

REDEFINING MEDIA: THE REALITY SPEAK

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***Abstract:** This article, based on changing trend of “mediamorphosis”, discusses an institutional viewpoint on media. It elaborates why a new definition to solve the problems of law making, drawing communication and media position in the state and society, and to liberate its users from the notion of single technology dominance in regulations is the need of the hour. It proposes that media may be envisaged as a process institution for transforming information into knowledge for the audience by creation and enlargement of message through instruments of process and delivery.*

***Keywords:** Media, new media, communication traits, sourcing, processing, formatting, finish, regulation.*

Contemporary Media Trend

For over a decade and half, media houses are regularly including many media in their repertory, placing the same content in multiple technological media and diversifying into products across media and trans-media. New media forms, while appropriating many features of traditional mass media and group media, have thrown challenge to every conception of media of yester years. Enhancing media power of the civil society and media houses by virtual breaking of media limitations, have put governments in alert. It is many years that media laws became ineffective to deal with the social media and media houses. Regulations framed for electronic media many years back and for print several years back are becoming obsolete in the age of co-existence and overlapping of media functions between new and traditional media.

The Term Media

Traditionally, the term media can include such different means of communication as face-to-face communication and a fax machine or the internet. Due to historical and technological developments in the traditional media sector, a few specific media - means of communication became dominant (Ross and Krogh, 1996, p. 11). From Gutenberg's time print media with books, newspapers and magazines was dominant in industrial world. In the twentieth century radio and TV became important media. In twenty-first

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century, whatever might be the efforts to make these media forms interactive, these are still dominant means of one way communication due to technological limitations. These are still offering incomplete experience for the inability to reply or react using the same medium.

Thus media, in this sense is closely linked to mass communication. Once the meaning of media was changed from conveying symbols between one another to meaning specific mass media which convey an identical message to a large audience. The latest development towards 'information superhighway' and consequent fall out on the traditional mass media, regulatory environment, state and citizens necessitates rethinking the term media in the new light. (Choudhury, 1998). The Freedom Forum Media Studies Centre, Columbia University Survey (1991 to 1993) on impact of new technology on the newsroom demonstrated how communication products were greatly changed by new technology. New media products were increasingly becoming computer-based, non-linear (hypertext), multimedia (combining text, data, audio and video) and user controlled (in form, function and time). More such products began reaching the end user in real time via on-line and satellite technology.

Changes Unfolding and Core Concerns

Thus consultative and interactive types of communication relationships and information flow became visible. As the traditional distinctions between print and broadcast media technologies rapidly vanish, we are witnessing the emergence of 'a united states of media', concluded Everette E. Dennis (Pavlik, 1996). Media audience, as a result of the shift started exercising more choice and control over media content in real time, space, format and delivery. As the control was changing hands from media firms to audience, it raised several issues. So far governments regulated firms in separate segments of the industry through distinct regulatory regimes for print, radio and TV. Blurring of distinction in many key tasks among various media, with firms going trans-border breaking media separations, demand that law makers create new regulations for media. The audience ascendancy necessitates rules to ensure access equity and quality. Here the integration in media consumption habit had to be taken into consideration. (Chaudhury, 2001).

Media owners and managers were already taking cognizance of "phenomenal synergy between hardware technologies, sophisticated software, and new applications, with each feeding into and from the other" (Ferguson, 1990). Telecom, TV and information technology convergence ushered into media

convergence resulting in scope-taking mergers such as that of AOL and Time-Warner, and many more world-wide in the last decade of last century. Cheaper cable modems and other technological advances enabled simple, inexpensive and user friendly cable TV systems to be used for internet access. Receiving TV programmes on net (WEB TV) and streaming audio and video on the net are normal along with on-line newspapers .

Naturally content creation becomes increasingly common whereas medium specific packaging would be improved to reach the audience. For media operators, the threat and opportunity of the new development poses business and creativity challenges. However, such complexities are increasing the onus-evasiveness in the area of public interest by demolishing walls of traditional media compartments.

Another issue of serious nature is that of fixing responsibility for content. With the trend of media convergence, impact of content enhanced. Houses having presence of products in converging areas make gains but what about ensuring propriety and standard of the content? More utilisation of common content by different media makes the issue of content ownership elusive. Whether any defamatory item circulated in a newspaper and its on-line version would attract action only on the printed newspaper or on the net version or on both ? A simplistic reply may be as the net version is the edition of the printed original, the print version should be taken into consideration. Inadequacy of this notion becomes clear as we observe that more online editions are offering elaborate and customized content than the printed version. Through change of format these acquire the look of new web products.

