

A Study on the Media Coverage on the Religions : A Political Tool.

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Abstract

Media and religion have formed an unexpected nexus that has started shaping the politics of the world. Religion was also losing considerable influence within its own confines, at the same time losing influence over politics, the economy, and the workplace. This could be the reason behind the general disinterest media portrayed in the realm of religion and theology. Religion may play a role that neither our journalists nor our foreign policy analysts anticipated. The topic of religion has always been difficult for journalists to cover. Since the majority of journalists lack a religious background, there is a general concern among reporters, publishers, and editors that issues including religion will always be divisive. This phenomenon of marrying media and religion for political purposes has borne some truths. The fundamental one being that the institutions that want to be active in the public sphere today must be present in the media, and that certain religion will win and others will lose in this conflict. The fact that the same stories appear on many channels at the same time imply that the motivating factor here is a competitive hurry to conform with ruling party, rather than a desire for market supremacy. Even when news reports are separately sourced, a number of key participants have a de facto habit of prioritizing the prevailing narrative. This is only one example of a pattern that has now become normalized and has highly dangerous ramifications for India's media independence.

Keywords - religion, media, political party, social media, election,

Introduction

Media and religion have formed an unexpected nexus that has started shaping the politics of the world. It is becoming more and more obvious that in order to understand religion and its interpretations in the 21st Century, we also need to understand media and the ways in which contemporary media interacts with religion. Before the advent of modern media, religion and media or their interaction were considered to be fairly inconsequential in shaping the society and politics of the civilizations. It was also so because religion was believed to have lost most of its influence in the modern world of science and education. Religion was also losing considerable influence within its own confines, at the same time losing influence over politics, the economy, and the workplace. This could be the reason behind the general disinterest media portrayed in the realm of religion and theology

This picture began to shift after two particularly significant changes in the second half of the twentieth century. The first was the Iranian Islamic Revolution, which resulted in the development of a theocracy in a previously secular country with a largely Muslim population. This was especially notable because it was completely unexpected. It caught the Western world off guard. Religion may play a role that neither our journalists nor

our foreign policy analysts anticipated. It also became hard to ignore that these religious tensions and fervor were to some extent also supported and stoked through the support of masses.

Another noteworthy development was the rise of evangelism in United States of America and its active role in the politics of the oldest democracy in the world. Conservative Protestantism, associated with the early 20th-century fundamentalism, had been in decline before the 1970s. Evangelicalism in the US started to have a bigger impact on politics, which was something completely new. Evangelical leaders aimed to regain lost position in the public domain while also reforming society and politics, and the new technologies of media came to their aid. One rather important example is of the Pentecostalism which gained popularity in part due to its growth and influence as well as the simplicity with which it incorporated media and capitalism into its rituals, including worship.

At the turn of the century with events like the 9/11 attacks in New York, as well as the bombs in Bali, Madrid, and London, that were linked to religious fundamentalism, religion took a center stage in global politics. Due to the introduction of completely new potential religious expressions and religious responses into our global discourse, they irrevocably changed the profile of religion in national and international politics. As religion gained importance in the global politics and shaping of ideologies, media started taking increased interest in this previously ignored and rather private aspect of human life.

These and other developments in the religious landscape demonstrated that religion was not going away anytime soon. As religion becomes more and more involved, media developed an increased interest in it. However, these new approaches were based more on mistrust and ignorance than on knowledge. It was also frequently evident that the media cannot resist featuring more and more religious content. This calls into question how the media has traditionally operated.

Religions, on the other hand, were changing too, and much of this change could be attributed to the media's increased attention on them. Along with the increased focus on the religious ideas came the alteration of views in which different religions were perceived by its leaders and followers. The media became a frame or window through which we observe and comprehend religions, whether "nearby" and "far away." Media gaze and coverage contributed to bringing about significant changes in the understanding of religions by layman and even created positive and negative perceptions of different religions and cultures. The charged religious atmosphere of the 21st century and notions of extremism and conservatism were no doubted helped and propagated to a large degree through uninformed and biased media coverage. With the dawn of religious politics in the modern world came the over analyzation of issue through a religious lens. This analyzation was happening in the mainstream news media and was often supported and encouraged by the religious and political elite.

The topic of religion has always been difficult for journalists to cover. Since the majority of journalists lack a religious background, there is a general concern among reporters, publishers, and editors that issues including religion will always be divisive. Religion calls into question a number of fundamental presumptions, including the idea that reporting on different "sides" of a controversy results in journalistic objectivity. In contrast to politics, religions do not easily fall into "sides." There are many different religions, and none of them are strictly equivalent, thus religion is a problem since it deals with inspiration, transcendence, and the afterlife,

whereas journalists are expected to stay in the material, concrete, and "here and now." They are challenging to sift and categorize for journalists.

