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Role of Media in Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

The institutions of communication and technology have become so prominent in world politics that it has altered the nature of power both domestically and internationally. Marvin Kalb, who provided the foreword to the famous book 'the media and foreign policy' has consequently stated "indeed, only the foolish foreign leader can any longer afford to underestimate the power of TV news."² The growing convergence of politics and communication suggests that the world is moving towards the media dominated governing system. While some scholars label this system as 'medialism', others refer it as 'tele-democracy'³. Tele-democracy is known as the major component of media diplomacy. There exists a vacuum in the existing knowledge relating to the role of communication in diplomacy as the image portrayed by the media can be easily tarnished due to 'editorial bias' or 'acts of carelessness'. The constructive role of the media in formulating foreign policies and peacekeeping treaties is always at stake. Although each source of the media has its own decision making and operational bodies, the ruling government tends to affect the autonomy of the media by creating the problem of 'bias'. Since the media is a great ride of power, its negative aspects also spread like wildfire. A single cartoon depiction or a single speech may be converted into a hate speech leading to a hot debate. This is where journalistic integrity clashes with public diplomacy and the freedom of expression is at stake.

Keywords: *Role of media, editorial bias, freedom of expression, public diplomacy, public relations.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There exists a vacuum in the existing knowledge relating to the role of communication in diplomacy as the image portrayed by the media can be easily tarnished due to editorial bias or acts of carelessness. The constructive role of the media in formulating foreign policies and peacekeeping treaties is always at stake. The humanitarian aspects may not be analyzed deeply, but despite these problems posed by the media, it has emerged as a major tool to govern public

¹ Author is a student at Symbiosis law school, Hyderabad, India.

² MARVIN KALB, THE MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY, 'Foreword' in Simon Serfaty, 14 (St. Martin's Press, 1991).

³ David Gergen, *Diplomacy in a Television Age: The Dangers of Teledemocracy*, The Media and Foreign Policy, 47-63 (1990).

diplomacy programmes, and it continues to influence diplomacy in multiple ways, ranging from Radio diplomacy, Tele diplomacy to cultural exchange programmes between nations. This influence is observed globally due to the restriction imposed on the global media by certain countries⁴. Although each source of the media has its own decision making and operational bodies, the ruling government tends to affect the autonomy of the media by creating the problem of 'bias'. Since the media is a great ride of power, its negative aspects also spread like wildfire. A single cartoon depiction or a single speech may be converted into a hate speech leading to a hot debate. The most relevant example was seen in the cold war era when diplomacy fell under the scrutiny of the media⁵. This is where journalistic integrity clashes with public diplomacy and the freedom of expression is at stake.

The institutions of communication and technology have become so prominent in world politics that it has altered the nature of power both domestically and internationally. Marvin Kalb, who provided the foreword to the famous book 'the media and foreign policy' has consequently stated "indeed, only the foolish foreign leader can any longer afford to underestimate the power of TV news."⁶ The growing convergence of politics and communication suggests that the world is moving towards the media dominated governing system. While some scholars label this system as 'medialism', others refer it as 'tele-democracy'⁷. Tele-democracy is known as the major component of media diplomacy.

II. MEDIA AS A GLOBAL DIPLOMAT

The history of public diplomacy can be traced back to the coinage of this term by U.S. diplomat Edmund Gullion in the mid 1960's⁸. Initially, it was developed to dissociate governmental information from overseas propaganda, basically used by ancient newspapers such as the New York Times, the London Times, etc⁹. However, over time, it has developed a different angle which is far away from public affairs. Now, public diplomacy is redesigned to communicate policy messages to its own domestic audiences and the execution of foreign policies based on the influence of public attitudes. Although Edmund Gullion is credited to have coined the

⁴ Oginni, Simon Oyewole, and Joash Ntenga Moitui, *Social Media and Public Policy Process in Africa: Enhanced Policy Process in Digital Age*, 14, Consilience, pp. 158–172 (2015).

⁵ Gilboa, Eytan, *Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616, pp. 55–77 (2008).

