

THE MASS MEDIA AS A FORCE FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

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The concept of induced cultural changes has found in a responsible mass media a positive partner in development. Mass media can promote and preserve peace by: (a) bringing on a situation where the people are less emotional, busier with building communities, moving with a more definite purpose and (b) developing the "mobile personality" out of the traditional Filipino.

Let me begin by saying that the skill in the use of mass media for constructive and profitable endeavors by a given people is not acquired by accident, nor is it only a side effect attendant to the increase in literacy, the improvement of the economic condition, or the growth in the population.

Rather the skill is deliberately developed, nourished, as it were, by the will of the people into a vigorous, vital force in society which can be used by every one either for good or evil, depending upon the motivation of the user and the orientation of the society which nourishes it to a significant strength.

In the Philippines today, the degree to which this skill has developed, is to me commensurate with the extent of the sophistication of the media infrastructure available to us for our use. This means that our skill grows in direct proportion with the increase in media facilities we acquire.

We shall look into some data on this aspect of the mass media later on. In the meantime, let me first express some thoughts on the concept of mass media as a potent force in society.

Uses and Effects of Mass Media

Mass media has always impressed itself on society. The self-serving effects were early seen

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in the 1900s under the era of adventurism when the print medium first showed its potency as social, political and economic tool by whoever holds interest in any of them or a combination of all of them.

But its use has been valued through the years as the democratic political philosophy took stronger roots in American society, and the more altruistic impressions of mass media has helped develop a significant school of thought that believes in "media with accountability" under the era of changing societies.

A society experiencing the effects of mass media becomes an affected society, if I may oversimplify it. In turn, the conditions consequently obtaining in the affected society define the responsibility of mass media to the society: how much further should new ideas be brought in, or are they brought in too many too soon, or uselessly, indiscriminately, resulting in a social fracture?

Mass media has the tremendous capability to build men, communities, nations, as much as the tremendous power to destroy the same — all in due time. From these twin features of power and responsibility springs mass media's duty to take a role in promoting peace and development the way only a man with a weapon in his hand can cause confusion or maintain peace around him, depending on how he wields or stays his hand.

This is, assuredly, one fact about mass media which responsible people in a given society must always be aware of and on guard about:

the awesome power that mass media holds and has proven time and again in many parts of the world. An example is the charge made by critics of yellow journalism in the 1900s, saying that the fight for sensationalism waged by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, two giant journalists in their time, one with the *Journal* and the other with the *World* as their "weapons," helped bring about the Spanish-American war.

Also in the U.S. in 1938, six million Americans underwent panic when they thought that Martians were on their way to America after having heard an "announcement" to that effect, a message which was actually just a part of a radio play realistically portrayed by actor Orson Welles, and was taken as gospel truth by the Depression-wearied Americans.

In both instances I have cited, you find mass media agitating people into conditions of disorder, advertently or inadvertently.

When mass media was first created, only its potential power to overwhelm human dignity was exhaustively explored. But the public has long been wary about irresponsible media and authorities have taken firm steps in regulating mass media almost anywhere in the world in order that it would instead become a potent positive force in enhancing human dignity. The concept of induced culture change has, in fact, found in mass media a positive partner in development.

Mass Media and Peace

Mass media promoting peace and development is not just supporting or aiding people but cultivating them during times when people are incapable of interpreting events more calmly or more objectively and peace is uncertain. In a situation such as this, easily identifiable with imminent conflict, mass media has the responsibility to act as sober interpreter of events, the one clear voice that lights up the dark hallways of a people's apprehension over what had not been fully made clear and known.

A concerted effort of mass media in the U.S. in 1942 denying the "Pearl Harbor rumors," which invented stories about the total wipe-out of the American Fleet, the torpedoing of an American ghost liner, and so on, could have alleviated the people's jitters and prevented the low morale that spread everywhere in America, and even in the occupied Philippines, at that point of World War II.

In the early history of mass media, its old role was to shape public opinion, rightly or wrongly. Its misuse was blatant and unashamed when its myriad possibilities as effective vehicle for power became clear. In developed countries, it still has the capability of being misused, owing to the lack of its more effective, public welfare-oriented uses.

In developing countries, mass media has found a significant relevance to the responsibility of supporting human dignity. It is in the developing country that mass media is most needed to which it must be responsive and by which it must grow.