Further, the effect of having an online edition on revenue of the original print product also draws attention of economic regulators. Whether for taxation, the burden would be levied on print newspaper only, or considering web version as a separate business, a different rate may be levied on it. This requires deciding by the state that the law for newspaper registration would also cover web version or by extension any other media version.

There is much concern about public communication aspects in the changing media environment. Whether common content orientation hampers multiple voice in society by restricting content diversity or common delivery regime affects audience interest adversely are two areas where nations and international forum have to act in citizens' and global interest. As media are

changing irreversibly, limitations of existing media regulations for ordering public communication based on the earlier realities are becoming evident. The basis of earlier regulation was the media whose types never coalesced with respect to technology, main tasks and public expectation. However in 'united states of media' the ground reality is changing apace.

New Media and New Media Traits

The new media along with its superhighway Internet continues transforming the ground reality due to perfecting twelve great departures from the traditional and thus forcing the traditional communication relations for which media existed earlier.

It is born digital and exists digitally. It's unique to be egalitarian in information sourcing, generation and distribution by any and all with new media literacy. It is neutral to time, space and identity of users. Its huge data can be compressed to be sent and de-compressed to be used. Message can be changed umpteen times by users. Its network design offers immense multiple connections. Its multi-media functions are gradually evolving further. It is having localized and multi-location dynamic databases simultaneously. Its automatic nature is key to its increasing levels of interactive properties. Interactivity is the principal trait of new media. Its instantaneity and changeability with time have ensured that all the limitations of media (of interpersonal, group and mass types) would be redundant in new age era. (Chaudhury, 2013).

Lawrence Lessig wrote in the context of United States of America that while the Internet has indeed produced something fantastic and new, our government, pushed by big media to respond to this "something new", is destroying something very old. Rather than understanding the changes the Internet might permit, and rather than taking time to let "common sense" resolve how best to respond, we are allowing those most threatened by the changes to use their power to change the law and more importantly, to use their power to change something fundamental about who we have always been. (Lessig, 2004, p. 13). This effort is almost common place based on the perception of struggle between the notion of "property" and "piracy" .

However, the Arab Spring and Indian Protest movements of 2012 have proven that these notions are in contest due to the inevitable rise of social avatar of new media. Social media power is the communication power of mediated participation per-excellence. Neither politics nor economy can deny

it the place of prominence as the “in-between”; culture of the day and memory of the culture of yester-ages mingle in the cloud in contradictions and confluences here. New media’s ability to be ubiquitous also necessitates an altered conceptualization of sovereignty for states.

A New Definition Overdue

An umbrella definition of media is needed at this juncture to facilitate operational efficiency of media firms, state and its people in a liberal media environment and to serve public and national interest. The chance is no less that in search of redefinition the media horizon may be enlarged to such diverse activities that the utilitarian purpose may be lost from sight. In all probability, in such cases the redefined term may not be more than loose assemblage denoting diverse informational products or services.

One such effort at redefining media considered a shift from mass media to all information related industries. This definition includes content providers such as traditional newspapers as well as retailers, banks and travel agencies; hardware providers such as computer producers, network suppliers; and service providers like access providers to the internet, packagers etc. and so forth.

This tendency may be partially true following Marshall McLuhan's "medium is the message" saying. This extension of media horizon is partly true in the context of looking to media as an institution. Yet, before including such diverse activities and instruments within the umbrella term media, an analysis of media traits and the presence or absence of such traits in each of the activities or institutions should be undertaken. (Ross and Krogh, 1996, p. 11).

Evolving Common Traits (Chaudhury, 2008)

First trait, utilizing *communication instruments* is value neutral. Whoever owns instruments may create media products or services. In the changing environment of technology, many of the instruments are capable of being utilized for combining so far separately existing communication modes into a multimedia product or service experience. Various technologies are increasingly dictating commonness in the sphere of information sourcing and processing for various segments of the industry.

Formatting and packaging are giving separate looks to media-type specific products. The distribution enhances the scope of content reaching more people by creating more customer segments. Thus any media operator having the power in content would normally try to deliver the content in separate

formats and packages utilizing various communication instruments. Hence separation of media only for different delivery instruments would prove to be inviting inefficiency in regulating the converging industry. Demolishing barriers would also help strategy and operational efficiency in the part of more and more operators.

