

Review

Do the Media Still Have a Role in the National and International Development?

Maria Karagianni

Abstract

76, Mikras Asias Street, Athens
11527, Greece

E-mail: akk@otenet.gr

Nowadays, we live in a world which is constantly becoming more and more complex, complicated and contradictory. This fact is intensified by the media of mass communication that occupy a dominant position in this world, and usually, overwhelm all sectors of both society and economy. Many countries and, particularly, the underdeveloped ones are very often influenced positively by the indications of the media on subjects such as change in the way of thinking, ways of production mainly in relation to agriculture, education, and treatment of incurable diseases. Thus, they manage gradually to approach the primary levels of development in sectors which are considered indispensable to survival. The question, however, that arises is to what extent the suggestions of modernization, as indicated by the media, become understandable by people for their survival, and how receptive and cooperative local societies are in relation to the implementation of development programs in their countries as proposed by foreign experts. The evaluation of the role of the media regarding their positive and negative aspects is considered absolutely necessary, and is analyzed in this essay.

Key words: Mass Media, Modernization Theory, Participatory Approach

INTRODUCTION

The Media of Mass Communication

The media are means of mass communication differentiated among press, radio, and television (Wahlens Großes Wirtschafts Lexikon, 1994). The media are described as a series of separate and distinct industries and practices rather than as a monolithic entity (Briggs and Copley, 1963, 2002). The media are part of the communication process, that is to say they are part of the special and unique process by which human communities are formed and in which they live...At first all media were included in the same conceptual entity because they were all treated as various aspects of the written or spoken language (Pierre Sorlin, 1994, pp.114-5).

The classical categorization of the electronic media of mass communication is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Mass media are divided into two categories, print media (newspapers, magazines, and books) and

electronic media (radio, television, and motion pictures). These instruments of communication must be able to carry messages quickly to audiences so large they could not be gathered together in any one place at any one time...The messages of communication are usually transient, impermanent; for radio and television, the messages are here one moment, gone the next; the messages of newspapers last only a day, magazines only a week or a month; book and film messages last a bit longer, but in an age of mass media, even they are displaced quickly (Ray Eldon Hiebert, 1995, p.1).

Furthermore, modern governments need media to advertise their policy domestically and abroad. Information is part of the structure of power relations; it helps circulate a positive image of statesmen and politicians...Sometimes media clash with public authorities, e.g., when means of information owned or