Significantly, mass media in a developing country has a twin passive-active role. It is a quiet but strong support of development, a contributor to the overall intent of improving life, uplifting the undeserved sector of the communities. It cannot afford to be dominantly frivolous or flippant, nor irreverent, for that would be like rocking the boat uselessly.

On the other hand, mass media can be more active than that, can be the pathfinder, ground breaker. More actively, mass media can act as mover of developmental events, the voice preceding community projects, the leader out at the front.

In its passive role, what mass media does in a developmental milieu is support national growth by keeping pace with it. Thus, it is not the job of mass media to concentrate and build on mere dreams, raising false hopes among the people. On the other hand, it

should be quiet but firm support of the gradual realization of dreams along the country's real growth. It can help sustain the feeling that the *status quo* is being preserved, despite the reality of change being wrought upon the stability of the tradition-bound community.

One way for mass media to fulfill the task of forging goodwill and peace is for it to arouse among our people the feeling of nationness, of being one with all, of being half-complete without everyone else.

Mass media must make it easy for the people to identify themselves with the whole, especially in a situation of change when they are bound to feel alienated. Mass media must make available to the people the total picture of development for them to locate themselves in the middle of it.

If they are not given the chance to identify themselves as participants in change, they will stay out of it. When thousands of them feel insecure, suspicious and disunited, creating a condition of lack of peace, then the nation is faced with the presence of thousands of impatient, unplacated, distrustful people tensed to the point of immediately taking up arms against their imagined enemy, if only to protect their supposed endangered traditional values.

Mass media has the responsibility of making the people aware and knowledgeable, trustful of their own leaders as much as it must create among the leaders faith in their own people. This effort to bring closer together the people and their leaders would help achieve the feeling of being one in the same society with concerned individuals.

On the other hand, mass media cannot always be just the source of information. It must also be the people's sounding board of legitimate gripes and cherished dreams. When the people are allowed to speak through the media, they identify with it and call it as part

of their own, confirming its influence and authority over them for their own development. Thus, mass media becomes creditable and truly participant in development.

A situation where old ideas are made to be discarded for new ones may dislocate social organizations which turns out individuals who find themselves ill-adjusted in a continually changing setting. The condition is ripe for unrest and loss of peace.

The job of mass media is to help avert confusion by being instrumental in hastening the change, letting it sweep across the entire culture quickly, once and for all— and here again I oversimplify—to cushion the pain of growth and make unnecessary the onslaught of conflict and disunity. While it abets change, which anthropologist Margaret Mead says is better when swift and broad, it also cushions the effect of the same change by preserving at least a sense of normalcy in the mind of the people, a sense of the wanted conditions, of the peace associated with the old ways and the familiar things.

To keep the potential of conflict in a country touched off by an era of change, mass media must also regulate the level of social tension, raising the people's aspirations only up to the level of the country's real economic growth, cultivating trust among the people in new things and new ideas, letting isolated communities close in and be one with the rest, continually integrating all developments into a highly understandable and unfailingly desirable total summary in the mind of the people. It should engender unity through eliciting the need for a people to preserve their collective own — whatever it is, a project, a community, its nationhood — because collective possession implies being one with others within a mutually created environment.

So far, I have been talking of what I term as the passive role of mass media in preserving peace and sustaining goodwill in a developing country. This is the role of media as media; it

other words, the role I have discussed here indicates mass media's contribution to staving off the potential undesirable effects of induced culture change.

Perhaps, I can term as mass media's active role in the promotion of peace its capability of marshalling all the positive effects of the conditions of a society to hasten and bring on a situation where the people are less emotional, busier with building communities, are moving with a more definite purpose.

Peace and the Mobile Personality

Daniel Lerner (1958), sees a "mobile personality" in the man who is able to absorb the changes in his developing society and accepts the fact of change. This man would be every planner's ideal man: he is highly emphatic with the changes, easily the advocator of change, and is seen by Lerner as "distinctively industrial, urban, literate and participant." The mobile personality, to borrow Lerner's term, is the man after every change agent's own heart. If he were multiplied by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the millions, he would erase all potentials for confusion, conflict and miscarriage of development.