⁶ MARVIN KALB, *THE MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY*, 'Foreword' in Simon Serfaty, 14 (St. Martin's Press, 1991).

⁷ David Gergen, *Diplomacy in a Television Age: The Dangers of Teledemocracy*, *The Media and Foreign Policy*, 47-63 (1990).

⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Routledge Handbooks Online, (Nov 2008).

⁹ Forty-First Congress, 3rd Session, *New York Times*, 2, (January 20, 1871).

modern meaning of public diplomacy in 1965, the New York Times is reported to have used this term in a congressional debate in 1871.

Public diplomacy has emerged to the new controversial and expanding field in terms of global interactive dimension of diplomacy. Public diplomacy is shaped by several factors, including the agents and networks through which the information is disseminated. Public diplomacy can be understood as the key mechanism which helps to foster the mutual trust of nations and leads to productive relationships between countries in the form of treaties, memorandums, etc. There is no consensual-fixed definition for public diplomacy, so it opens the doors for the wide interpretation of this term.

Although maintaining good diplomatic ties with other countries is a must for every country, India is observed to have adopted a different approach in this regard. It has often taken such relation for granted which has affected its reputation and relationship with its neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, China and Nepal. These recent developments in India have been highlighted by Abhishek Rai and Armaan Arora concerning the abrogation of article 370 in Kashmir, resistance on the issue of CAA, and others¹⁰. They suggest that an ambassadorial dialogue is the need of the hour to backup the worsening situations.

Alexis de Tocqueville states in his book “Mass media, politics and democracy¹¹” that the media is the cause of action in any democracy. Democracies introduce geniuses, but it's more important contribution is of the ideas which it injects in the society.

Diplomacy has always been a subject of scrutiny by the media¹². The traditional role of media led to a more tailorable form of communication but in the modern information age warfare, Media has emerged to be an influential and far-reaching tool. It is used as an effective tool for modern warfare as the internet not only renders the power to read news but also to create content based on an individual's opinions. Often fake news is injected into mainstream media which injects propaganda into the society and often becomes the point of ‘cyber warfare’.

(A) Traditional Domestic Media

Media may be categorised into two types based on its reach- traditional domestic media and the international media. TV, newspapers and radio are traditional means of mass communication, but they come with a set of weaknesses inherent in them that is quite prominent. They are based on one way communication and hence lead to a huge gap between

¹⁰ Abhishek Rai & Armaan Arora, *Changing Contours of International Relations- How India 'Undid' its 70 Years of Diplomacy* (08 Jan, 2021).

¹¹ JOHN STREET, *MASS MEDIA, POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY* (2 ed., Macmillan Education UK, 1988).

¹² Young Sam Ma, *The role of global media in public diplomacy*, chinadaily.com (Nov. 11, 2014).

the information conveyed by the media and the information perceived by the public. While social media is a means of international communication which is a two way process and bridges the gap posed by traditional media.

Public diplomacy is the means through which a sovereign country communicates with other nations. It is the transparent means by which the overseas audience is influenced for promoting foreign policy goals. Traditionally, this was seen as a state-to-state communication through the means of official representatives who represented sovereign states. It includes programmes like language training, education exchange programmes, cultural events etc. These activities tend to portray the desired image of the country in the receiving country.

However, the growing incidences of terror attacks in the recent past has again shifted the focus of practitioners from the traditional narrow aspect of the state based conception to the new broader scope of public diplomacy empowered by non state actors for democratization of information. In the grave International crisis, the media provides as the means of communication between rival parties. During the Iran Hostage crisis, the press became the medium of communication between the Us and the terrorists holding hostages¹³. This new diplomacy is based on new media outlets and communication technology which is mutually benefiting inter-state relations.

Generally the government uses telecommunication and radio stations as a means to public diplomacy, but it also hires public relations firms and lobbyists in the target country under the domestic relations variant to achieve its goals¹⁴. Domestic public relations are preferred when the government tries to hide the true sources and funding authorities behind it. The prominent example of this theory was evident in the 1991 Gulf conflict. When president George W. Bush needed media and congressional support to forcefully remove Saddam Hussein from power in Kuwait, the Kuwaiti monarchs hired the American public relations firms to generate support from American public to conduct a successful campaign in the USA¹⁵.