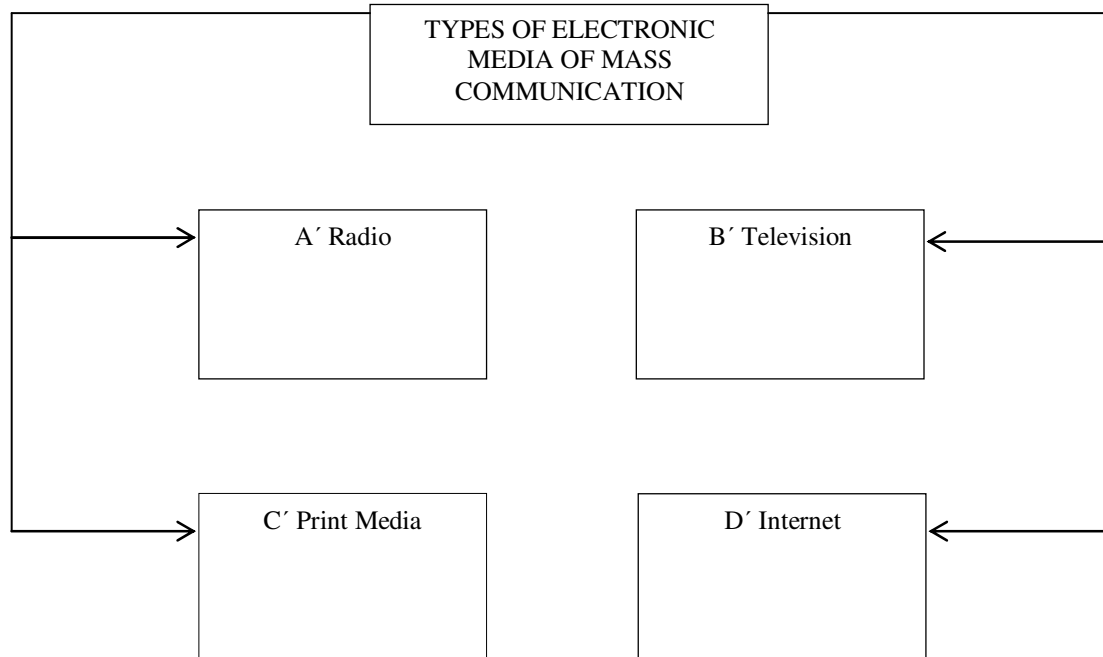


Figure 1. Electronic Mass Media

financed by the state challenge them too seriously or when tax policy is accused of favoring one medium against the others. Governments and media moguls are therefore bound to bargain constantly (Pierre Sorlin, 1994, p.114).

However, the development of new technologies which enable the generation of media texts that needs no passport to cross national boundaries, and which do so constantly and effortlessly, means that those boundaries will become increasingly blurred. There is likely to be no buffer zone between the global and the local. But of course, the global-and before it, the national-can only ever be a hybrid amalgam of local identities and cultures (Briggs and Cobley, 1963, 2002, p.412).

Definition of Development

The term "development" includes the following aspects: financial, social, cultural and technological. In current bibliography, references very often concern economic development which, however, relates or interacts with the rest of the development forms. In this way, any change to economic development is possible to "lure" the rest to a similar change (Polysos, 2011, p.35). We can also state that development is the improvement of the standard of living of a national economy over time. Therefore, the development of a country has also, besides economic development, a social and a political dimension (Wahlens Großes Wirtschafts Lexikon, 1994, p.565).

It should be noted that National Development to the economist involves two considerations. The first is that

National Development can be taken to mean the maximum attainable rate of growth of the total economy, e.g., 5 per cent per annum in Gross National Product. The second consideration is the question of optimal choice of investment projects. This means that an estimate of economic costs and benefits must be made for each feasible development project. These are then ranked in order of their benefit-cost ratios within overall budget restraints, including the effect on the balance of payments (A. J. Davies, Dec. 1965, p.46).

In view of the above, the sociology of development becomes a question of identifying and analyzing the social, cultural and psychological conditions, concomitants, and consequences of economic development. The transition from the traditional (economically backward) to the modern (economically advanced) society can be treated with a primarily negative emphasis in terms of removing institutional obstacles to development (Bernstein, Henry, 01/01/1971, p.141). Furthermore, development aid is the aid in improving the standard of living of a national economy over time.

Development aid aims at measures for the promotion of underdeveloped countries. Such countries are particularly in Africa, the reasons being: insufficient infrastructure, small nature control, rapid population growth, lack of qualified workers, small industrialization, backward agriculture, lack of long-term investments etc. as indicated by UNCTAD (Foreign Trade), FAO (Nutrition and Agriculture Organization), UNESCO (Special Organization for Education, Science and Culture), UNIDO (Special Organization for the Industrialization of the

Developing Countries), and the WTO (World Health Organization) (Wirtschafts Kindliches A. B. C, 1993, p.24).

Modernization Theory

Among the many concepts of social and cultural change is the notion of modernization which implies change away from some earlier condition (often termed traditionalism) towards some new condition that is considered to be a better one (a process that is often termed development) (Berry, John W., 01/01/2000, p.289). Modernization consists of a gradual differentiation and specialization of social structures that culminates in a separation of political structures from other structures and makes democracy possible. The specific casual chains consist of sequences of industrialization, urbanization, education, communication, mobilization, and political incorporation among innumerable others; a progressive accumulation of social changes that ready a society to proceed to its culmination and democratization (Przeworski Adam, Limongi Fernando, Jan., 1997, p.158).

It is obvious that the contribution of modernization to development is a basic prerequisite for the development success in our era, at least for the countries of the Western world. The countries of the Third World, that have managed or are still trying to incorporate modernization even rudimentarily, finally, gain the respect of international institutions and even international organizations as it will be reported here below. The degree to which a country has achieved modernization reflects the level of know-how and its recognition on an international level, taking into consideration that it concerns a model of gradual transition from the «traditional» form to a more «contemporary» society, mentality, and activity. The problem which, however, exists, is whether those societies or countries are willing to adopt new methods and participate actively in the process of changing their way of life, means of production, and offer of services.

