelf life of issues is short and even more so in case of good, prompt and factual rebuttals that understand the consumer. Official responses need to

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be fast, yet not smart or cute that is open to misinterpretation. However, the challenge lies in designing frameworks, methods and protocols, supported by adequate training of PR teams.

Controlling the narrative is the new objective with possibly an uncertain end-state. TV and print were easier to handle since protagonists were known and could be cultivated or dealt with. Social Media is full of surprises-unknown actors who achieve instant and ‘viral’ fame, anonymous good citizens as well those with mischief and malafide intentions. Adversarial relations allow nations to exploit this as a low-cost option in attacking vulnerabilities or fault-lines. A starting point is to recognise some myths about media i.e. neutrality, objectivity, apolitical outlook, fairness and responsibility. In a stiff competing environment, there are strong economic and political motives, and serious decline in codes of conduct. The laws of the land in terms libel and defamation are weak allowing media to take chances and cross red lines. At the same time, print and TV have been reined and somewhat by Social Media since it serves as a watchdog and provider of real-time counter-narratives. Therefore, TV and print journalist no longer have absolute privileges to disseminate news and views.

And yet, print media is expanding and doing well mainly because of increasing literacy in the country. The vernacular or local print is especially relevant to opinion building and perception shaping. On the ground, despite penetration of the internet, print and TV will continue to be relevant to firm up first-opinions and beliefs in the form of views rather than news. Also growing rather alarmingly are phenomena of paid journalism, private treatise (media share-holding in industry), lack of laws or conditions for entry into this sector, growth of news personalities as larger than life figures, and sensationalising (creating events). There is no accredited training even in reputed institutions and the lack of regulators in TV is acutely felt. At least print media has the Press Council of India as a regulator, even if largely a toothless one. The fourth estate (TV) acts almost as a non-state actor, and therein are the dangers of pure self-regulation.

Nick Gowing (BBC) has succinctly put across in his new book that “in crisis situations, institutions of power face a new acute vulnerability by real-time information flow that challenges inadequacy of structures of power”. In such circumstances, immediacy is the key with non-linear flows that focus on speed, engagement and countering rumour-mongering. The reputation and loyalty cultivated on Social Media over time risks disruption if not handled with integrity and credibility. Understanding of the medium and targeted audience, crafting of the message aiming for consistency and coherence,

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and, first and foremost, to accept errors and ownership of mistakes are first steps in crisis handling.

The military and media may be on different sides of an adversarial table, however they are not exclusive, and interaction and deep engagements are imperative on both side. An essentially unstructured media is difficult to be managed but needs to be understood, befriended and even co-opted by the military. However, an important caveat is that media coverage may not necessarily reflect a true measure of public opinion. This has been demonstrated time again in elections in the country. The challenge for armed forces is to occupy media space with positive news e.g. small people doing real work. This needs a push strategy rather than wait for pull forces, which can only happen with a deeper and consistent relationship with the media.

Nuances of engagement

New media is a term for digital devices such as laptops, smart phones that individuals carry, use, upload, download, take pictures, and in general interact with the world at large with high speed and instant connectivity. Video going ‘viral’ is an example of the large and even strategic effects that can be caused by tactical level individuals. Today’s environment makes the word ‘control’ redundant. Engagement is a key term along with attributes such as speed, timeliness, credibility etc. Rather than the futility of chasing information superiority, the focus needs to shift to effective engagement, superior leveraging and countering the adversary’s information design. Media engagers, not managers, need to clearly understand targets, mediums and messages. Speed of engagement is vital since the first messages tend to be lasting impressions. This can only be achieved if response is delegated downwards to well qualified and inclined persons who grasp the macro and micro views. The message must be in context to the environment and target audience. It must be clear and specific, consistent with long-term focus, and be adaptable to changing contexts. It also means that no space can be left unattended; both mass and new media need to be addressed.

Other important aspects are the messengers themselves and synchronising the messaging at different levels. Credibility of the ‘faces’ or sources is a major factor that is keenly sensed by audiences. Besides the content of the message, knowledge, experience and familiarity of the messenger are equally critical. Synchronising can be planned and choreographed from higher levels even though messaging has been delegated downwards. Creating credibility at all these levels needs frantic and well-connected efforts of documentation, analysis and dissemination in real-time. Quickly and effectively countering

an untruth or a half-truth may be more effective than shutting down that media space. This see-saw battle is so evident in the counter-insurgency effort in Kashmir.

Social media - Social headaches

The same New Media devices pose a conundrum of problematic issues within the armed forces. Compromises have happened despite best efforts. While strict and up to date rules and regulations will try and stop personnel wittingly or unwittingly falling prey to devious designs of adversarial nations, an equally important aspect is to redefine what is really off-limits. In an age of satellite reconnaissance is it possible to 'hide' everything? Adding to the problem is the ignorance and levels of awareness of digital pitfalls among personnel and their families. How competent are warriors to view this holistically and stay updated to take timely action? This is only possible with a dedicated lot who understand both sides of the equation. Alternatively, it may be time to think of lateral absorptions or attachment of experts or insiders of the media at various levels. Defence spokespersons of the current form may be passé. As such, open source and crowdsourced intelligence today outweighs other clandestine means. Mining open source information laid out due to compulsions of social media is a great target for adversaries. Even in the mass media sector, a proliferation of channels and narrow-casting to focus audiences can elbow out bigger channels.

The other important issue staring squarely at senior leadership in the defence forces is the social effects of Social Media. Conventional means of cohesion and team building seem to be taking a back seat as young warriors, reflecting larger societal trends, lean more on virtual connectivity rather than spare time for real contact. In simple words, people have no time for talking to each other even on phones, but are available 24x7 on Social Media or Social Messaging Sites. How does one buck this trend or use it as an opportunity? This requires one to be comfortable with nuances of new media and deeper introspection to strategise the way ahead.

A case in point: Uttrakhand disaster

During the Uttrakhand Disaster in 2013, a unique synthesis emerged between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and mass media. This was partly due to the preponderance of air operations in saving lives and the uniqueness of virtually every state in India being affected in terms of injured and trapped pilgrims. The State Government was on the back foot and not too sure of itself or the situation (Dhanasree, 2013). While it had made efforts to engage and inform the media, their credibility was low. The Indian Army

had gone overboard in its PR drive with exclusive helicopters and an army of cameramen. Information not matching facts on ground dropped their credibility to such an extent that media had no trust or time for engagement as evidenced by media reports of that period.

The Chief of Air Staff (CAS) moved two defence PROs to the scene, one each at Dehradun and Gauchar. The narrative was simple to all – the truth and optimistic plans, and nothing else. While engagement was done at all levels of airmen and captains of helicopters, the main briefing face was of the Task Force Commander (TFC) – the man with the latest information and in the thick of things. The morning and evening updates became the mainstay of feeds for the entire media. The IAF even engaged own personnel from different states to engage the vernacular media from there. The real success lay in the fact that it covered the holistic picture, role of all agencies and team work happening to handle the major crisis. This got the support of all agencies and thwarted most media effort at sensationalising.

How to handle media efforts at sensationalising in a sensitive multi-agency work comes out clearly in the following example. The Channel Headlines Today approached the CAS' office for a live one-on-one interview with the TFC on the issue of 'People First, Mission Always' in light of the work being done. On the same day, two politicians had got into a fist-fight at Dehradun Airport which was widely reported. The live interview took place under a Mi-17 helicopter at Jolly Grant Airport in Dehradun at night. The TFC had an earphone to follow the conversation but no visuals. What emerged was a sensational report on the earlier misbehaviour by politicians, and lack of competence and empathy of the state machinery. In between, Gaurav Sawant tried to intersperse the sacrifices of the IAF. The TFC did not fall prey to this ruse, and took time to explain the team work by all agencies on ground as also distancing from any political commentary. This one single report, that worked well for multi-agency collaboration but not for planned dramatised effects by the channel, did wonders in building trust and credibility.

An example of strategic communication was the CAS' comments to the national media that the rotors would keep churning till everyone was out. This simple message touched the entire country assuring the commitment of the service. After one of the helicopters had met with a fatal accident, the CAS visited the site and was surrounded by the media asking what his message to the team was. "Keep smiling and doing the important work, the time for grieving will be later" – was a powerful internal and external message. The bottom line is that all media are extremely alive, intelligent and discerning,

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so control and manipulation is out while effective and credible engagement is in.