Journalism is not the only religion practiced in the media. Furthermore, religious content abounds in secular media. Even if it isn't always the kind of religion that religious leaders would desire, there is a lot of religion in entertainment media such as telenovelas—what sociologists call "implicit" religion. The same may be true for numerous genres of popular music, films, and television. Religion is becoming increasingly present in all forms of entertainment media nowadays.

Evolution of Media and Religion.

Media channels and sources have multiplied as a result of recent developments in media technology that include production, transmission, and reception, including "new media" like the internet, world wide web, and "digital" and "social" media as well as "old media" like television, publishing, and film. The media has become more globally distributed and omnipresent as a result of these changes. This rapid development in technology and exponential increase in media outreach has irreversibly transformed religion and its coverage.

The proliferation of innumerable channels has challenged the traditional dominance of a few groups of publishers and broadcasters. Prior to the 1960s, there weren't many opportunities for certain religions to enter the media. As channels have grown, barriers have been removed, access requirements have been loosened, and prices have decreased.

This takes us to the second important impact of media change: the proliferation of channels now allows for the circulation of an increasing amount of specialized media content. Only universally held truths, or widely held religious beliefs and principles, could previously be broadcast. In the modern media marketplace, one can now hear remarks, products, symbols, networks, and enterprises, voices, and beliefs that are religious, spiritual, quasi-religious, implicitly religious, and close to religious.

Another significant impact of media revolution is that previously "secular" media are increasingly prepared to embrace sectarian, religious, and spiritual content. Religion, today is being, "commodified" or "popularized" in a way to fulfil political or monetary agendas. It is simply the result of market forces. When access limitations are relaxed and more sources and channels compete for audiences, the preferences and interests of those viewers become more important. The audience's inquisitiveness and searching stimulates a growing reservoir of religious and spiritual information. New producers arrive with an eye on these viewers as well. The internet, Web 2.0, and the emerging "social media" have accelerated this process even further.

Resultantly, religions are losing authority over their own symbols. Religious signs, symbols, and languages can today be defined by the media and celebrity culture. Popular teachings have started replacing and challenging traditional teachings. This ends up furthering ideas of religion that are of benefit to a particular political ideology. For example, the traditional Hindu belief is that Lord Parshuram was born somewhere in Indore. However, nowadays the Hindu populist media in India can be seen peddling information that Lord Parshuram was indeed born in present-day Iran. This is to back their claims of Akhand Bharat and Hindu supremacy.

Individual religious voices and authorities lose significance as the media intervene in the production and dissemination of religious symbols and values and also as the market for mediated religious supply develops. More significantly, perhaps, the formerly dominant histories and institutions coexist and sometimes get overshadowed in the media marketplace by a diverse range of other populist beliefs.

This phenomenon of marrying media and religion for political purposes has borne some truths. The fundamental one being that the institutions that want to be active in the public sphere today must be present in the media, and that certain religion will win and others will lose in this conflict. Religious traditions and religions vary in how good they are at this. Evangelicals and Hindutva forces have enthusiastically embraced every new form of media that has evolved, including radio, film, television, and now the internet. Other religions have been slower to adopt contemporary media, especially those that value structure and authority. Traditional religions must live with a contemporary marketplace of spirituality that is unconcerned with form, doctrine, tradition, or history. Instead, what religious scholars refer to as "implicit," "informal," or "banal" religion prevails for gains.

Media Coverage of Religion in India and its Politics.

In India by the 1860s, there were affordable, functional printing presses widely available, and the number of pamphlets and newspapers had grown to the extent that British administrators felt it was necessary to pass the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, which was passed rapidly. Bal Gangadhar Tilak started publishing articles in a Marathi weekly publication and an English publication in the 1890s. Gandhi's Young India and Navajivan were distributed to more than 40,000 people, which was a lot during the 1920s.

During the 1970s, two media technologies gained popularity, cassette tape recorders and transistor radios with shortwave capabilities. There was no literacy requirement and they were reasonably priced. With its ability to record and play music, including bhajans and other hymns, the cassette recorder became quite popular. Some of the most notorious uses of the cassette recorder were Khalistan's agenda from the late 1970s and Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's political and religious campaigns. It was the huge popularity of the young preacher in affluent Punjab, coupled with the novelty of inexpensive tape recorders, that provided a movement with numerous supporters and funding sources with additional momentum. This technology was decentralized and largely outside of the jurisdiction of the government, the "first-mover" phenomenon also had a role.

