

## **Mediatization of Politics or Politicization of Media: Women's Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

*In accordance with the phased and meta process of mediatization, politicians have grown dependent on media at the cost of their own independence. As a result, politics has become synonym with something negative. Little research in Pakistan has been done to explore perspective of women politicians and journalists on negative perception about politics. To fill up the gap, we constituted focus groups in Multan, Lahore and Islamabad, comprising mostly women politicians (local and national), rights activists and journalists. It has been found that the respondents are mindful of the fact that there has been an increase in representation of women politicians on media since former President Pervez Musharraf allowed private electronic media to operate in 2002. Female participants in Multan feel encouraged by the increase in representation of women on media but those in Lahore and Islamabad believe that media has added to the challenges women politicians are facing. However, all focus groups opined that this situation is reflective of politicization of media, which shows that they have internalized the negative image that media construct of politicians and that they lack the understanding about the process of mediatization of politics.*

**Key Words:** Mediatization, Media Logic, Politics, Politicization

### **Introduction**

The theory of mediatization denotes a process through which media change behaviours at many levels, giving rise to a culture of populism at the expense of protection of human rights and dignity which is required of politicians who are supposed to do legislation in such a way that wellbeing of the masses is ensured. The mediatization theory has transformed the concept of dependency of media on other modes of communication to achieve effectiveness that Lazarsfeld and Merton gave back in 1948. Hjarvard (2013) explains media is not something that affects the society from outside or a plaything controlled by consumers through remote controls. (Strömbäck, 2008) dubs teachings of Frankfurt School

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“pessimistic” and explicitly map out the four phases in which media brings political institutions to its logics, which are based on generalization of issues and controversy. At this stage, NCCR-Democracy (2012) finds that the process of mediatisation of politics becomes a threat to democracy. It is so because it fans populism that clouds the process of decision making (Kriesi, Lavenex, Esser, Matthes, Buhlmann & Bochsler, 2009). Cohen, Tsifti, and Gunther (2010) explain that the decision-making process is clouded because of the presumption that politicians have about media influence on the society and their peers and this “presumed media influence” directs their energies towards adapting to media logic.

Lundby (2009) explains that mediatisation the theories of agenda setting are now governed by the process of mediatisation. Krotz (2008) declares that mediatisation is a “meta-process” bringing about changes in human behavior through changing communication. This situation makes media vulnerable to be used by authoritarian powers (Hjarvard, 2014) as can be witnessed in the case of Pakistan. My research will explore a new era in which future researchers may not dub mediatisation theorists “pessimists” as mediatisation theorists like Stromback did Frankfurt scientists. It will see how this process of mediatisation of politics is different in developed democracies like Denmark from developing democracies like Pakistan. It will attempt to utilize new media technology to transmit TV transmission of selected channel/s from Denmark to Pakistan, inspired by McLuhan’s concept of media cannibalism, to mediatize democracy across continents. Ultimately, it will add a new dimension to the theory of mediatisation.

In 1950s, Harold Innis was the first to decipher that media plays a part to shape modern societies (Heyer 2003). In 1960s, his disciple Marshall McLuhan pointed out the “implosion” that the electronic media had caused after the “explosion” that print media had caused. The ‘implosion’ of electronic media, McLuhan (1962; 1964) said, “Transformed people, social relations and societies”.

Lash (2005), took a different approach to explain it. He mentions that there exists a “post-modernity” or “second modernity” in the form of generalized mediatisation. “The second modernity is one in which the media spread like a disease. The first modernity describes a process of rationalization. And the second modernity describes one of mediatisation.” The current situation involves ongoing social and cultural changes. The media themselves are changing.

Friedrich Krotz believes mediatisation is a meta-process that has given new meanings to the concepts of globalization, modernity, individualization, and commercialization. “The specific relevance of mediatisation lies in the fact that it is a meta-process that changes communication and so the core of human action,” (Krotz 2008). He moved on to explain that the meta process “makes it clear that

lifeworld-specific communication remains the basis of communication and meaning in general.”

Hjarvard (2008) adopted an institutional perspective on mediatization. He defines mediatization of society as “The process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions *in their own right*. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between the institutions, and in society at large – takes place via media.”

## **Women Politics and Media**

Jaffrelot (2000) mentioned Pakistan had dictatorship four times since 1947 and its policies remained highly reactionary, which gives credence to the assertion that media either was not let or did not play the role of watchdog it was otherwise to play (Iqbal, 2012). This instability led to the country's dismemberment in 1971 when East Pakistan became Bangladesh (Lamb, 1991). Iqbal (2012a) reports stark violations of freedom of press and the right to know in eras of dictators, not least Zia ul Haq.