The media's ubiquity was demonstrated time and again. No better example than the one during the first week of the disaster. While the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and state authorities were still deliberating on an alternate foot route to Kedarnath from Gaurikund, a reporter and a cameraman from India TV channel made it by foot themselves and took some first rate shots of the devastation enroute. So, hiding facts may not be an answer, even temporarily. It is better to be the first to present facts through your own lens.

Whatsapp had just come into India (most had not even heard of it till then!). The nightmare of controlling (avoiding collision and optimal sequencing) 75 helicopters in one narrow valley with just three helipads seemed insurmountable. One young Flight Lieutenant of a Mi-17 helicopter, comfortable with the new app, came up with a radical solution of forming a group with all captains doing self-regulation. In the absence of a better solution, the TFC allowed a trial. Not only was it a success, but almost 3000 sorties were done to save lives under this arrangement in the next ten days. The power of new media was fully at display; in both minds and devices.

Disaster management in a network-age

Mobile penetration especially in underdeveloped countries has transformed the way humanitarian response and business is conducted. More than an information-age, the world today is deeply a network-age, where big data is being generated with contributions from all levels. This has enabled concepts such as crowdsourcing, crowdseeding, mobile cash transfers, transparency and effective response to 'real' needs. Real-time monitoring, tracking and feedback from affected communities allow adaptability to changing circumstances. The proliferation of mobile phones in underdeveloped nations that are crisis-prone means that aid beneficiaries have a voice now (Ramalingam, Ben & John, 2014). Accountability of aid delivery will now have to account for end-user voices or feedback. Baseline data of populations held by state authorities need to be shared during a catastrophic event, and therefore, this must be preserved in multiple modes and places to avoid loss in disasters. But, opening this data completely risks exposure to criminal agendas.

The network-age comes with its own challenges of bias: socio-economic, cognitive, statistical and epidemiological. These need to be researched and understood well by decision-makers. Disruption of existing and traditional

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cultures, hierarchies and power structures in societies is another area that needs to be understood for longer and higher order effects. The danger of further excluding marginalised groups must be avoided. At least the world-wide web is not completely free of interference in most countries. All this despite existence of treaties such as the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters that are enabling frameworks for rapid release of data from national databases. While information overload is a common refrain at the level of humanitarians, the expectations of an increasingly connected society has jumped multi-fold putting pressure on field workers. An additional concern is on privacy, security and ethics of handling such personal and public data. Targeting of vulnerable sections after identification through the reporting channel is common in many conflict-term areas. This needs a deeper involvement with security and providing clear guidelines and frameworks to all handlers of such data.

Agencies involved with humanitarian work must first understand, adapt and train to handle the network-age. Nations and the UN along with NGOs must arrive at common grounds to establish clear and shared frameworks and guidelines. The premise must be that information needs are primary objectives, and translating this into actionable plan is a key to effectiveness. Technologies adopted must be chosen in context to suitability to those handling it including affected communities. Nuances such as low-bandwidth and offline versions of network, battery-charging facilities and power-packs, internet access and liberal recharges, free mobiles etc are realities to be handled at ground level. Therefore, restoring this network post-crisis is an imperative that needs to be planned and scaled by Government and agencies.

Crowdsourcing involves humanitarian agencies or actors working with trained people who can collect and share information. It can be done even via SMS (Short Message Service) short codes to transmit critical issues. These are particularly useful in monitoring and tracking longer term programs or projects. Crowdsourcing has been enabled by certain technologies and applications. For example in Haiti in 2010, the success of program 4636 (based on SMS) was possible by: collection, processing and viewing of high resolution satellite imagery by all; an available geospatial Wiki platform; volunteers to handle such Wikis; and, collaborative sites to allow mashups such as Google Docs. However, introduction of new technology during an active crisis is certainly problematic. Reliability issues demand that this be done during non-crisis times to allow innovation during disasters. Without a certain amount of predictability of a system, its acceptance when tensions and pressures are high is doubtful. Therefore, core issues in acceptance of Big Data Analytics are: Awareness; Reliability; Trust and Branding;

Professionalism; Open standards; Verifiability; and, Interface platforms.

Trust, big data and social media in disaster response

Crisis Informatics was a term introduced a decade back, however it has shot into prominence only a few years back after 2010 because of technological leaps in mobile phone processor and network capacities. Social Media especially plays a crucial part in this area. There are three main sub-groups under which this subject has advanced. First is information collection which includes aspects such as Social Media data mining, Social Media-based crisis recognition, and Social Media -based geo-location applications. Second is communication, with facets such as detecting misinformation, Twitter analysis for improved Situational Awareness (SA), crisis-communication with public, and use of Social Media by agencies to communicate. Finally, there are apps and systems to enable collective sense-making and collaboration among organisations and volunteers. For example, map mashups and crowdsourcing of geo-tagged information (Lee, Hirschmeier, Muller & Luz, 2017).

Big data analytics as decision support

After the earthquake in Haiti (2010), an era of digital humanitarians has dawned with the emergence of big data gathering and analysis during disaster response. A platform named ‘Ushahidi’ was copiously used to develop crowd-maps and actively involve the affected and the concerned through mobiles and web-based activity. A virtual community of tech-savvy volunteers helped make the response quicker and more effective. Big data is large, unstructured and dynamic data-sets that cannot be handled by traditional information technology or computer hardware and methods. There are many sources of big data: mobile Call Detail Records (CDR); online activity such as SMS and Twitter; sensors such as UAVs, satellite feed and mobiles suitably networked in real-time; personal data and location through mobiles; publicly available web-based Government web sites; and, crowd sourcing, which is an active method based on volunteers and participation. The current focus by national Governments on e-governance can enable all these sources to contribute meaningfully in disaster response.

Some applications of big data analytics are public health (epidemiology); population tracking during migrations; sociological behaviour of affected etc. Recent technological revolutions in communication have made this simple and mass-based. Mobiles (smart phones) can act as accelerometers (to detect movement), provide audio/visual content, provide co-location through Bluetooth and GPS, and allow crowdsourcing SMS. Tracking all these can provide analysis of community movement and behaviour. Neo-

geography platforms such as OpenStreetMap allow participative mapping techniques with audio-visual inputs also. This allows quick crisis mapping to provide situational awareness and support to decision making for effective response.

Swarm intelligence

Collective or swarm intelligence deals with the behaviour of decentralised and self-organised systems, e.g. ants and bees in nature. It applies to human beings when minds meet to collectively solve problems in real life. Many studies have brought out the relevance of swarm optimisation, ant colony systems and bee algorithms for human crowdsourcing to solve problems. Knowledge management from diversified and dispersed individuals entails accurate aggregation and transforming tacit knowledge quickly to the research table for timely use. Nowhere is this more pertinent than the field of disaster management. Any system that is modelled on complex adaptive theories has scope to benefit from swarm intelligence approaches. Quick data collection, spot analysis and real-time research allow problem solving in dynamic and fast-changing scenarios. The reasons for such application are many, among which some are as follows:

First, data only starts becoming available as the problem emerges and develops. Second, quick dissemination of issues allows ideas to be exchanged from diverse stakeholders in real-time. Third, in an interconnected and networked environment, it is increasingly possible to use technology to break “silo mentalities” to allow boundary spanning interdisciplinary approaches. Crowdsourcing, social media, probabilistic mechanisms and metaheuristics allow tapping the potential of crowds.

Lastly, in a world that is increasingly transparent and accountable to public, stakeholder engagement in real-time has been made possible by technology (Callaghan, 2016)¹.

Use of social media

The use of social media and crowdsourcing to populate maps with synthesised information in creating accelerated memory is based on the theory of met heuristics. Ant colony algorithms point to modelling optimum paths that allow success to attract more and better ideas. All these nature-based applications are providing breakthroughs that cannot be ignored. Gone are poll-based methods replaced by real-time connected swarm methods that allow interactive and reflective methods in tapping crowd wisdom. Some issues in this are workflow, hierarchy and task allocation, synchronising

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and sequencing, quality control and reputation, motivation and incentive, and active or passive intelligence guidance. Members of these virtual communities may not have rigid structures or hierarchy but can be flattish and unconventional, and transition from workers to leader and vice-versa. Guidance to such a fluid arrangement can be by unique signals or information at interfaces of a problem. This allows larger contributions and the attendant advantages of scales. There is implicit or explicit division of labour and invisible guidance which leads to synergy just as *stigmergy* in insects. The structures and changes are driven by real needs from bottom-up that leads to evolution towards optimisation.