The widespread availability of video cassettes in the early 1980s, unleashed the power of the visual. Following Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, video films provided by elements from outside India aided in fanning hatred and violence.

However, like with every other technology, the low-cost mobile phone turned everything upside down. As technology advanced, it was second-generation digital technology that became widespread, with its capability of making phone conversations and text messages, as well as taking pictures, recording and playing sound, and receiving brief moving images.

In the 2004 national election campaign, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the incumbent prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, used robot-calls to ring mobile numbers and play a recorded message to the recipients. This proved to be an innovative and effective campaigning strategy and opened the floodgates for media involvement in politics and elections.

The first Indian election in which digital technology was used rather successfully, was the UP election of 2007. An unexpected religious and caste alliance of BSP dalit leader Mayawati and the brahmins was aided to victory by the 2G phone. The alliance was not only strengthened by helping expand its network and reach, it also bridges a gap of technological resources between two distinctly different castes and economic class.

Every election in India since 2012 has seen attempts to employ new technology for political benefit. Every example appears to confirm the notion that hard workers and technology work well together, but technology without people is like a cannon without powder. Similarly, without media and its wide technology its almost impossible to reach the masses.

For example, the visual capabilities of 4G phones, which are now chosen by 600 million broadband subscribers, have enhanced the presence and impact of saffron-clad swamis in India. Around 2010, feature phones with the ability to play music and display short movies became widely available in India, making it simple to advertise items and people through sounds and images.

WhatsApp and Instagram had overtaken religious and political discourse in India by the 2019 election. They have the ability to capture the attention of a large number of people and might be used to gain access to and affect the beliefs of tens of millions of people. However, war rooms of monitors and engineers were required to adjust messages and respond to constant flows of news, opinion, and other digital traffic in order to maximize the power of these gadgets. It is fair to say that the current government and the BJP have made the most of the power of this new age media. This new media provided mechanisms for providing content to BJP and RSS workers for use in their individual communities. Yogi Adityanath, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, is the prime example of using religious identity with high-tech media capability to shore up political support can reap enormous political gains.

Trends of Increasing polarization in media coverage of Religion.

In addition to the other three pillars, the Indian media was designed to support the operation of democracy. However, with each discussion, prime-time discussions and press coverage have hit new lows in terms of immoral, political, and jingoistic behavior. During prime time, arguments or coverage become "prime time religion."

The over-denationalization of name-the-discussions, in which panelists and hosts shout their thoughts by exchanging irrational wrath for well-researched facts and unthinking judgments. The fundamental principles of journalism have been replaced by clickbait and the dramatization of significant disagreements. Triggering headlines and the use of religious and political symbols combine to build a package that is fed into the general population's brains, "Ram Hamare, Masjid wale padhare?" was the subject of a recent prime-time debate on an Indian news program.

The two intertwined underlying causes of this increased polarization of Indian news media are TRPs and funding. The business the two main enemies of journalism's ethical standards have always been "popularity and sensationalism." There is a continual need to sensationalize news, whether during the yellow press era in the United States to boost sales or the battle of government favor and Trp's in India currently.

Politics alters the religious discourses and coverage in media often thanks to the assistance of business corporations that own the media houses. The media, both print and visual, disregard issues that could have harmed the ruling party and ideology. The most prominent example being the focus of Indian news media on Corruption and inflation Congress' rule from 2004 and 2014 while ignoring same issues during the BJP rule, rather focusing on how the current government is necessary for "Hindu survival".

Another important trend to notice is the lack of will to practice investigative journalism and relying on the deliberate convergence of content between social media and mainstream media, notably television. Peddling fake news, forged documents and factually incorrect information has become the new normal on Indian news channels. For information, the news media is reliant on "experts." These experts, who are given time and space in newspapers and television channels, are not even impacted by the topics being addressed; they also do not belong to the groups that are the subject of the so-called "news discussions" on television.

While national and foreign reporting aiming to balance the balances is openly denounced as one-sided, the majoritarian narrative is reinforced to the detriment of competing voices. There are interventions by the central government and constitutional bodies that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, ensure that coverage favorable to the status quo is provided.

There have been numerous reports of TV stations broadcasting tweets/posts from ruling party operatives with aggressive headlines and then spreading them on social media with dramatic hashtags. A few weeks later, it was the topic of several prime-time television debates. The fact that the same stories appear on many channels at the same time imply that the motivating factor here is a competitive hurry to conform with ruling party, rather than a desire for market supremacy. Even when news reports are separately sourced, a number of key participants have a de facto habit of prioritizing the prevailing narrative. This is only one example of a pattern that has now become normalized and has highly dangerous ramifications for India's media independence.

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