In early 1970's, Zia brought militants from Gulf States to Pakistan to fight US's war against Russia (Jaffrelot, 2000a; Bhutto, 2008). It was state-sponsored terrorism (Roelle, 2010). The jihadists, charged ideologically, believed they can establish Islamic caliphate and subdue the world to it (Musharraf, 2006). The Supreme Court of Pakistan has been told that about 50,000 Pakistanis have been killed in war-generated activity since 2001 (TET, 2013) and two successive governments have been brought to their knees to hold conferences of all political parties for talking to terrorists (Dawn, 2013). It shows that a generation of Pakistanis was fed war narrative on mainstream media. Now this generation feeds this narrative to new media and this generation could be called “digital” (Buckingham, (2014). This digital generation, defined by war and violence, which are different forms of trauma (Edmunds and Turner (2002), has mainstream media that thrives on controversies, simplification of complex issues and populism (The News, 2014).

This war generation, like Herzog's listeners of operas on radio, is “disempowered” audience who are given false and harmful satisfactions when they watch women politicians belittled and sidelined on electronic media. Their right to know is breached (Niazi, 1994; Iqbal, 2011b). Puritanical elements stifle informed debate on media (Daily Times, 2014). In such a scenario, voices for gender equality and quality politics find a way in social media but influenced by radical ideology, the state stands against liberal speech on Internet (Dawn, 2014). At the same time, militants' media has flourished with a “message of “Jihad”

mainly against the “West” (PIPS, 2010). And according to this message, women are not welcome in politics.

Two-time and the only female prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, faced this militant threat all along and now her assassins have confessed to getting education from a seminary (Dawn, 2014; The News, 2015; ETN, 2015), highlighting the dangers for women politicians. This situation necessitates opening of spectrum of choice of media content for the audience so that they are not get carried away by a violent narrative.

Unfortunately, it is contrary to the vision of Founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who always encouraged women to play their part in politics of the country but media and society at large could not carry forward the message compromising quality of democracy (Herald, 2007; The News, 2009). Zia ul Haq oversaw the process to systematically suppress women and the process he set in motion is still going on (Yousaf, 2011; Paracha, 2010). What Zia did is contrary to what Jinnah dreamed (Dawn, 2012).

Misrepresentation of women on media fans sensationalism and yellow journalism on the one hand. On the other, it hinders media from keeping its audience informed of the latest developments changing their political choices that are not then based on informed decisions. The environment in which democracy grows requires freedom, equality and liberty (Dahl, 1989). In this environment, media is supposed to be a forum where political parties and personalities can present their ideologies so that people can make decisions about who is good for them and who is not. It is this role of media that Ward (2004) believes supplements the process of achieving quality of democracy. Taylor (1992) argues that elections are the key to achieving democracy as long as they transpire free will of the people. His concept of free will seems elusive if women feel handicapped due to discrimination and gender biases fomented by media.

The number of women interested in politics is on the decline because they do not feel it convenient to do politics, for which media is held responsible to a great extent. Harrop & Miller (1987) explained how media manipulates elections. They found that media give coverage to a set of politicians and with the passage of time, these few politicians assume decision-making roles and others are excluded. The findings that Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (1948) made are still relevant and criticized by those studying influence of media on social behavior. They said, “Media could influence the masses only at a limited scale.” What we witness in Pakistan is contrary to Lazarsfeld’s findings because media has acquired key role in decision-making process at state level. Blumler & McLeod (1974); Ranny (1983); McLeod & McDonald (1985); and Simon (2000) have conducted studies in different times that have one thing in common and that is their findings mentioning that media’s role in society is not limited.

If we look into the history, we see that the confidence that Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave to and his sister enabled her to stand against

Pakistan's first dictator Ayub Khan and '[H]er appeal went directly to the hearts of the people as she fiercely attacked the man who had suppressed the freedoms of speech and expression' (Mazari, 2006). Ayub Khan also put the blame of ousture of Iskandar Mirza on his wife Nahid Mirza (Vatanka 2014).

Mazari's version shows the key role that women politicians play to wrestle people's right to freedom of speech and expression out from dictators. Ayub Khan's spin doctors had not spared a moment to outshine Fatima Jinnah on a controlled press that the country had at that time (Ziring, 2004). Though with the help of excessive use of power, Ayub succeeded in defeating her in 1965 elections but her struggle left the dictator 'weakened' (Jafferlot, 2006).