Crowd wisdom can be tapped through crowdsourcing or crowd computing. In disasters, the former has been effectively used in searching, micro tasking, translation, data verification and data classification, using open-source principles. Crowd computing is used for solving complex problems by breaking it down into solvable parts. The other innovative thrust is to mix the data-handling ability of computers and better pattern-finding ability of humans to arrive at complementary hybrid models. One example is the Artificial Intelligence for Disaster Response (AIDR) platform which can automatically classify tweets after being ‘taught’ by crowds. Experience shows that early tweets are mostly about cautions and warnings, while later ones reflect damages, casualties, requirements, donations etc. AIDR collects relevant tweets of a disaster and asks a crowd to label a subset of this data, which in turn trains an automatic classifier to handle huge amounts of data. Therefore, this method becomes very specific to a disaster and leads to user-friendly relevant processes. AIDR combines human intelligence and machine capabilities to handle large amounts of data to obtain labels from a subset of the data. The classification process is based on an active learning approach by the machine using crowdsourced wisdom (Imran, Castillo, Lercas, Meier & Vieweg, 2014).

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Extracting meaningful information from micro blogging messages has been done many times in large disasters. For example, Hurricane Sandy in 2012 with two million tweets, Japan Tsunami in 2011 where 5,500 tweets were posted every second and 2 million tweets after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Real time analysis of twitter data to extract casualty reports, critical requirements, geo-location of crisis sets etc has been done very effectively to enhance situational awareness of disaster managers. Systems are generally based on machine learning techniques that rely on crowdsourcing. Experimental dashboards such as Disaster Response in partnership with UNOCHA are refining this further for speed and accuracy (Imran, Castillo, Lercas, Meier & Vieweg, 2013). Many platforms on the internet use Twitter

to gather meaningful information on disasters for analysis by responders and helpers. All of them are based on ingesting or collecting data from Twitter using machine learning classification techniques, along with help from crowd sourcing methods. Extracting from 140 character limited tweets is much more difficult than longer texts such as blogs and texts. Also, classifiers do not work on different disasters or templates; therefore, fresh effort has to be put in every new disaster.

The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami witnessed the first-ever volunteer generated internet-based website that was modulated for about two weeks. Today, Social Media and different approaches of handling mass data and crowd sourcing allows the public at large to play a crucial contributory role in disaster management, especially in improving Situational Awareness (SA) and coordination of activities. It allows emergence of networks that are complex and adaptive, and creatively solve problems through crowd wisdom. This role is not limited to the response phase only but covers the entire cycle. An example of improving SA is the Australian software Emergency Situation Awareness or ESA platform which detects tweet outbursts and presents information in terms of timelines and spatial maps by event detection, classification, clustering and geo-tagging. On the other hand, platforms such as Crisis Mapping use digital volunteers to do this job on a sample, and machines to learn and do this on a mass scale. A crucial factor is the nature of applied programming interface of major social network platforms that are unique and determine access of outsiders. Geo-tagging allows retrieval of spatial data but it needs GPS enabled programmes on the devices. Geo-coding is based on references to geographical features that allow coordinates to be fixed. This can be also done by automatic searches for geographical clues. Some platforms alternate between archived and live data processing which allows regular feeds for better latency as well as better contextual analysis by working deeply and retrospectively (Imran, Castillo, Lercas, Meier & Vieweg, 2015).

UN and the virtual community

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) primarily collaborates with governmental and non-government agencies to facilitate coordinated response in humanitarian disaster and logistics supplies in such crisis. In a highly tight-knit and bureaucratic setup with standard procedures and formalities, it is still not very comfortable with crowdsourcing data and analysis from emergent and independent groups. It is difficult to integrate these in a formal or highly accountable manner since the concept of command and control is not acceptable to them. Digital

Humanitarian Network (DHN) is a volunteer-based virtual group that is loosely structured to become active during disaster management. OCHA and DHN are increasingly collaborating for mutual benefits; the latter being able to take advantage of OCHA's formal network with most humanitarian agencies. The contrast between the two in terms of bureaucratic structure, hierarchy, formal SOPs etc is stark. OCHA's field information service (FIS) is responsible for information coordination between clusters (UN). Its network with virtual community has allowed it a role as a boundary spanner.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is mobilised in case of major disaster events where national capacities are overwhelmed. The normal UN way is to divide the task among 11 clusters with initial assessment of requirements by OCHA, after which it takes on the mantle of coordination of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. The start is a Multi-Cluster Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) by OCHA within two weeks. This requires systematic collation and analysis of data, including community level inputs and analysis. During Typhoon Haiyan over Philippines in Nov 2013, OCHA approached the digital volunteer organisation MicroMappers to use Twitter to map out the crisis. While this first attempt did not prove decisive, it gave impetus for future research into this area. The MIRA framework is focused on eight themes: Crisis drivers; scope and profile; population status; response capacities and effectiveness; international efforts; humanitarian access; gaps; and, priorities (Vieweg, Castillo & Imran 2014). OCHA now formally accepts Twitter as a source to triangulate or confirm information through other conventional sources. It also accepts that social media is a valuable source for early or real-time information during critical phases.

DHN includes virtual organisations such as Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team, Standby Taskforce, GEOCAN and CrisisMappers. These are focused on disaster responses or humanitarian crises and based on peer-to-peer networking. Their strength lies in harnessing diversity and dispersed talents towards common objectives. However, capacities, core strengths and specialisations vary and are unpredictable. Sustainability over a long time is also a problem. Integrating this diversity into a formal structure is problematic, and requires a flatter and flexible approach. Shared situational awareness (SSA) for humanitarians and disaster responders is a critical issue in a melee of complexity. It requires a synthesis and synergy of modern information technology and time-tested institutional practices to build a real-time SSA. Incorporating new and stranger communities such as DHN may be key to survival of bodies such as OCHA in an increasingly connected world. The roles of boundary spanners and creative leaders seem

to be game-changers.

Challenges in using big data with trust

Experiences in Nepal in 2015 indicate many problems in handling Big Data with volunteers. Firstly, volunteers are essentially untrained in specifics such as nature and extent of damage to infrastructure. Secondly, local language barriers and cultural contexts are not understood by most resulting in poorly structured and unsynthesised data. Thirdly, standard formats to fill data are not available or not readily accepted. Fourthly, the virtual community may not be able to elicit response from formal organisations for the lack of credibility or face-to-face contact. Fifthly, quick rotation of volunteers inserts a large component of unpredictability. Lastly, virtual volunteers may not adhere to core humanitarian principles.

There are many challenges to big data being credible and reliable. Some of these are variety (structure), velocity and volume (speed and quantity), veracity, vagueness (language) and validity (removing biases). There are other issues of volunteers and misuse potential that require caution when relying on big data. It must also be remembered that it is only an enabler or facilitator; decisions leading to action are still taken and done by humans. Response is extremely time-sensitive, and therefore, real time credibility, security and tolerance to disruption of infrastructure must be ensured. The final issue is putting all these analyses and information in a user-friendly package.

There are pitfalls to look for when handling such large data:

First, the velocity of flow can be overwhelming in unpredictable bursts.

Secondly, the size may run into millions of items occupying many gigabytes of space.

Finally, much of the information may be duplication such as retweets. In terms of context, the ungrammatical and short-form nature of micro-blogging is difficult to sort out and analyse by simple machine learning templates.

There are other attributes such as clarity, timeliness, objectivity and context that are difficult for a non-human to handle with accuracy. All media, including print media, videos, photographs etc need to be integrated into a coherent holistic analysis. Filtering and classification may take into account subjective or objective context, type of information, source, credibility, time or location (Vieweg, Castillo & Imran, 2014). What is finally most important

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is usefulness and efficacy to the whole process of disaster management. Usability by the end-user is critical in the designing stage. A further development would be to graduate from enhancing situational awareness to decision support such as forecasting. A core requirement and challenge would continue to be validating credibility and truthfulness of social media context. Also, it must graduate from a passive approach to actively questioning or posting requirements. A desired end-state would be to use these platforms for active coordination of a chaotic disaster scenario.