(B) The International Media

Diplomacy primarily refers to the international negotiation by the elected or appointed officials to defend or express their interests on a global platform. The traditional diplomacy was

¹³ James F. Larson, *Television and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Iran Hostage Crisis*, Journal of Communication, 36, 4ed. , Indiana University Press, (1988).

¹⁴ Dennis L. Wilcox, Phillip H. Ault and Warren K. Agee, *Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics*, Harper Collins, 3rd ed.(1992).

¹⁵ Jarol B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy: Managing Kuwait's Image During the Gulf Conflict*, The Media, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy in the Gulf War, The University of Chicago Press (1994).

interpersonal and formal, and usually protected by secrecy¹⁶. Former U.S President, Thomas Woodrow Wilson who was the architect of the League of Nations and also led U.S into world war, had stated in his “Fourteen points speech” in 1918 to eliminate all private international Understandings so that diplomacy prevails frankly in public view¹⁷. This was a blueprint of new diplomacy. It is associated with exposing diplomacy with public opinion and media. Although such exposure has remained controversial, it has become an inevitable and also irrevocable part of media diplomacy governed by international negotiations.

The International relations and politics are interrelated. Mass communication has influenced the media’s role in diplomacy. The growing world communication has almost removed all barriers for communicating with the public. Earlier, when the technology was not so developed, the country’s ambassadors played a vital role in establishing relations, but now their position is merely limited to a social role.

The soft power which is the ability to achieve the desired outcome in international politics is replacing the traditional forms of power. It does not use force to achieve the output, but rather attracts them gradually. Information is the new power in the international arena in contrast to the power of military and threat by superpowers during the cold war era¹⁸. The global television in respect to mass media is particularly the central source of information about world politics. During the cold war era, both the USA and the USSR had extensively utilized public diplomacy to share their views and attract public opinion towards their respective ideologies. The main weapons used for international broadcasting were Radio Liberty, Voice of America (VOA) as the USA’s radio stations and Radio Moscow on the USSR’s side¹⁹. Later overseas television programmes such as ‘dialogue’ were also added to promote public diplomacy. While ‘Television Marti’ was used to destabilize the Castro regime in Cuba, ‘Radio free Asia’ was established for the protection of human rights in China by the US government against the communist rule.

III. RESTRICTION IMPOSED ON GLOBAL MEDIA

International Broadcasting and mass media have a lot of impact in public diplomacy. While the mass media channels usually affect the general public, the cultural channels, festivals and exchanges tend to have a direct impact on elite audiences which focus on long-term perception

¹⁶ Ronald E Barston, *Modern Diplomacy*, Longman (1997).

¹⁷ William A. Williams, *The Shaping of American Diplomacy*, Rand McNally (1971).

¹⁸ Joseph S. Nye, William A. Owens; *America's Information Edge*, Foreign Affairs, 75 (March 1996).

¹⁹ Gary D. Rawnsley, *Radio Diplomacy and Propaganda: The BBC and VOA in International Politics*, Macmillan (1992)

about countries. There are many variants of public diplomacy which strive to deal with critical minds of people in countries with hostile governments. Public opinion is the target to create a favourable image of the country's policies, actions and political system. Public diplomacy is used with a view to exert pressure on the target society's government to amend its policies and provide balanced information to tackle domestic propaganda.

A dramatic media event that took place in May 1989 at the summit between Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, aimed at the lack of suitable jobs for educated and undemocratic policies in China. The live coverage of this campaign led to the fulfillment of the aim of generating public support and exert public pressure on Chinese government²⁰. The Chinese government held this coverage by CNN and VOA as an interference in their domestic affairs and therefore expelled the journalists who reported that unrest²¹.

Electronic diplomacy has emerged as the novel form of communicating diplomatic goals between nations. The usage of technology on the global level in the form of establishing multilateral and bilateral relations between nations has opened a new dimension of research for practitioners as the internet has proved more efficient in supporting foreign relations than traditional sources²².