After Fatima Jinnah, Benazir Bhutto remains a source of inspiration for women politicians. She was elected prime minister twice and reserved for her the honour of being the first and the youngest woman prime minister of a Muslim country. Her opponents used the technique of leaflets to defame her on the basis of her gender and feminine attributes. Defleur & Larsen (1958) argued that the technique of leaflets is "instrumental" in creating rumors.

When her pregnancies were used by her political rivals to belittle her, she fought back and continued work in office, she wrote in her autobiography (1998). At that point, she wrote, "That is one less glass ceiling for women Prime Minister in the future to have to break." On the basis of such practices, Shrinvastana (1989) concluded that male characters dominate media. Konach & Rosenstiel (2007) found that the dominance of male characters on media leads to consolidation of male chauvinism in society.

According to spring (1993), by giving coverage to a select set of women politicians, media actually 'missed the point' as it ignores the struggle for women politicians as a whole for gaining 'political power'. This practice leads to hindering women from participating in debate on national security and foreign policy (Scanty Coverage, 1992).

Gradually, a perception about women politicians being unfit for discussing serious matters related to the state is adopted in the society, casting women politicians in a negative light (Aubin, Haak & Mangini, 2005). In the US and some other parts of the world, women outnumber men but they are not represented in the parliament as such (Millar, 2001).

Another impediment in their way to politics is monopoly of men on resources and due to lack of resources, many stereotypes are generated about their role in politics (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). Kahn & Goldenberg (1991) have found it 'unfair' that media highlights dresses and looks of women politicians instead of the substance of the debate they generate about national and international issues.

Norris (1997) said that instead of giving women politicians coverage on news and current affairs pages, media is putting them on style pages along with showbiz personalities. Similarly, their domestic issues are portrayed on media to

indicate that they are emotional, weak and noncompetitive, which is a misleading impression' about them (Kelly & Fisher, 1993). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argued that performance of women politicians would be different from what is witnessed if media stops priming the masses about their apolitical role in society. Media cannot absolve itself of this damage that is done to democracy by demeaning women as it presents to the masses a picture of politics through its opinions and news stories based on its interpretation of the situation (Gerstle et al., 1991).

## **Research Question**

The question that this study explores is how do women perceive their representation on media? Are they satisfied with it or not?

## **Findings of Focus Group Discussion**

Participants of focus groups opine that there is a rise in coverage of women parliamentarians on electronic and print media since 2002, when former President Pervez Musharraf set up Pakistan Electronic Media Regulator Authority (PEMRA). The Authority was meant to oversee and regulate functioning of private TV channels and radio stations that were allowed to operate in Pakistan for the first time. Musharraf was a military dictator and had also introduced 33 percent quota for women in the parliament. These two developments offer a wide range of subjects to study for media and politics researchers. The participants of focus groups, however, observe that the increase in representation of women on electronic has left little impact on print media which continues to treat women politicians as it was before 2002.

Since respondents in focus groups are stakeholders being politicians, media professionals or researchers, and civil society activists, their opinion is informed and based on their observation of society and professional experiences. Almost all of them observed the rise in representation of women politicians on media during and after Musharraf regime.

Opinions and perceptions of female participants of focus group of Multan are different from those in Lahore and Islamabad to the question of implications of growing representation of women politicians on media. Majority of female participants of focus groups in Multan are of the opinion that they are satisfied with the increase in representation of women on media. They say that it is good if more and more women are being represented on media. They like the coverage that Maryam Nawaz, daughter of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, is getting on media. "She (Maryam) has proved that she is power of her father (Nawaz) and not a burden on him," says a female respondent. Addressing a public gathering, Maryam herself had made a statement similar to this opinion,

which means her narrative has hit a chord with women having politician aspirations. Another says, "When a daughter stands by her father, victory and defeat stand irrelevant." Her opinion revved up discussion during the session as more and more female participants endorsed this opinion.

Some other female participants say they take courage from the way with which Senator Sherry Rehman, the opposition leader in the Senate, conducts herself on media. "She (Sherry) is always to the point and full of purpose. She does not relent until she says what she wants to say on media," comments a female journalist. She says she and other women take inspiration from the likes of Sherry Rehman to enter politics. A woman councilor says representation of women politicians on media give women politicians courage to rise and claim center stage at local and national landscape. Others say that media has made it easier for them to experience what is going on in Islamabad. They say that they "feel good" to watch talk shows on different TV channels hosted and participated by women.