The main concern in using social media for information on disasters is authenticity and reliability. Many media houses such as BBC and CNN use contrasting or multiple sources and phone interviews to check this out. YouTube videos can be confirmed by correlating time of day with shadow, weather and accents of people, as also geographical features by using Google Earth. The internet explosion and social networking has allowed a revolution in social mobilisation. The Red Balloon Challenge by DARPA clearly demonstrated the means of making sense of contradictory and dynamic data from a large geographical area. This was done by an MIT team sitting on laptops using social media, crowdsourcing and a recursive incentive mechanism. Claims and counter-claims can be verified based on mass participation and multiple evidences volunteered for an incentive. Evaluation is done through crowd sourced voting (Popoola, Naroditskiy, Castillo & Rahwan, 2013). Platforms such as Verily have been developed for disaster scenarios, which use these concepts to collect and verify inputs such as photos or status reports. It is based on rewards and incentives to those whose contributions lead to verified information that allow effective action by responders. These are not in monetary form but as recognitions and trust-based allowances for more access to functions on the dashboard. It is felt that the spirit of disaster volunteerism responds better to recognition and reputation rather than monetary benefits. However, some platforms reward with airtime on mobiles in developing countries.

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Network challenges

A network established purposely or incidentally, aims for knowledge sharing, problem solving, innovating or capacity building. It allows cross-fertilisation of ideas and inter-disciplinary approaches. There is evidence that some of the factors attributed to successful networks are clarity of purpose and goals, leadership, core values, resources and flexibility. But a network of organisations that are independent and differ on so many counts has multiple challenges. Firstly, a combination of competition and interdependence creates vulnerabilities that can be taken advantage of by opportunistic parties

or behaviour. Secondly, this collaborative social identity can get tied to a group-think that can put blinkers on the effort to look for fresh ideas. Group or network loyalties may inhibit the required change or evolution. Thirdly, people or personality factors and cultural contexts among organisations require time and effort to sustain. Lastly, the usefulness or success criteria of networks need objective and honest evaluation.

Among large crisis responders, a new specialisation has emerged, i.e. the social media analyst, who while monitoring and engaging with Social Media community helps to detect problems, identify trends and senses real needs (Power & Kibell, 2017). He/she also detects and addresses rumours and misinformation among the community. He/she contributes to Situational Awareness enhancement by providing information such as videos after validation through means such as corroboration, authenticity check by reverse imaging, tracking reliable sources etc. He/she has to constantly update himself/herself on relevant handles, hashtags and websites. Assessing sentiments and emotions is another vital role along with a proactive program to mitigate, if required.

Training together

Large disasters are ‘wicked problems’ that are complex, virtually unsolvable and vexing. They are characterised by: a problem not understood till formulation of solution; a no-stopping rule; no right or wrong solutions; novelty and uniqueness; each problem a one-shot operation; and, no alternative solutions. Many approaches have been suggested to manage these problems. One is ‘muddling through’ which is based on using small and incremental actions from past-learning and adapt depending on current progress. A second approach by Stubbart (2008) advocates pre-disaster planning as a social learning process so that all agencies are on board a common ground of shared understanding (Stubbart, 1986). The underlined theme is that problem solving and learning go together when addressing wicked problems.

In a wicked problem it may be futile in terms of time constraints to fully grasp a situation and act in a most optimum manner. Expertise and experience can weigh limited factors and use heuristics to act fast. At the same time, feedback channels are open to make sense, as events unfold and ‘surprises’ creep up, to adapt and modify strategies. However, groupthink must take into account well documented biases such as Collocation Blindness which refers to the tendency for collocated members in a distributed command or ‘virtual’ control team to resist reaching out to distributed members even

when they may have better expertise. Another well-documented is In-Group bias, where members favour own group over people from other groups. In the effort to break up complex or wicked problems into manageable parts by different teams, a 'deference to expertise', wherever it lies, must never be lost sight of. This must be monitored by senior leaders who may be preoccupied in strategic oversight and garnering resources. The decision support must have mechanisms of feedback to senior levels and ability to allow informed dissent by experts on decisions being taken.

A table-top exercise simulating disaster response is planned around interaction, coordination mechanisms and integration of organisational differences and ethos. It focuses on communication between agencies for a collaborative system to emerge. These are very structured and normally unsuitable to creatively attack wicked problems. However, this can be addressed by: allowing players to tame the issue in the table-top rather than the planning stage; focus on unsolved and vexing issues rather than routine ones; and, use plans and lessons-learnt to collaborate in the present. Focusing on unplanned and unpredictable issues will allow more dynamism in table-tops.

Lessons learnt: Table-tops

In many multi-agency tasks in disaster response, a common refrain is lack of understanding of each other leading to suboptimal collaboration in a critical life and death scenario. Limited sharing of information is due to poor incompatible structures, poor information management, and lack of interoperability of equipment or plain agency agendas of keeping information to themselves. Misinformation or misunderstandings are due to lack of a common operating picture that is relevant and contextual to an agency. It could also be due to lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities and capabilities of each other. Confusion over leadership (shared, distributed or specialisation-based) also distorts mutual accommodation. A similar effect is caused by poor structure of command and control, which varies from phase to phase. Cultural differences in processes such as decision-making create friction if not countered with more experience of working and exercising together (Edzen, 2014). The following measures are suggested to ensure better collaboration and coordination in disaster response tasks between agencies:-

- Meta situation awareness is about knowing and understanding other agencies' capacities, action and status at a point of time. Along with clear roles and responsibilities, and areas of overlap and mutual

support, this will lead to automatic coordination to avoid conflict and duplication.

- Shared or compatible mental models are critical to Distributed Situational Awareness (DSA) and coordination among dispersed actors. This is possible by joint training, exercises and scenario-building. This is then supported by procedures, protocols and systems that allow each agency to augment their cognitive processes and personal schema to grasp real-time Situational Awareness. Therefore, the end-user is important in terms of form of communicated information.
- Overload of information needs to be avoided. Design of information flow must cater to individual group or agency requirements. DSA is based on just-enough and tailored information and not all that is available. This also aids quick decision making at dispersed location. The overall aim being the right information, in the right format and at right time.
- A ‘system’ of leadership that caters to distributed roles and tasks, changing priorities during different phases, specialisation focus at critical points and allows trust for collaboration has to be put in place. This can only happen if exercising jointly or gaining experience through actual work. Core task of such leadership also includes monitoring and evaluation of performance of teams.
- There may also be a need to incentivise collaboration through active or passive measures. Awareness and understanding of the benefits of a collaborative and synergised model can create all-round positivity, clarity and trust.

Way ahead

While armed forces continue to be somewhat media shy, the need to engage is ever increasing. Commanders often face this dilemma; on one side is the demand by journalists to be updated on issues, while on the other they deliberate on the exact words and authority for response. Often the first information about an incident or accident at another station is received from a defence journalist. As per policy, one is helpless in providing any input. The designated officer and those at Command HQ are able to clarify only after a day sometimes. In the absence of any communication, a journalist is free to interpret the situation as deemed and often ends up sensationalising it. The saving grace sometimes is an active Defence PRO who ensures

that news which is not in the interest of armed forces is suppressed or side tracked. The question then is the PRO's qualification, motivation and competence to do these tasks. In the process of engagement with the information environment including New Media, all agencies and elements of a nation need to be synchronised to act with coherence. This demands a strong core narrative around which they can exercise some flexibility and adaptability. Information dissemination to strengthen this core narrative is to be considered as strategic communication. This in turn requires refined capabilities at each level, especially at higher headquarters. Speed is of essence since even small untruths can snowball quickly to bigger truths as perceived on new media.