The amplification of the image of the development acceptor, the mobile personality, lies in the hands of the mass media. The increase in number of the mobile personality is also what I would refer to as the active task of the mass media in a changing society. The big question is: where is the mobile personality? He is where mass media can help shape his thinking, his attitude, his outlook.

In its role of promoting and preserving peace anywhere in the country, mass media must develop these personalities out of the traditional Filipino because the mobile personality in the middle of change is the source of the peace and calm of a solid citizen - the citizen who survives, prevails in and influences his environment with a sense of security under any pressure.

And this brings us back to what I earlier stated: that the skill in the use of mass media by a people is being determined by the degree of sophistication of its media infrastructure. For it is the presence of this infrastructure that also determines the speed with which we may find or develop the mobile personality that Lerner speaks of.

In our country, the Filipino mobile personality may be located among over seven million or so households, a certain percentage of which is exposed daily to one form or another of mass media.

Our Bureau of National and Foreign Information (BNFI) of the Ministry of Public Information presents the following research data:

1. More than *one-fourth* of the total households in the Philippines (32%) buys print media more or less regularly. More than half of the print media buyers pick *comics*, followed by *newspapers*, *vernacular* magazines and other *periodicals* in that order of preference.
2. In comparing the percentage of newspaper buyers to the number of households in every region, it seems that households in the predominantly urbanized region (including Metro Manila) buy more newspapers than those in other regions. In the latter, less than 10% of the total households buy newspapers.
3. Comics is the most popular reading fare among the print media. Most of the comics fans are concentrated in Region IV (43%) and Central Luzon (16%).
4. Compared to the newspapers and comics, the vernacular magazines are the least bought among Philippine households, with an average of less than 10% of the total. Most of the buyers are found in *Western Mindanao* (7%), *Metro Manila* (7%), *Northern Mindanao* (5%) and *Cagayan Valley* (5%).

5. It appears that the largest number of consumers of printed matter resides in Metro Manila with almost all of the households buying at least one of the periodicals on a regular basis. This is followed by Central Luzon (25%), Ilocos Norte (20%), and Southern Mindanao (16%).
6. Compared to print and television, radio is owned by a big percentage of Philippine households. *Forty-five per cent (45%)* of the *total households own radio sets* while 31% buy newspapers and other periodicals. A very minimal *8% owns television sets*.
7. The ownership of radio sets seems to be evenly distributed among the different regions of the country. It ranges from 40% in Mindanao to 61% in Central Luzon.

In my region, Central Visayas, 59,858 daily copies of newspapers reach 596,874 households while over 300,000 radio sets are religiously listened to daily. Even the effect of 27,849 television units in the shaping of the mobile personality cannot be underestimated.

Mass media before the coming of the New Society was considered traditionally candid, highly licentious in many areas, and was the creature of private business and departmental politics. Particularly, the Philippine press was the freest in Asia, or so it was considered for its blend of popularity and notoriety. In fact, the Philippine press was very free. It was not bound by any sense of mature responsibility, and it could serve the curiosity of any world watcher and any casual reader, excepting the Filipino who waited (if he was told of his due) to be seriously educated and properly motivated.

Mass media in the old days lacked acceptance of responsibility to the reader, listener, viewer in a sense that it only recognized a fraction of its role in society, a role which

was understandably conducive to profitability: the very limited task of fiscalizing, reasonably or unreasonably.

Conclusion

As a whole, Philippine mass media at the time of the "traditional" society lacked the sense of undertaking positive motivation, community building and educating the public. What happened was that it was, in the greater part, in the hands of very exclusive private interests, and was mainly found in Manila. For this fact, mass media was self-serving, selective in community building and exclusive of its own political public.

The coming of the new era has reformed mass media to a great extent. Skeptics ask: how long will it stay "reformed?" I personally feel that if we can accept the presumption that now mass media is in the hands of intelligent men, it cannot, in the last analysis, disregard what it has learned of its potentials for relevance within its society.

At least, there are manifestations today of acceptance of media responsibility that no amount of regulation in the past could ever make significant. Mass media now possesses a clearer understanding of why under our changing society it is duty-bound to contribute its bit into the job of transforming Juan de la Cruz into a highly motivated Filipino, the neighborly Juan, inspired to maintain his peace, but moved to act for growth from within as well as committed to the achievement of a better life for all from without.

Reference

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1958 *The Passing of Traditional Society*, New York, Free Press.