They think that women politicians were represented on media because they take part in politics and play leadership role. They believe that media professionals track performance of women politicians to give them space on TV screens. They are then asked do they get exposure on media the way some of the politicians they take inspiration from. The reply was "no". After spending years in politics, profession of media, advocacy or consultancy projects for human rights protection and awareness, they got little exposure on media. However, watching some other women politicians on media has not let their ambition to be on media put off. They continue hoping that they will one day be able to represent women on media. They said that they have ideas to share with the masses and if given a chance on media, they can play their role in bringing about a change.

This is a point at which the researchers note that their urge to be on media has outdone the primary function of a politician, which is to struggle for welfare, equality and freedom in the society. These three elements – welfare, equality and freedom – are among the key indicators of quality of democracy, which are vital to understand political logic. When politicians give less importance to this primary function of politics and pay more attention to be on media, it shows that they have given in to media logic, which in large part is made up of conflict and controversy and its end product is populism.

The participants of focus group in Multan believe that their geographical background counterweights their success in getting exposure on media. Media people do not take them seriously because they are from far-off areas, for which they frequently used term "backward". By use of term "backward", it can be assessed that they have internalized the excuses that the media people use to hold them back. It also shows that the female participants of focus group in Multan are harboring an urge to move out of their native areas in search of exposure on

media. It indicates that they lack of attention by media towards their activities in Multan has exhausted their hope for improvement in living conditions and status of their native areas. They believe that those who move to Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad from Multan and its adjoining areas have become big names and those who were left behind are left behind. Some of them have a laundry list of those big names to relate during the focus group proceedings. The researchers can understand that all they said is not for nothing. The principal researcher himself is from Alipur, district Muzaffargarh, and has been a media professional for about two decades in Islamabad. He has lived the reality that media head offices are situated in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, which is why the people living in these cities are more represented on media, not least electronic media, than other parts of the country. The participants, however, believe that if media is rid of mightier politicians, it will treat them fairly and duly.

Hence, on the basis of perception of women participants of focus group in Multan, three critical conclusions can be drawn: 1) they seek exposure on media but fail to get it; 2) the failure drives them to the verge of desperation where they want to leave their native areas in search of media attention; and 3) they believe they can win media exposure if it is made less politicized. These points indicate to the process in which individuals gradually become dependent on media at the cost of their own independence.

### **Focus Groups in Lahore and Islamabad**

However, being in big cities is not enough for women politicians and rights activists to be on media. What more is needed is discussed in detail by participants of focus groups in Islamabad and Lahore.

The focus group participants, especially in Lahore, remember the time before President Musharraf when they had only one TV channel to watch all day. They remember when a female newscaster would appear at the news bulletin at 9:00pm and even in dramas, their role remained submissive. One of the participants recalled that the society was not so closed those days, unlike the gender regression on mainstream electronic media those days. He recalls that women used to go to schools and colleges and adopt different jobs in cities.

A woman participant in Lahore recalls that college girls used to ride bicycles on The Mall and literary gatherings were held in which women would express themselves the way they like. Another said situation in villages was also not so different. She said that women in villages used to work shoulder to shoulder with men. In the fields, women would be extensively engaged during harvesting season along with men.

A male participant recalls that both men and women, along with kids, would get together at 8:00pm to watch drama on PTV. Another says that TV sets were rare in those days as one among 10-15 households had a TV set. Because of



this phenomenon, TV in fact served as bond among community members, she recalls. She says that she still remembers that kids of her locality would get together at her house, where her father had brought a TV set upon insistence by her mother. She says TV had changed their lifestyle and she and other kids would wait for the evening so that new episode of the drama can be played. Her father, she recalls, was interested in news bulletin that followed the drama. After the drama, the kids would disappear and her father and some of his friends and relatives would watch the news bulletin, she recalls. After watching the bulletin, they would sit and chat for a while on the current affairs. This leads to two conclusions: 1) the society had preserved its pluralism when it was not so densely mediatized, and 2) media was endorsing the stereotypes associated with women at that time as they were then shown in submissive roles and in veils, which was contrary to ground reality. The stereotypes media nurtured at that time became lifestyle of the generations to come. Prevalence of different forms of media made expressions easier and set off fault lines of the society because the expressions run contrary to one another. This is a situation in which indecisiveness and confusion reign supreme and violent trends are followed.