In the future, it would be advisable to have onboard cameras or UAV feeds when operations take place so that credible counter-narratives can be placed to discredit rival claims of collateral damage. The Indian Army practices information war in conflict zones such as J&K or Northeast quite effectively at times, besides benign public relations and image building exercises. A lot needs to be done to train, empower and improve risk-taking abilities of senior leadership in this regard. Media is also a feedback channel on the pulse of public perception. Strategic listening can be tracked on new media, while mass media can provide feedback on the pulse of the public. This requires subtlety, tact and expertise from senior leaders designated to engage the media. Blogs are another means in the realm of communication rather than just one-way information flow. Contextual background demands people from within being chosen to manage this.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS
PRACTICES
IN
INDIAN
UNIVERSITIES



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Abstract

Public Relations (PR), apart from managing organisational communication affairs, contributes significantly in Human Resource (HR), Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibilities. Both its functional and advisory role give important inputs in organisational operation and thus no management can ignore the existence of PR units in the organisation. Higher Education in India is going through major changes and apart from increasing enrolments, other issues such as quality of the HR, skill development and attracting students have become criteria to evaluate. In the recently launched National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) peer perception is adopted as a very crucial point that affects the overall ranking of the institution. In such environment Public Relations can play a vital role in attracting talents, improving image and overall ranking of the institution. This study is an attempt to discuss the status of the Public Relations in Public Sector Higher Educational institutions. The study highlights differences in the structure and functions of the PR in Central Government-funded Universities and State Government-funded Universities and its consequences.

Keywords

Public Relations, Higher Education, Educational Public Relations, National Institutional Ranking Framework, Human Resource

Public Relations helps organisation to create a social environment, which is favourable for its growth. It helps to develop milieu of trust and cooperation between an organisation and its public. “Public Relations is a process – that is a series of actions, changes, or functions that bring about a result” (Wilcox & Cameron, 2009). According to Hendrix (1995), “the public relations process is a method for solving problems. It has four phases: research, objectives, programming, and evaluation. Each element may be modified by the demands of different audiences or publics, including employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders, and, usually, the news media” (p.5). Public Relations help our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony.

Higher education in India

We have a very unique and diverse concept of education since Vedic period. Rigveda defines the objective of education as self-reliance and selfless. In the view of *Upanishadas* education helps achieving salvation. Education has been a symbol of social welfare, respect, high moral character and prosperity in our society. The aim of ancient Indian education was initially laid down by Vedas. According to Vedic world view, the world is pervaded by divinity and the aim of every living being is to achieve liberation (Sharma & Sharma, 1996). With established system of Gurukulas education was used to develop a person socially, economically, culturally intellectually and spiritually. Gurukulas under Acharya or Rishi (seer) offered need based education to the students with an objective to serve the society with skills, wisdom and character. In the Gurukula system a student was residing at the residence of the teacher as a family member and the whole institution was lived as a family. Bigger educational institutes were called Parishad where many teachers were teaching comparatively large number of students. Besides, Sammelans were organised by state or king where experts took part on intellectual discussions.

Modern higher education system

India’s higher education system is the third largest in the world, after China and the United States (Rienda et al., 2011; Times of India, 2014). The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grant Commission (UGC) which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps coordinate between the center and the state.

The British model influences our modern education system. Primary

and secondary education completes in ten years followed by two years of higher secondary or intermediate. After twelve years of primary and senior secondary course higher education starts with three-year/four-year and integrated graduation courses in various disciplines. This 10+2+3 year's education pattern is uniformly followed by all state boards/institutions which came into being after the recommendation of the Education Commission (1964-66).

Challenges to higher education

The contemporary higher education system is going through massive changes. A number of basic parameters such as access and reach of higher education to all is still less, public sector institutions are overcrowded with enrolment in conventional courses. Private institutions that are focused on market oriented courses pose great challenge to these institutions.

Public relations in Indian universities

Wilcox and Cameron (2009) have emphasised on the major role of public relations in all educational institutions. A college or university must keep up good relationship with its public. Public Relations contribute with varied range of activities and helps universities to develop and sustain a convivial relation with its public. Seitel (1997) opines that public Relations affect almost everyone who contact with other human beings. Public Relations is personal, practical and entirely human profession. Knowledge, experience and judgment of the individual or practitioner are three essential characters for successful public relations.

Ethics, truth and credibility are core values of public relations. Public Relations professionals work as a bridge between an organisation and its public and educational public relations must follow the pattern of listening and speaking – a two-way communication. Public Relations practitioner must have the understanding of educational public, issues and functionality of the universities.

Nowadays Indian universities are facing major shifts in organisational management and public dealings. These institutions are supposed to generate money through their core activities of education and research. Therefore, the objectives of public dealing and relationship factors have been shifted to a new platform. Public relations practitioner has to understand these shifts and they have to contribute through marketing communication, branding and public dealing. Most universities and institutions of higher learning have systemized themselves to win public favour. Imagination of Public Relations

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can convert a student prank into an asset. These days the educational system is facing tremendous pressure on financial, branding and management fronts. Public Relations can earn confidence, support and credibility for the organisation (Cutlip & Allen, 1985).

The higher educational institutions in India have gone through key changes in recent years. The post globalisation scenario has seen introduction to franchise system, self financed institutions; huge tuition fee, educational loans, and privatisation of higher education. There are more than 500 universities across the country but there is a sharp difference in term of quality and people's perception. Quality of education, student strength, industry cooperation, outreach, research and development, development of e-platform and some other issues pose challenges before them. Social and democratic institutions such as media are judging these institutions regularly. And pressure groups, civil society and their perception play a crucial role in progress and survival of higher studies institutions.

Public Relations can help in developing a positive image environment leading to an interactive interrelationship and positive reputation. It can help in building media relations, issue management, publicity and counseling. It can bridge, act as a negotiator, and as a spokesperson for universities. Modern educational institutions need to have a good relation with media, pressure groups, policy makers, and the common public. These people influence their interest and progress. Therefore specialised public relations is an essential requirement to deal with complex relationship between management and public. Unfortunately Indian universities have not taken Public Relations (PR) work sincerely, so either a casual approach is adopted or they use public relations in very narrow sense.

Most universities utilise the ability of PR for media publicity and associated works. PR professionals in such organisations applied in maximum for writing news release, manage media for positive coverage and some reception works. Media relations and publicity through mass media and specially news media is the major job assigned to Public Relations by Indian Universities so other functions are rarely performed or utilized. PR very rarely play any role in policy making, and in most of the cases conventional policy of community relations, relations with other stakeholders, use of communication tools, research, scanning are used or followed by PR person.

Review of literature

Public Relations research has grown exponentially over the past 100

years. Currently a number of companies offer services that measure and evaluate Public Relations activities. Yet, even with the increased attention paid to the discipline, significant variations continue to exist with the varying range of approaches to Public Relations measurement and evaluation. These variations result in a lack of standard measures that can be used to gauge the success of a Public Relations program as well as in an uneven overall quality of the research being conducted. (Michaelson & Macleod, 2007).

In India Public Relations research started with a motive of getting glimpses of public opinion and to evaluate the success of Public Relations efforts of the concerned units. At present Public Relations research can be categorised into three categories – research conducted by professional organisations’ and corporate, government research and academic research. According to Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg (2013), “educational institutions are usually non-profit organisations, but they may either be public or private”. Although they have significant dealings with government, their work is quite unlike that of public institutions, which, being a part of government, are more open to the scrutiny of taxpayers and the whims of politicians. The type of PR practiced in state educational institutions is often suited to a person who enjoys dealing with the government. PR people in all educational institutions are likely to be involved in development, which includes fund-raising. According to National School Public Relations Association (2012), “educational Public Relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programmes and services of an educational organization”.

Wilcox and Cameron (2009) have emphasised on the major role of Public Relations in all educational institutions. Public Relations contribute with a varied range of activities and helps universities to develop and sustain a convivial relation with its public. In government relations, community relations, and communication with publics and dealing with contemporary issues: Public relations play a vital role with organising, creative and coordination function. It involves in the development, fund raising and enhancing the prosperity of the institutions.

Lancaster (2005) described that educational public relations officers serve as information stations by providing information to students, employees, and general public through mass media publications, leaflets and brochures on the university programmes. Sriramesh (2000) in his study reviewed eighteen organisations in Bengaluru in 1991. The study led to the development of the ‘personal influence model’ for public relations. This model describes how development of significant relationships with

strategically placed individuals was considered crucial to Public Relations in India.