IV. OBSTACLES TO PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Media diplomacy is often considered synonymous with public diplomacy, but it is not the case.²³ Since politicians use TV Diplomacy for international propaganda which in turn merges with domestic propaganda. Media diplomacy includes the media as the source of information, including all other aspects of diplomacy involved in sending signals by the government. The media is used as a basic communication variant in both ways, when politicians want to mediate through secure mediums, they use diplomatic channels and when they wish to confront, they make use of mass communication²⁴. Media is generally used when one side is uncertain of the reaction of the other side and when direct communication is not required.

²⁰ ROBERT J. DONOVAN, RAY SCHERER; UNSILENT REVOLUTION, TELEVISION NEWS AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE IN 1948-1991, pp.308-10 (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²¹ Robert S. Former, *International Communication*, 281 (1993).

²² Al-Muftah, Hamad, Weerakkody, Vishanth, Rana, Nripendra, Sivarajah, Uthayasankar, Irani, Zahir; *Factors influencing e-diplomacy implementation: Exploring causal relationships using interpretive structural modelling*, Government Information Quarterly (2018).

²³ Eytan Gilboa, *Media Diplomacy: Conceptual Divergence and Applications*, 3, The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 56-75 (1998).

²⁴ J. Wood, *A History of International Broadcasting*, Peter Peregrinus, p.235 (1992).

While most of the research has been focused on ‘strategy building’ for better inter-country relations, a very little emphasis has been given to the ‘public’, who is the influenced target. If the soft power of the country is non-coercive, then the fate of public diplomacy depends on the will of foreign diplomats. Since world war II ended, there has been a significant shift from practice of wars for territorial gain to refraining from using force for political independence as enshrined in article 2 (4) in the United Nations Charter²⁵. This issue was also highlighted during the United States attack on Syria as whether such an attack was violation of the UN charter.

With the growing convergence of media and politics, a new stream of revolutionary media-dominated government has emerged worldwide. This transformation to media outlets has also led to the phenomenon of ‘cable news networks’ also known as the CNN effect. This phenomenon in foreign relations has led to a shift of power and the officials have lost control over the decision-making process due to humanitarian intervention in global television²⁶. The consequential changes in diplomacy has opened new doors for the development of other branches of global media which in turn has increased the interaction between media and diplomacy. The coinage of other branches of diplomacy such as tele-diplomacy, media diplomacy, real diplomacy and instant diplomacy have developed leaps and bounds over the years, but very little attention has been given in disciplines of international relations, communication and politics.

Scholars have often neglected the expansion of mass communication and its amalgamation with public diplomacy and therefore also ignoring the significance of public communication. Hence it can be said that the existing knowledge on diplomacy is quite fragmented and not up to date as it deals with only some facets of diplomacy. Raul S. Manglapaus, Philippine Secretary of foreign Affairs has elaborated on the ally of democracy and technology in the 46th regular session of the UN General Assembly²⁷. Electronic transparency is the means for public diplomacy and morality. Manglapaus’s ideas have been echoed by other incidents also when CNN news was marked to be biased and against the competitive economy. However, these concerns have to be addressed immediately as international differences can only be maintained through negotiations in diplomacy.

²⁵ D'Amato, Anthony, *The Meaning of Article 2(4) in the U.N. Charter*, 2nd ed. , Northwestern Public Law Research Paper No. 13-30, September 6, 2013.

²⁶Robinson, Piers, *The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?*, *Review of International Studies*, 25, 2, (1999).

²⁷ J. Eduardo Malaya, *Diplomacy, Mass Media and Technology: Convergence and Conflicts*, 8 *WORLD BULL*, 62 (1992).

With the fast pace of technological development, global television has also affected the speed of diplomatic messages being communicated between countries. Though it leads to immediate actions in serious situations, it also poses a dilemma for policy makers to act in crisis. While a too fast response may lead to a wrong decision, too long thinking time might create an image of confusion in the international arena. However, fast diplomatic communication also enables policymakers to act swiftly in situations of crisis²⁸.