A living example of modernization is China, mainly concerning production and economic development, and its experience should be followed by other countries.

Participatory Approach

It concerns the participatory approach in development programs i.e. the cooperation of the people of a country with specialists and researchers belonging to international organizations. These programs become known with the help of the local mass media, i.e. programs of «Rapid Agricultural Development Evaluation» (RRA) which were applied by the International Organization of Development. Initially, preliminary data were collected by the local people on their perception of

local environments and living conditions in agricultural areas. Then, those data contributed to the cooperation of organizations with local social groups that had the same interests in a difficult communication environment, since there is always some kind of suspiciousness in those societies.

However, a lot of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), mainly belonging to the medical sector, have been cooperating with the local medical and nursing staff in many countries. In appreciation of a significant medical effort, «Time Magazine» (Time Magazine, December 22-29, 2014) decided to award the title of the «Person of the Year» to all those people that fought the battle against the deadly virus «Ebola» when governments did not have the capability to confront the problem, and the World Health Organization denied to see the real dimension of the situation. However, those people that were in the first line of the battle against the virus, such as volunteers and specialists working for organizations such as «Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)», «Good Samaritans» as well as for other organizations from all over the world, took a stand next to the local medical staff and helped incredibly. This is a living example of Participatory Approach.

The Role of the Media in National Development (practical examples of the Social Media)

Social media compose an integral and indispensable part of our everyday life to the extent that companies and organizations on a national level take them into consideration. As far as the contribution of social media to development is concerned, it expresses the power of technology since the public plays a very different role. Changing from a passive receiver, the public becomes a participant in the shaping of content. Many people claim that social media are just «trendy». Others deem that social media have come to stay.

However, it is certain that we have started to realize that social media have changed the way that companies and organizations communicate with people. From the time when companies and organizations used to forward their message to their customers and associates, we have reached an era where the message is shaped by the public as well, which has also power, and the winning organization is the one that is aware of social needs.

Through communication with their public, companies, and organizations are in a position to become acquainted with their public's desires, preferences, and needs. Certainly, it is not enough for an organization to open just a web page in the most popular social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Google +, LinkedIn). In these pages, the organization should also publish content which will be of interest to its public either on the national or international level. The presence of an organization in the social media should always be constant. There is no

Golden rule which determines how often the people responsible for communication should post in the social media. Everything in those pages is a result of "Trial and Error". However, the public should have the feeling that the organization is next to its people whenever it is necessary (Tsoukala, Ath., 18/11/2014, p.3). The role of the social media developed to an unprecedented degree during the Egyptian Revolution in 2011: Mubarak's government forbade any mobilization, however, demonstrators managed to unite with the help of the social media.

Concerning Greece, the media commented on its return to development. On one hand, Greek Statistical Service (ELSTAT) provided the media with financial data, and on the other hand, the French newspaper "Le Monde" stated: 'Reconnection of Greece with Development'. The site "Capital.fr" also reported: 'Greek exit from recession already since the first quarter of 2014'. Indicative are the reports of the American site "MarketWatch" in a glowing article which supported the Greek development issue (November 2014). In continuation, the same source reported, among others, that in accordance with Eurostat's data, the economic «diet» imposed on Greece has proven successful. On November 14th, 2014, the site "Sofokleousin.gr" stressed the positive rate of growth that the Greek economy has achieved so far, thus, putting an end to the six-year recession which has been the top story in all international mass media. The site "Capital.fr" also stated: 'Official exit of Greece from recession already since the first quarter'. 'Return of Greece to development for the first time since 2008' is the title of an article published in the financial paper "Challenges".

In addition, on November 17th, 2014, European Central Bank's President Mario Draghi alleged that Greece is starting to reap the rewards from its wide-ranging economic reforms. 'Greece grew by a quarterly rate of 0.7% in the third quarter', Draghi said. 'That made Greece, which has contracted every year since 2008, the fastest-growing eurozone economy in the quarter', he added.

In my opinion, it does not mean that Greece is fully back on a «development track». Apparently, the media simply took some data, analyzed them, and in this way, they are indirectly inviting investors who will be persuaded to invest in Greece after reading articles published in renowned mass media. In continuation of this positive act, such news could possibly assist to the increase of tourist inflow, thus, resulting in helping Greece to achieve development.