Gregory (2001) has argued that there is a major strategic role for public relations in organisations. As expert boundary-spanners, Public Relations professionals can play a key role in the dominant coalition by gathering and interpreting information from the external and internal environments and presenting this as strategic intelligence. Henderson (2001) suggested a four-step process for managing communication in universities i.e. research, planning, communication, and evaluation.

Sriramesh (2000) mentioned that still press agency or publicity model is predominantly used by most of Indian organisations for managing their Public Relations. In addition personal influence model is also practiced as an emerging model. Moreover, two-way symmetrical model for communicating within and outside found with empirical evidence in the study. Hendrix (1995) elaborated public relations as organisational communication practice with management perspective.

Grunig's (1989) press agency/publicity model is descriptive of the propaganda feel of PR, seeking media attention in almost any way possible. Grunig's public information model is similar to the press agency/publicity model. Practitioners of this model offer generally accurate information, but usually do not volunteer negative information. Grunig's two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models are more advanced, they include the element of research; however, only one of these models holds real promise toward attitudinal change. The fourth model defined by Grunig is the two-way symmetrical model. This model has effects that benefit both the organisation and the public. Organisations are practicing this model for bargaining, negotiating and strategies of conflict resolution to bring about changes in both the organisation and the public.

The mentioned studies show that Public Relations research in India can be broadly categorised into two streams- professional and academic. Professional research has been established to fulfill industrial requirements. Most academic Public Research in India is aimed to evaluate the role of Public Relations, and to analyse the performance of professionals in a public setting or in the society. In the area of academic or higher educational Public Relations very less work has been done so far and it gives scope for scholars to explore the practice and importance of Public Relations in higher education.

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Methodology

The Researcher has used case study and observation approach as the main method of study. Primary data is collected with the help of constructed questionnaire schedule. Secondary data is collected with the help of different published or publically available credited sources. Apart from analysing individual institutional cases comparative analysis has also been used to draw reasonable inferences from the study. Since the size of data (less than 30) was small therefore qualitative analysis was preferred.

Universe and sample

Central and State universities of the country were the universe and Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Central University of Tibetan Studies (CUTS) as central higher studies institution and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith (MGKVP) and Sampurnanada Sanskrit University (SSU) as state government controlled higher studies institution selected as the case/sample of the research. A comparative analysis with the help of selected parameters/variables has been performed on these organisation's PR functionality, approach and structure; which are operational in the same environment.

Public relations in universities: Job profile

The PR departments in Indian universities are engaged in the task of information, image management, publicity, internal communications, media relations, and associated activities. These departments are also engaged in publicising policies, changes, and activities of organisation among various publics. The PR departments inform the public of the policies, programmes, developmental activities, events, performance, achievements of concerned organisation throughout the year with the help of tools such as press release, guided media tours, press conferences, press meets and interviews, articles, features, brochures, booklets, handbills, exhibitions, advertisement and through online activities. Several publicity campaigns are being carried out in order to inform and educate the people on operations, services, and development of the organisation.

Public Relations department maintains dialogue with the target group through regular flow of positive information in order to sensitise, inform, motivate, and convince their opinion and to gain positive understanding for organisation. With established inhouse functioning of Public Relations these departments strive to maintain cordial relation and better coordination with media and other departments to conduct the Public Relations work efficiently

and smoothly.

The organisation and function of PR in select universities

With the help of distant observation, visits, interaction and physical verification organisation and functioning of the PR departments of the select universities have been explained. General setup, reporting pattern and line of command, job rotation pattern and internal communication pattern has been described.

Public relations setup

Banaras Hindu University has a well-established Public Relations department. This division, headed by Information and Public Relations Officer and assisted by an Assistant Public Information Officer, consists of two units' viz. Information & Public Relations Unit and Publication Unit.

Public Relations set up in MGKVP is adhoc in nature. A person from the teaching community is designated as the PRO and he offers his services to the university as extension approach. Earlier a full flagged committee was serving as Public relations and publicity committee with chairman and various members that is dismantled now.

Sampurnand Sanskrit University has an established PR Office. Public Relations Officer (PRO) is the head of the office. He reports to the registrar. Three other staffs including two office assistants and one attendant are serving in the office. They report to the PRO on routine matters. Central University of Tibetan Studies has regular Public Relations office which works under the direct control of the registrar. It works as the official information felicitator and helps people to get news and information of the organisation.

Reporting patterns

The hierarchy of authority in an organisation is designed to benefit it and the employees. It is important to the sustained success of the organisation. A simple pyramid structure is found in the hierarchy of Rublic Relations Office in the BHU. Top to bottom command is followed in placing order and subordination. Planning, coordinating, leadership and administration functions are taken care of by top management i.e. Chairman, PRO, and to some extent APRO. Others report to them and work on the planning done by top managers.

Only one person has been deputed as the PRO in MGKVP so any managerial structure is not created in the organisation for PR unit. No line of command is found as only one person is working. However, PRO creates Hierarchy from top to bottom in term of reporting to VC and Registrar. Job rotation does not exist. Meetings, interaction on idea generation etc are used for internal communication.

A simple pyramid structure is found in the hierarchy of Public Relations office in the SSU. Top to bottom command is followed in placing order and subordination. Planning, coordinating, leadership and administration functions are taken care of by top management. A simple pyramid structure is found in the hierarchy of public relations office in the CUTS also. Registrar actively takes care of the affairs of the office. PRO reports to the Registrar and other staffs report to the PRO.

Job rotation

Mixed job rotation is observed in the BHU's PR office. Some posts such as PRO, APRO, and Photo Artist are non-transferable as these are sanctioned for PR works exclusively. Others have interdepartmental job transfer pattern. No job mobility exists in MGKVP. Mixed job rotation is observed in the SSU. Some posts such as PRO is non-transferable as this is a sanctioned post for PR works exclusively. Others have interdepartmental job transfer pattern. Internal and interdepartmental job mobility exists in the CUTS.

Internal communication

Internal communication simply indicates the sharing of information within the organisation for Public Relations purpose. In BHU, Public Relations Office uses a number of methods and means to conduct internal communication affairs. With inbuilt infrastructure it communicates electronically, through print media, through notice board and circulation and through direct communication. Mobile, telecom and telephone are also used for it. Meetings, interaction, idea generation etc are the main practices or part of internal communication in MGKVP. Normally linear formal internal communication pattern exists in the PR Office of CUTS. Other units mostly do communication with other departments and PR has very little role into it. In case of communication with public both electronic and print media tools are used. Notice, requests, notes, SMS, telephone etc are also used.

Data analysis and interpretation

Opinion of the PR professionals analysed to come to the meaningful

conclusion. The analysis was aimed to highlight issues such as management approach and nature of functioning, differences between established and casual PR setups, differences between central and state university PR setup. All professionals working in the sample university's PR departments were questioned with the help of interview schedule. Total 27 people (minor population) were found working hence all included into the survey.

Table 1: Nature of Job

Sr.	University	Nature of job and no. of respondents				
		Managerial	Administrative	Clerical	Multi tasking	Other
1.	S.S.U.	1	2	3	2	
2.	C.U.T.S.	1	1	2	2	
3.	M.G.K.V.P		1			
4.	B.H.U.		3	6		3

All sample (Table 1) PR departments have occupied different capacity workers to perform their duties. In terms of number more clerical and multi-tasking staff is associated with PR departments indicating conventional administrative structure of these departments. Out of the total samples MGKVP does not have an established PR department. At the top level more people have perceived their job as administrative job nature. Thus, it was found that PR job in both central and state universities is managed with administrative mindset.

Table 2: Job Mobility Patterns

Sr.	University	Internal Only	Inter-Departmental
1.	S.S.U.	1	3
2.	C.U.T.S.	3	
3.	M.G.K.V.P.	1	
4.	B.H.U.	12	

Job mobility (Table 2) indicates job specification. Data revealed two distinguished patterns of mobility of the personnel i.e. internal only and inter-departmental. In case of regular managerial staff, only internal mobility

or vertical mobility is found such as in case of PRO and APRO and technical staff. In case of clerical staff inter-departmental or departmental mobility is found. Thus, it can be said that in case of PR skilled personnel only vertical mobility and in case of clerical staff horizontal mobility is found.