Press is indeed a key factor in determining the success of governments and this is what successful politicians make use of in politics. With the growing awareness of diplomacy and technology, the scholars have started to focus more on media influence on diplomacy by exploring means like press diplomacy and the CNN effect. Although the USA has called for sanctions against communist Government of China, the Bush administration has refrained from using it as it would curb the trade privileges and damage the fragile relations between countries.

(A) Need for Citizen's Participation in Policy Making

Noelle-Neumann's theory of 'silence and social media' states that the opinions of individuals are based on the prevailing opinion²⁹. They build their opinion with respect to additional information available on that matter. Therefore, this conveyance of information plays a crucial role in determining people's opinions and the state of diplomacy. Certain factors like unbiased media sources and cultural policy programmes play a crucial role in this.

The societies are witnessing a change from autocracies to democracies due to growing mass participation in political processes. The drastic upgradation that took place in the field of Information Technology and mass communication has almost turned the global society into a small town with fast and effective transmission of information. Every significant world development can be broadcasted live on social media platforms around the globe. The globalization of journalism and electronic communication has led to expansion and substantial growth of public diplomacy through media outlets. The consumers of information have become far more aware and receptive of their surroundings than they were earlier, and are also in a position to participate in policy making programmes.

The meaning of power has changed with the revolutionary changes in contemporary world politics. It is not merely based on the economic or military power of a country, but rather a projection of its leader's image which helps in determining the status in the international

²⁸ James F. Hoge, Media Pervasiveness, *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (July 1994).

²⁹ Cristina Malaspina, *The Spiral of Silence and Social Media: analysing Noelle-Neumann's phenomenon application on the Web during the Italian Political Elections of 2013*, (2014).

community. The unprecedented non proliferation of social media in this digital age has outdated the conventional tools of public policy formulation. It connects the ideas beyond geographical boundaries. This aspect has been highlighted by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in its resolution titled “The future we want”³⁰ where it emphasizes on people’s involvement in policy making is fundamental for sustainable development. Therefore, governments need to devise effective measures for the citizen’s participation and feedback in public policies.

V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The researcher has attempted to explore the theory of public diplomacy in the current scenario and the various factors which influence it. Media is one of the most important components of public diplomacy as the minds of people interpret only what it comes across as additional information. Public diplomacy has been perceived in different ways by the different actors of the society. Sometimes their connotations also have been contradictory as seen in China- US conflict where the Chinese government saw the demonstrations as intrusion into domestic affairs and use of the cold war variant, while the US viewed the prodemocratic campaign as an example of a non-state transnational variant against human rights violation in China.

The international arena has been recently engaged in a war of public diplomacy where the usefulness of global media has been proved for the countries who portray themselves as friendly to foreigners. However, the credibility of the media is a subject to critical scrutiny as its success depends on the targeted audience. Its credibility is also subject to its freedom of expression and editorial bias. Therefore, public diplomacy through the media is highly mercurial and can be seriously tarnished by a single act of negligence. The progress of technology has forced the world to adapt vivid graphics and other coverages by the global media in formulating foreign policies. It tends to have both positive and negative impact as it introduces ground level, democratic aspects but risks the policies to be made without careful analysis of the situation.

Former US President, Barack Obama had initiated this trend of political campaign for gaining support of electorates. It is recognised as the most successful digital campaign by many scholars and researchers. However, one should not forget the other side of the media which is its ‘dyadic nature’ which can have the opposite effect.

Journalism through TV channels and radio stations have emerged as the most modern tool of

³⁰ The future we want, The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 20-22 June, 2012.

networking and spreading propaganda. This has led to the emergence of various intelligence agencies as mediums to cater for the cyber-based attacks and leaking of confidential information of countries. The media may yield both positive and negative results as, without sufficient independence and strategy, it is difficult to seek credibility from the media. The solution for its reliability may be the actual feedback from the audience, but again it is subject to the availability of rational public opinion. The availability of various sources of the media in the public domain leads to competitiveness amongst one another which is a crucial tool for monitoring the misuse of the media. Only multiple sources of information can self-verify the content, by providing different perspectives.