The Role of the Media on an International Level (practical examples)

It is true that all international mass media are overwhelming us with news, reports, articles, press

conferences, international teleconferences etc. on the sad picture of many African countries as well as on the intentions of international organizations such as the WTO (World Health Organization) to eradicate deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. Recently, on November 24th, 2014, on BBC WORLD NEWS, an extensive presentation was made on the Ebola issue so that the social map of specific African countries could possibly change.

Governments have responsibilities for the health of their civilians which can only be secured by the application of sufficient hygienic and social measures, a commitment which was undertaken during the International Conference on Primary Health Care Alma-Ata on September 6th-12th, 1978! Since then, the media are urging (of course with the help of organizations such as the WHO, UNICEF, NGOs, etc.) people working in the health sector to support this international commitment, and provide primary health care and increased technical and financial support particularly to the developing countries.

Furthermore, with reference to the "First International Conference" of the United Nations Organization on the impacts of climatic change on health on August 28th, 2014, the sites un.org and socialpolicy.gr state that: specialists are inviting the international community to act fast so that climatic changes are reduced together with their subsequent impacts on health. Climatic change causes tens of thousands of deaths every year due to change in disease types, extreme weather phenomena (such as heat waves and floods), deterioration of water and sewage networks and negative impacts on agriculture. On one hand, Dr. Flavia Bustar, Assistant General Secretary of the World Health Organization in relation to the issue of Family, Female and Child Health, and on the other hand, Christina Figueres, Executive Secretary of the Framework Convention of the United Nations Organization on Climatic Change (UNFCCC) have warned that as long as the world becomes warmer and overpopulated, and demand for food, water and energy increases, the consequences on health will be aggravating.

The core of a successful reaction to climatic change is the challenge to undertake the responsibility and take difficult decisions that will change the way of life and habits that have formulated the basis of humanity development in the last one hundred years (un.org, socialpolicy.gr).

Epilogue

Nowadays, we live in the constellation of a «communication society», within the enlarged and globalized humankind of the internet, under the dominance of the mass media, the oligopolistic information, and the disintegration of national states by

the supranational sovereignty of international media which changes people into masses. The international power of the media through speech and journalistic image imposes a «new international order». We hope that this power will not stay only in the hands of mass media owners and advertisers (the oligopolies of information) who intent to change people and societies into consumer masses as well as «guided and controlled subjects»(Spyros Efthimiades, 2007, pp. 2-3).

The theory of modernization is subject to critique not only ideologically but practically, as well. Such an example is that modernization delivers values, traditions, customs, and habits of traditional societies to the free market in an abrupt and violent way. In addition, those societies claim that the funds from organizations for modernization do not reach their target, and therefore, financial, cultural, and social gaps are created between advanced and poor societies.

Modernization very often penetrates pure natural environments of “traditional societies” to secure infrastructure and technological advancement. Firstly, taking advantage of this, the media undertake the role of touristic guidance which results in a massive inflow of people causing social problems to local people (i.e. loss of customs and habits, dialects, way of life, deforestation, blocking natural resources, etc.). Secondly, in those areas, very little of the touristic profit stays in them, there is no increase in the local income per capita, although the media continue to advertise the local culture. The strangest thing is that hotel chains usually do not use local products, but offer non-local food items (Fennell David, pp.30-31). The main objective and the predominant factor is profit.

Certainly, there is also a positive aspect of the mass media role in development since they act dissuasively to the imposition of dictatorships or totalitarian regimes in various parts of the world. Such a case is Greece which during the seven-year dictatorship, imposed in 1967, was impoverished due to the lack of social and political development programs.

In other areas, with the help of mass media, living standards, education, and financial opportunities are ameliorated. With the collaboration of many governments with local societies, the suggestions of many organizations, mainly international, are applied, thus, achieving many positive results.

CONCLUSION

As far as Greece is concerned, in my opinion, the positive comments that the country has received on its development are unrealistic since economic development means, among others, increase in the real income for a prolonged time period under the condition that the level of social prosperity increases as well. These two facts are non-existent in Greece for the time being. Although economic indices are improving, Greece has a long way to go in order to achieve economic growth.

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