Table 3: Availability of Basic Communication Facilities

Sr.	Institute	PAS	Conference room	EDB	Printing press	Net	Fixed phone	Fax, X-rox, printer & Scanner	CCTV	Still camera	Video camera
1.	S.S.U.	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
2.	C.U.T.S.	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
3.	M.G.K.V.P	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2
4.	B.H.U.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

1 = Yes, 2 = No. [PAS: Public Address System, EDB:Electronic Display Board]

Variations have been observed in availability of media means (Table 3) in concerned university PR departments. Banaras Hindu University and Tibetan University have adequate in house availability of media tools. Advanced infrastructural facility such as conference room under the premise of department was found in BHU only. However other universities use university's common conference room if required. Internet and computers are available to all departments. Only CUTS and BHU have still and Video cameras and Public Address System. All PR departments have printing press facilities at university level. In terms of availability of media tools MGKVP is in a very deprived condition. On the basis of data a clear distinction can be drawn between central and state universities resourcefulness. The universities with established departments such as BHU, CUTS and SSU have regular facilities and universities where PR departments are not established and are run on adhocism have to make need based arrangements by borrowing or on rental basis.

Table 4: Specialized skills of the PR Personnel

Sr.	University	Internet use	Photography	Videography	Data Analysis	Content writing	Any other
1	S.S.U.	4	2			2	
2.	C.U.T.S.	3	1		3	1	
3.	M.G.K.V.P.	1	1			1	
4.	B.H.U.	4	2		3	1	4

Public Relations is a skill based task. All managerial staff is skilled in photography skills but no one in Videography. Managerial staff found familiar in content writing skills and data analysis and non-managerial staff have skills of data analysis. Data indicates that Photography and content writing job is handled only by persons exclusively engaged for PR works.

Table 5: Guidelines to circulate Information to the Media

Sl. No.	Institute	Mandatory to circulate via PRO	Only Administrative information circulation through PRO	Any other
1.	S.S.U.		X	x
2.	C.U.T.S.	X	X	x
3.	M.G.K.V.P.	X	X	x
4.	B.H.U.		X	x

BHU, SSU, MGKVP have guidelines (Table 5) to circulate such information through PRO only. In CUTS Registrar also circulate such information. All the respondents are well aware of this fact. Thus, it can be said that PRO is an official route or channel in universities to circulate information to media. BHU and SSU administration have made compulsory to circulate information to media through PRO only. CUTS and MGKVP do not have such guidelines.

Table 6: Managing Facebook, Twitter profile and Blogs

Sl. No.	University	Yes	No	Coordinating Individual blogs	University does not have FB or Twitter account
1.	S.S.U.		✓		✓
2.	C.U.T.S.		✓		✓
3.	M.G.K.V.P.		✓		✓
4.	B.H.U.		✓		✓

No university is using Facebook or Twitter (Table 6) and they do not have any official profile or page on Facebook or Twitter. Thus, it can be said that no central or state university is interested in using Facebook or Twitter for Public Relations.

Table 7: Use of SMS

Sr.	University	At personal level	Use bulk SMS	Only media invitation
1.	S.S.U.		✓	✓
2.	C.U.T.S.	✓		✓
3.	M.G.K.V.P.		✓	✓
4.	B.H.U.	✓	✓	✓

As shown in the Table 7, PR department of SSU found engaged in using SMS services at personal level as well as for bulk SMS. In case of CUTS, PR department use SMS services at personal level only. In case of MGKVP it is being used for bulk SMS and media invitation. In case of BHU it is used at personal level (managerial 50%, non-managerial 66%) and only for media invitation (33% managerial and 15% non-managerial). Thus, it can be mentioned that university PR departments use SMS services frequently. At personal level everybody uses it. Bulk SMS are used by departments mostly to invite media persons.

Table 8: Preparing Press Release for University

Sr	University	PRO officials	Coordinators of program	Any experienced person
1.	S.S.U.	✓		
2.	C.U.T.S.		✓	
3.	M.G.K.V.P.		✓	
4.	B.H.U.	✓		

Most universities follow two-point model in preparing press release. In case of university events the PR office is preparing it and in case of departmental and other events coordinators of the programme prepares it.

Table 9: Job of Spokesperson Assigned to PRO

Sr.	University	Yes	No	Can't say
1.	S.S.U.	✓		
2.	C.U.T.S.		✓	
3.	M.G.K.V.P.	✓		
4.	B.H.U.	✓		

In most of the universities PRO is an authorised spokesperson of university except CUTS. CUTS has PR team on contractual basis. Thus, a significant correlation is found between existence of PRO and assigning him the role of spokesperson of the university. It can also be assumed that PRO is officially recognised as a source of information by university authority.

Table 10: Maintaining media relations

Sr.	University	Yes	No	Can't say
1.	S.S.U.	✓		
2.	C.U.T.S.	✓		
3.	M.G.K.V.P.	✓		
4.	B.H.U.	✓		

It is revealed that all university PR setups, irrespective of their regular or ad hoc media settings, manage media relations as core task. Thus, it can be concluded that press agency model of Public Relations does exist as a dominant model in university Public Relations practices.

Table 11: Crisis Communication

Sl.No.	Institute	Yes	No	Can't say
1.	S.S.U.			✓
2.	C.U.T.S.		✓	
3.	M.G.K.V.P.	✓		
4.	B.H.U.	✓		

It was found (Table 11) that only BHU and MGKVP PR establishments have used or contributed in handing crisis situation through communication inputs. Major role is played by university administration so it can be said that the use of PR in crisis communication is very limited in university crisis management.

Conclusions

Public Relations is not a new or weird practice for higher education institutions in India. As responsible institution to society all educational institutions are practicing various tools of Public Relations for information,

education and motivation. They need to establish good relationship with public to sustain and be credible. Creating positive image environment is also an essential element for its prosperity. Moreover nowadays, in the age of open economy the doors of higher education are opened for private sector as well as for foreign institutions so competition is an emerging trend in higher education sector. To survive in the competition such institutions need to create brand value for organisation, products and their degrees. Therefore they need established Public Relations to cover their goals.

As it was pointed out in this study also that Indian higher education is going through major changes in all respects. On the one hand some institutions have scored positive values and they are overwhelmed with student enrolments and positive response from the HR peril and job market. But a number of institutions are lacking behind as neither have they had the student support nor they have enough brand value to attract job market for their students.

The study has drawn some conclusions on the importance of Public Relations activities for institutions of higher education. The globalised India has seen an explosion in the media and business scene. With the advent of liberalisation Public Relations in India has emerged as a prosperous industry. Business organisations look to Public Relations for strategic communications, not simply for media relations. It emerged as specialty communications and as a powerful and supportive management function to achieve organisational goals smoothly, a booster for positive growth and an expert in managing people and relations.

Public Relations in higher education has also witnessed major changes. Universities have realised the importance of PR in achieving their objectives and a good number of universities have established Public Relations departments. It was found that universities with no PR setup (MGKVP) or casual PR setup (CUTS) do not have established and scientific practice of Public Relations. The basic PR job is on need basis performed with administrative approach, they score more negative coverage (MGKVP) or less visibility (CUTS). Therefore it can be concluded that public relations should be an established departments in all universities.

The study revealed some valuable and interesting findings, which are indicative and explanatory on Public Relations performances.

In the study variations recorded in functional structure of the Public Relations departments in select universities. Some universities spend a great amount on Public Relations so a well-established structure does exist. Some

universities have not taken Public Relations activities seriously and it is also reflected in their structure. Organisations with established Public Relations setup have more regular and multifaceted activities than the universities with causal setup. Status and efficiency correlation exist in university Public Relations. For example, in BHU Public Relations Department found in well-established leading to an efficient and varied structure. In BHU media relations, publication, publicity, website management, Studio is recognised responsibility for PR. Another university with defined PR setup is SSU. Though, it is not as resourceful and structured as BHU but due to presence of established setup Public Relations activities are handled in a more organised way. In case of CUTS PR job is done by contractual staff. So their efficiency is low and they do not have enough freedom to work. MGKVP does not have formally organised PR department so its Public Relations activities are only able to manage marginally media coverage.

Presence of defined and established infrastructure is essential to get benefits of PR. As universities nowadays have become more complex and they have more diversified, multi-ethnic public therefore structured PR departments have great roles in communications management. Practicing two-way symmetrical model and conducting research-based Public Relations activities cannot be done effectively without established and structured PR departments.