Thus the new definition of media may be tried keeping *communication instrument* as a feature but not according it the status of overarching component. This leads us to another important component - *message* which provides the value for media product with reference to the public and private needs.

Message is the utilitarian component of media. It is assumed that people should be provided with important information in relevant areas of the society such as politics, sports, economy, culture, religion, science and technology. *Message* refers to the content, actual information received by the user ultimately. It includes news, views, advertising, entertainment and numerical data too. While the message in single medium may vary addressing different target groups, the same content may be addressed to target groups through different media as a matter of expediency. In the same medium, efforts to customize the message through variations and story structure changes are evident. On the other hand, use of same message in products in various media under control of the same operator with or without structural change is also frequent. Therefore a rethought on the technological determinism is necessitated.

An irreversible trend of content ascending in importance is discernible. Content is the king, this common refrain can safely be extended now as the content which is more and more utilitarian for expanding population of users is the king of all media where it resides. This brings into sharp focus the criticality of the message component in defining media and the shift of stress from instruments to message. The new qualities of message originating in the lap of convergence are acquiring importance as are creating additional user values. The convergence is not only breaking the limitations of one way communication but for the first time truly democratizing the message creation and presentation.

Digital technology in all media types helps users choose content of their likings and even creating own content packages too. Virtually the time of soft presentation is arriving when customization would be at its extreme. So the

mass media is proceeding to change into interactive (how small the dose may be) and niche media. Niches may be small or big, the signs in the industry show. Governments, therefore, have to consider regulations on content which can clearly fix onus for the content, irrespective of type of communication instruments used to deliver the same. It warrants defining media in such a way that the industry, the government and international organizations have a consensus on the issue. *The scope of the definition should be such that the message aspect is reflected without any ambiguity.*

Message is for the audience. Ideally they are unlimited. In reality the traditional media have diseconomies in scale of operation depending on the audience, advertising revenue and technology platform mismatch. As the traditional media are acquiring their new media avatars (incarnations) and utilizing technologies for interactivity, targeting audience becomes crucial for its success. Right targeting in search of audience value creation is reflected in several areas - the message sourcing and processing, tuning delivery to audience need, formatting for audience segments and so on. Hence media audience targeting is shifting from general to niche, where unique value creation can ensure success. The diversification of media product portfolio by operators reflects the same. Governments cannot remain disinterested to such changes as niching and segmenting complicate the media content market. The public service inherence in media institution is bound to suffer in such cases. The government has the logic to regulate distribution for enforcing a state of balance under such cases. Where to regulate and where not would be justified when the limit of the media is clearly demarcated.

On the basis of the above discussion, an idea emerges about the media. *Communication instrument is not the media but it is the vehicle used by the media. Message enlivens the communication instrument and is transformed in the process of reaching a real target audience.* An effort to assess the value for claims of diverse activities to be considered as media may be undertaken on the basis of discussion on various aspects of these components. From the table it is evident that hardware and software providers, packagers and ISPs may deal with information but content processing, the key to media, is absent in their activities. In the system of media starting from information sourcing through content processing to delivery in the form of media-specific - message to the target audience, the transformation of information into knowledge for the public in steps is clear. Knowledge lodges in man and man is the way to have it (Anukulchandra). Media mediate human experience sharing and facilitate knowledge transfer. For these acts, multiple instruments

Table: Core Tasks in Media and Their Position in Diverse Activities Claiming as Media

Activity / Service	Sourcing	Processing Content	Delivery	Audience
Traditional Newspaper/ Magazine/ Book	Discovering interesting stories / news	Collection, selection, editing & printing preparation	Innumerable hard copies Distributed as commodity	Targeted readers
Online Newspaper	Discovering interesting stories / news	Collection, selection, editing & web format preparation	customized pages, navigated in Net	Surfers
Radio Channel	Discovering interesting stories / news & entertainment programmes	Collection, selection, editing & audio version preparation	Wave transmission to receiver sets	Programme-time bound listeners
Web Radio	Discovering interesting stories / news/programmes	Collection, selection, editing & digital audio preparation	Transferring to Net	Listening by surfers at will
TV channel	Discovering interesting stories / news/programmes	Collection, Selection, Editing & Audio-visual preparation	Terrestrial Satellite & Cable, DTH etc.	Programme-time bound viewers
Web TV	Discovering interesting stories / news/programmes	Collection, selection, editing & printing preparation	Transferred to Net	Surfing viewers at will
Movies / Video	Creating stories of appeal	Scripting shooting & editing, Master copy preparation	Numerous hard copies on reel or disc	Viewer at exhibition venue