The level of satisfaction with the presentation of women politicians on media can be gauged from the fact that at times male respondents state that women politicians are given relatively more space on media than their male colleagues. A female participant was then quick to claim “female discount” in a lighter tone but she gave a term that again endorses male character of the society. It means that she has accepted that it is not right of the women politicians to be on media and they are rather enjoying a “discount” in the shape of their representation on electronic media. They, however, admit that women are more than 50 percent of Pakistan’s population.

The female participants of focus groups keep hope that the increase in representation of women on electronic media has a chance for them. They hope that one day they will also be able to communicate their message to the masses at large through electronic media. They believe that the electronic media has an appeal for the society which is stronger than print media. For them, it is the manner of presentation of a message that matters more than anything else. They say that electronic media has made it easier for women to express themselves as in print media they were not having maximum of their expressions.

In Lahore and Islamabad, female respondents see that media plays a proactive role in supporting them in politics and welfare work. One female respondent in Islamabad quoted an incident in which media helped her start a welfare project in the city. Another female politician says, “Yes, media is our voice. It supported us a lot. It has helped spread our good image.”

However, majority of participants of focus groups in Islamabad and Lahore narrate their experiences of approaching media houses and getting no or negative response from them. “I keep on emailing editors my proposals for

women empowerment but I get a reply only rarely. Only female editors, sometimes, pay heed to my proposals,” said a local politician in Islamabad. Others say that family background and “looks” matter a lot to get representation on media. They say that when they participate in walks or protests to create awareness about democracy or welfare of society, media people do not ask them questions. “There is a set of women from well-off families who attract all media attention. Every reporter come and ask them questions. We are pushed into the background,” said a rights activist.

They believe that women with “good looks” and mightier family backgrounds have held media hostage. This belief indicates to their perception that media does not discriminate against them because of its nature but rather some other women politicians and activists are to be held accountable for it.

At this stage, it can be stated safely that women rights activists, politicians and journalists are confusing mediatization of politics with politicization of media. In reality, politicians have given in to the process of mediatization.

## **Male Perception**

Male participants of focus groups in Multan, Lahore and Islamabad give a different account than the women participants. They are not only critical of increase in representation of women on media but they are also endorsing the male chauvinistic patterns of society, which is not fully patriarchal in nature in Pakistan. They say they watch TV regularly and take interest in the programs in which women politicians are represented. They say that such programs attract more attention of audience because of presence of women and not because of substance of discussion (abc, 2012). Some of them have objection to representation of women on media. Their manner of expression of these objections is forceful and their tones raised. They use vivid and strong terms in their expressions and are unmindful of the fact that they are expressing these remarks in presence of women participants of the focus group. They believe that this practice of increasing representation of women on electronic media is adding to “vulgarity” in the society at large. They say that it is “indecent” for a woman to come on TV without burqa (hijab). They say that they have objections to what they call “footloose and fancy-free” style of women politicians when they speak on media. They believe that watching such content is spoiling environment of their families in which female members try to follow the politicians who come on media. They press on taking care of Shariat (Muslim jurisprudence) in Pakistan.

Their objections and the manner of their expression shows only one thing that media is endorsing stereotypes about women in society. Presence of women on media is associated with the sense of vulgarity and indecency, because it suites male political players and social leaders to cement their position in the

absence of a meaningful contest. Some of the participants come down hard on President Pervez Musharraf for many reasons including his initiative to unlock the potential of electronic media. They say that Musharraf was a dictator and he introduced reforms in parliamentary system to accommodate women representation following western agenda. They believe that the “western agenda to make Pakistan their cultural colony” was the driving force for Musharraf to allow private entrepreneurs to start TV channels in Pakistan.

They are especially critical of increase in representation of women on electronic media. They believe that it is an international conspiracy to pollute culture of society and taint the Islamic fabric of the country. They are of the opinion that home is the place for women to focus on and it is their duty to keep conducive environment at home for children to grow and become leaders of the future. They say that the element of sexism is also behind encouraging women's representation on electronic media. They assert that they will raise their voices against this international conspiracy at every forum.

Their perception about women is not fully reflective of the popular gender slurs that prevail in society. It is because they are media professionals, politicians, or community mobilizers in their different capacities. But the uneducated, religious-political activists, clerics, seminarians, and other members of society who are not as articulate and expressive as male participants of focus groups are blunter and more brazen expressing their opinion about the rise in representation of women on electronic media. Apart from social and historic reasons for this perception, it has a strong political and media-driven populist dimension.

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