

Lecture- 05



Idealism and Press Theories

Many of these theories have reflected Western idealism and championship of a Western perspective of democracy. The work of Picard (1985) is no exception. He reviewed previous categories of state–press relations and added a further concept, that of the democratic socialist theory of the press. This theory argued that the press’s purposes are to provide an avenue for expression of public views and to fuel the political and social debates necessary for the continued development of democratic governance. Under the umbrella of the theory, the role of the state is to ensure the ability of citizens to use the press and to preserve and promote media plurality.

HATCHEN’S addition:

Hachten also proposed five theories or concepts of the press emphasizing politics and economics: authoritarian, Western, Communist, revolutionary, and developmental or third world. His conception of authoritarianism was similar to that of Siebert and Lowenstein. However, his Western concept encompassed both the libertarian and social-responsibility models with its defining characteristic being that it is relatively free of arbitrary government controls. Under the Communist concept, media are tools that serve as implements of revelation (by revealing purposes and goals of party leaders) as well as instruments of unity and consensus. The main difference between authoritarian and Communist systems is ownership. In authoritarian systems, press can be privately owned as opposed to state ownership in Communist systems. Hachten defined the revolutionary concept as being illegal and subversive mass communication utilizing the press. Finally, the developmental model was seen to have arisen out of a combination of Communist ideas, anti-Americanism, and social-responsibility ideals.

Hachten saw the defining characteristic of this concept as being the idea that individual rights must be subordinated to the larger goals of nation-building and thus must support authority. This concept is also seen to be a negative response to the Western model. However, his classification never yields a clear distinction of the press systems, for the analytical dimensions are defined both under the system of the state (authoritarian, Western, Communist) and the functions of the media (revolutionary and developmental).

Criticism:

Work on categorization of national press systems in the last 40 years has been grounded in the well-known Four Theories of the Press. Whereas this approach has been strongly criticized by international scholars for its idealism and its poverty of empiricism, it is still widely taught in introductory journalism courses across the country, and few theorists have engaged in grounding the theory with data in international settings. Although journalism is contextualized and constrained by press structure and state policies, it is also a relatively autonomous cultural production of journalists negotiating between their professionalism and state control.

The world order has changed greatly in the last decade. Many of the old frameworks—including those of the media such as the Four Theories of the Press (Four Theories)—are obsolete and inapplicable for contemporary analysis. The new order has already annulled their explanatory power. We need new ideas to account for the development of our internationalized and diverse forms of media. The theories are hardly applicable to the current scenario.

Conclusion

Not confined to the extent of theories, the media always faces (and is open to) criticism and social scientists always keep this debate open as how best media could be used to improve functioning of civil society and promotion of democratic sense and practices. In their view if people's knowledge, understandings, capabilities, and actions are manufactured, it simultaneously follows that they can be developed, improved, and individualized in proper (ideal- democratic) circumstances. Among these circumstances, proper communication networks are inevitable. Because of new developments, the relationship among the state, private sectors, markets, and civil society profoundly changed during the 1980s.

In politically and economically advanced societies the change is based on new information and telecommunications technologies, which affected the media industries in terms of economic restructuring, and on a new social and political environment, as reflected by media contents. Training and continuing development of professionalism can be done to advance and nurture balanced and impartial news presentation. Professionalism implies standards and procedures, which means journalists tend to act as responsible members of the political establishment, upholding the dominant political perspective.

*** Media Laws - An Overview: Mass Media systems of the world vary from each other according to the economy, polity, religion and culture of different societies. In societies, which followed communism and totalitarianism, like the former USSR and China, there were limitations of what the media could say about the government. Almost everything that was said against the State was censored for fear of revolutions. On the other hand, in countries like USA, which have a Bourgeois Democracy, almost everything is allowed.