Cassette / CDs	Creating songs, dramas, skit, discussion etc for entertainment mainly	Scripting, arranging recording & editing, Master copy preparation	Numerous copies of cassette or disc	Listeners & viewers at will
Website	Discovering interesting Information or sharing content	Developing site, formatting, Content editing updating.	Positioning in World Wide Web	Surfers at will
Hardware & software providers	Absent	Absent	Supply to media operators etc.	Media firms etc.
Internet service providers	Absent	Absent	Facilitating navigation through sites	Surfers
Packagers	Absent	Absent	Packaging content for delivery	Media firms etc.

Source: Towards Redefining Media, part of doctoral thesis (2001) of the author.

are used from sourcing to delivery stage. So in the system, the instruments basically are the support devices. "Social construction of reality" in news, entertainment and views that the media incorporate in message is search of its *raison-d-etre*. *The effort of the media to reach the audience in their terms is the zeit geist of this period.*

A Definition Proposed

Considering all these, *media may be envisaged as a process institution for transforming information into knowledge for the audience by creation and enlargement of message through instruments of process and delivery.*

In this effort to define the media, the contradiction among different technological media (which are based on difference in instruments mainly) as seen in traditional division is resolved. *The solution is emerging through acceptance of criticality of the message component, which has been undervalued earlier in technological determinism which showed it as medium- dependent component only.*

Dynamism in society depends much on information exchange, opinion formation and knowledge development and sharing. Quantum jump in media content has been instrumental to bring one way communication to its peak. The qualitative change to interactivity is gradually eliminating the loss in message content in one way flow. The message would never be the same again as the scope of enlargement is going to be inbuilt in content programming. The effort in defining media accepted this critical component.

The message enlargement continues from the stage of content processing, formatting and delivery to consumption. As technology is mediating in all these stages and determines media product or service packaging to a great extent, the definition takes cognizance of the same.

Conclusion

The definition looks to media as an institution rather than communication instruments. Every institution in the society evolves with purpose. The evolution of media in the quest of creation and spread of knowledge from apparently disparate binary bits or bits of information attests its institutionalizing. David Bollier and Charles M. Firestone opined that new media technologies are creating a knowledge hierarchy. To them, datum is the elemental form of knowledge. A step up is information, where data are organized and defined in some intangible fashion. True knowledge emerges when information is interpreted and synthesized, reflecting certain values. Wisdom is the summit. It is the knowledge that carries spiritually profound, transhistorical insight (Pavlik).

It is the evolutionary urge of media that dictated media technology upgradation over many centuries. Each time upgraded technology necessitated new organizational structure. However, the "social construction of reality" remains in the domain of social wisdom manifest in activities of information gathering and content creation. As an all pervasive institution, the media is at the centre stage of state attention. The question of language vehicle (especially for people of minority languages worldwide) and the cultural preference in content (when transborder broadcasts have the technological capability to homogenize with bias towards the dominating culture) are two such issues to be dealt by states. The proposed definition is the recognition of this reality too.

Within the scope of this definition, a common media regulation can be enforced by states for various media forms. The confusion of assigning media status to many support industry and information sector activities such as banking would be over. In an unified media regulatory regime the prospect of

media products will be more, taking scope of simplified procedures and integrative impulse. Governments can face the challenge of changing media situation in a better way as several problems pertaining to many media are accepted as different problems within the same legal provision.

The definition, while solving many problems arising out of new developments in information sector, hints at the group of core activities woven around the social existence in the backdrop of state, culture and economy. The conventions for execution of core activities followed in media firms accord media the status of an institution. These conventions span over all thinking and actions that facilitate knowledge building from bits of information .

Potentially information knows no limit but it is limited by the reality of limited capability of HR to sieve out the angle of interest within it as well as by the decision of the firm to put its scarce resource in few chosen information areas. Within this limit, firms try to spell success discovering audience match. Therefore, the definition offers a frame of reference for understanding media industry in action.

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