The study has inferred a definite correlation between efficient Public Relations practices and established PR setup. Since, communication is a major factor for smooth functioning and growth of universities so a well-established PR department is suggested for all universities.

Another important finding of the study indicates orthodox and stereotyping of understanding and execution of Public Relations works. Most PR departments are focused on media relations only. Their core activity is identified as the felicitator of media to secure good coverage in news media. Their approach is stereotyped because in media relations they follow ‘Do- invite-manage-publish’ approach. In this approach they invite media persons when some formal event is being organised. They please them with their hospitality and with personal relations and request and try to secure publication/broadcasting of news on university. They do not go to create value of event, so it becomes a news value for media. This stereotyping should be replaced with balanced media relations.

The study revealed limited use of online Public Relations practices in Indian Universities. Except BHU other PR departments do not have any web

based Public Relations practices. In BHU though the PR Department's name is mentioned on the front page of the official website of the university but unfortunately it could not be opened. In case of SSU, MGKVP and CUTS their names do not appear on the webpage. Their absence can be correlated with giving them less importance into the information function. Again stereotyped role can be mentioned. Still information is a subject of administrative management so PR departments are not properly utilised in this regard. It is a concern for image management and branding.

When observed closely, in the modern PR practices social media is a game changer. Unfortunately no university has formally managed its presence on social media; blogs, Facebook and Twitter are still unexplored and show the limitations of efficiency of PR departments in terms of online Public Relations. Their absence limits their scope to connect with youth and global audience and they are unable to filter the information flow. During the study it was found that a number of pages is created in the name of each university. These pages are possibly run by students and friends studying in university, so an incomplete and distorted image can be seen. This should not happen more. This also reflects orthodox and old mind-set of PR people and university administration. They have undermined the importance of social media, unable to nurture its benefits.

Study revealed infrastructural deficiencies. A significant difference is observed between established PR Departments and available infrastructural and financial support from non-established ones. BHU has full fledged establishment for PR so it has inbuilt conference room, lab, internet setup, studio, Public Address System, and logistics support. SSU has established PR department so they also have a separate space for office. But in case of CUTS, and MGKVP only ad-hoc functioning exist. In absence of space and budget even normal PR jobs suffer badly. The sluggish administrative system and setup hampers their efficiency and mobility so a casual and inefficient performance, often delayed, appears as outcome.

In today's word PR has been established as strategic function. It has a role in the policy making and planning of communication strategies. But in university setup PR is not recognised as managerial function. Even top officials of the PR have perceived it as an administrative job. It indicates that paradigm shift has not taken place even in the functioning of Public Relations departments. It is viewed as a tool of publicity. Planning and research are though important but neglected areas of Public Relations. Their research and analysis is limited to simple calculation of number of items published or broadcast by news media. In their job they practice just 'Cut-paste-show'

approach. They do not compare it on how much they have communicated and how much was published, so absence of logical evaluation of publicity work is found. It, further becomes a reason for adopting 'Please and publish' approach. Public Relations departments need to change this 'please and publish approach' with 'create news value and score coverage' approach.

Suggestions

This study suggests the following points for effective PR practices in Higher Education institutions-

- (1) With modern approach PR should have a role in framing communication policies. PR should be consulted for event planning, media interaction, information development, extension and outreach activities and community relations.
- (2) All universities should have established PR departments to manage their communications needs appropriately and scientifically.
- (3) All PR departments should have enough infrastructural facilities.
- (4) PR departments should be developed as a resource centre for information and communication with all internal and external public.
- (5) Skill specification should be framed and a person with a degree in Mass communication or Public Relations should be given responsibility of PR job.
- (6) PR departments need to concentrate more on 'planning-execution-research' approach.
- (7) Research should be a core job of the PR departments. They should give more attention to feedback research, media analysis, environmental scanning and image scanning.
- (8) PR departments should increase their online presence. They should have a separate website or a distinct space on official website. This corner should be interactive and updated on a regular basis.
- (9) On time PR should have updated information on events, policies, statements, decisions, media coverage, backgrounder and audio-

visual contents.

- (10) University PR should think to initiate Social Media Public Relations. A university should have a Facebook profile, twitter presence and presence on other social media with updates.
- (11) PR departments should manage blogs on Internet. In this blog management one blog should be contributed by PR people and link of other blogs should be given.
- (12) The study suggests adaptation of balanced and proactive approach for Public Relations Departments of the universities. Instead of giving all importance to media PR professionals should try to establish relationship with the source or public. This approach will help in nurturing both traditional and future public with positive attitude towards organisation.
- (13) The study suggests stopping political entries in PR works. PR job should not be assigned to university professors. PR departments should have the liberty to work in a professional way and their work should be evaluated on professional and objective manner.
- (14) University management should know that image is a result of performance. 'Performance and recognition' approach should be supreme to expect positives from the PR departments.

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ABSTRACTS

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The Odyssey of Portrayal: Woman in Indian Cinema

Akanksha Shukla

This study is an effort to understand the various stereotypical and novel images portrayed by women in Indian Cinema. All vehicles of media play a significant role in the life of an individual but the socio-cultural force that cinema holds is the strongest. Various media theories have been formulated which promulgate the idea that what is reflected in media, particularly cinema is a mirror image of the society. This study traces imagery as portrayed in Indian Cinema and points out works where the mould has been broken to go beyond the skin deep beauty and explore the inner self. The conclusion highlights the tangential relations between media, state and religion and its cascading effects on portrayal in cinema.

Visual Framing in Indian Print Media: A Preliminary Investigation

Sunil Kumar

This study investigates the manner in which Indian newspapers use visual frames to communicate news. Using the example of a news event covered by four leading English language newspapers published from Delhi, it analyses how each newspaper had used different frames in respect of visual data available from the same common pool of photographs. The study points to the scope for further research on visual framing of news in the Indian print media through correlation with the relevant editorial points of view.

Communicating Social Change through Cinema: A Case Study

Swikrita Dowerah

Media can play an important role in the success of communication for development initiatives by highlighting key issues in development and promoting new ideas among the people. Experts have acknowledged the role of entertainment in educating the masses. In this case, films, with their ability to interlace information with entertainment, can serve as a powerful tool in laying the foundation for change. This study aims to critically analyse the social issues raised by popular Bollywood films and their role in creating an ideal ground for putting forward key issues in the society which could further aid in the better reception of development initiatives by the people. The study offers a reading of Ashutosh Gowariker's *Swades* to emphasise

how films can embed in its narrative social issues without compromising its entertainment value and therefore serve as an efficient tool for communication for development.

Cartooning in Journalism: Mapping the Origin and Growth of Cartooning in India

Mrinal Chatterjee

This study maps the origin, growth and present status of cartoons in India. Though India has had a long tradition of lampooning and caricature in its popular culture, 'cartoon' as the term is understood now was a British import to India. Gradually the *desi* fervour grew, and the typical Indian humour began to play a greater role. Cartoons in India exposed the soft social underbelly of our society, it helped India's freedom struggle by fanning hostile attitude against the British administrators and Government. It played a role of social critique. After independence, cartoons, especially political cartoons became even more popular. However, it suffered a decline in finding space in mainstream newspapers from 1990s. This study attempts to analyse the reasons thereof and it also attempts to document the different sub genres of present cartooning in India.

Reflective Image of Honour Killings in Cinema: Anthropological Inferences from Tamil Cinema

Arunkumar A.S. & Jesurathnam Devarapalli

With the series of incidents of honour killing frequenting in media and channels in recent past, the bilingual (*in Tamil and Telugu*) film *Gauravam* reckons significant accord for its stern message on honour killing. This study with the anthropological acumen has tried to foreground the structural root cause of honour killing with reference to India, that is, the caste underpinnings in social realm and link it with the contents and allegories of cinema – *Gauravam*. While there have been many Tamil cinemas that had the caste resignifications, the film *Gauravam* stands for its critique on caste system in terms of honour killing. This study therefore, probes the caste contours of Tamil cinema as well as the portrayal of women as chastity and pronouncing ritual status. In doing so, it compares the core valour of theme that were set in general contour for Tamil cinema. Moreover, the study will culturally try to understand the resentment of society towards the choice of mates and love marriages.

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