

Conference on 'Media in Transition 6: Stone & Papyrus,
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Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA
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**Paper Title: "E - Media Evolution in Pakistan: Emergence of
Visual Democracy – Building Concepts, Discourses &
Frameworks"**

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(Please note that this is a draft document but it may give an outlook of Visual
Democracy in Pakistan due to emergence of e-media in last 07 years)

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Conference Theme: "Media in the Developing World", 'Hyper Local Media and Civic Engagement', 'Approaches to Media History'

Key words: Mass Media, Pakistan, Developing World, e-media, digital media, democratic media, visual democracy, participatory media, Culture, Values, Traditions, Political Communication, Internet TV etc.

Abstract: The mass growth of electronic media in the last seven years changed the landscape of media in Pakistan. This growth is just not bound to attract largest audience but also shaped the market dynamics of mass media by creating opportunities to journalists in specific and people in general. The necessity of this core topic is felt in the current situation, where Pakistani media is transforming in many aspects that includes technological, economical, social and political and also on the moral grounds. Its access to the large audience is increasing day by day with the inclusion of private media. The concept of community radio is also getting its place in the media-environment. The booming culture of FM Radio and internet-localization factor also demanded the capacity of media history research.

However, e-media has played a greater role in the last general elections held in February 2008 by doing live coverage of political rallies, political speeches, attacks on political parties, political-terrorism by killing of political dignitaries and this all happened to general public through live images, So, the basic concept of this paper is how 'e-images or live coverage can bring the concepts of visual democracy in Pakistan and can change public opinion and also can build new frameworks and discourses in the public media scholarship'. The phenomenon of live coverage is just not restricted to general elections but it has profound impact on 'Lawyers' Movement', 'Assassination of Benazir Bhutto' and 'Long March'.

Research Methodology: In this paper, the political events which are dominated the media-people-state troika are taken into account as judicial crisis in 2007, death of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007, General Election in February 2008 and Long March to reinstate of Chief Justice of Pakistan in March 2009. These events are contextualized into broader framework and discourse that may bring the notions, framework and discourse of visual democracy. The most relevant associated term is 'Live Coverage of Political Events' on e-media of Pakistan. This analysis will clearly give an outlook to emerging concepts of visual democracy in Pakistan and how these news media through cable, satellite or internet transforms political and social change in the society.

The terms such as free media, democratic media, public media, political trends, and nation-state defined in the study are basically 'conceptual terms' that "describes concepts or classes of phenomena by relating them to other concepts" (Smith J Mary

1988). These concepts are further analyzed through “informational discourse” to get ‘acquisition’ of ‘facts’ (Smith J Mary 1988). Similarly, “the study is Pluralistic in nature as to foster for alternative worldviews and to promote interdisciplinary criticism for paradigms”. Pakistan is taken as case study as this method provides patterns of observations, insights and ideas that can be merged with other investigations to produce results which can be generalized (Severin & Tankard 1992).

This study will be pioneer work in this dimension in the local settings and will give some thresholds for building discourse on Visual Democracy in Pakistan through the transformation of e-media. This proposed study will also provide certain benchmarks for studying social and cultural transformations by using media outlets in the broader perspective. Finally, it will also pave ways for building future studies for political communication based on survey methods for a larger population.

Research Questions/Objectives:

1. Can electronic media revolution (specifically TV Channels) in Pakistan bring the concepts of Visual Democracy that are close associated with the political, social, cultural networking and transformation in the society or not and what are the suggestive benchmarks to study and analyze these transformations?
2. What are trends, opportunities and challenges to the traditional media outlets and what are the converging or emerging points?
3. Can the concepts of Visual Democracy is based on events or situations and how state’s operates to those emerging ideas?
4. How this phenomenon can be mixed-up with the traditional forms of communication in the developing world in case of Pakistan?
5. What are the notions, discourses and frameworks for developing a public media?

This study can determine the local settings and will give some thresholds for building discourse on Visual Democracy in Pakistan through the transformation of e-media. This proposed study will also provide certain benchmarks for studying social and cultural transformations by using media outlets in the broader perspective. Finally, it will also pave ways for building future studies for political communication based on survey methods for a larger population.

The study is divided into three parts keeping in view the research questions and objectives. The first part deals with building of global media discourse towards localization. The second part deals with certain myths and realities in which evolution of electronic media happened in Pakistan in its conceptual and analytical framework leading towards creating democratic media. The third part deals with de-contextualizing the visual democracy in its analytical framework how certain notions, frameworks and discourses are still associated or in operation while talking about e-media evolution in Pakistan.

Building Global Media Discourse to Localization: The global median in its present outlook and nature relied upon visuals of global events. This is also described as “Visual products are constantly changing themselves in the context of the society in which they develop. That is why the field of visibility is an extremely dynamic

phenomenon" (Beatriz Tomsic Cerkez & Primoz Urbanc 2007). Talking in the same context, the concepts of citizen journalism, especially photojournalism, are mixed up testimonies with journalism. These testimonies resulted due to digital revolution which can be reached to larger audience ("for the people") produced by a larger group of persons ("by the people"). So can we described it better photojournalism and therefore, better democracy? (Hughes Leglise Bataille 2007).

However, the images of the Gulf Wars, 9/11, the Madrid bombing, and London bombings, Abu Ghraib changed the both political and visual economies of representation that are redefining democracy in ways that are not yet clear. (Perivolaris John 2007)¹. He further described the concepts of Visual democracy goes beyond instrumental use by elites and its beneficiaries are lagers group of mass people including diverse actors, media, practices, audiences, and functions. (Perivolaris John 2007).

Supporting to above discussion, the concepts of Public Journalism also facilitate democratic process by engaging citizens to their issues of concerns. This engagement process can be facilitated by developing opinion and decision making for building democratic process and public discourse (Haas Tanni 1999). Whereas, Habermas opined for a communication model of deliberative politics that is a mediated form of political communication in the public sphere backed by free media and social responsible and an informative civil society (Habermas Jurgen 2006). This can be endorsed in developing nations likewise Pakistan where e-media is invoice but can exercise its influence in making and re-shaping public opinion through coverage of political events in last 02 years.

The concepts of Public Journalism can be discussed by elaborating "emancipatory journalism" that specifies role within "new social movements" for journalism and journalists in the process of national development (Shah Hemant 1996). However, the global media is still under debate by its stakeholders at various fronts that whether presence of an international ethics of journalism is existed or not. The death of Princesses Diana, genocide in Congo and it's coverage by the international media put again the question of an ethical journalism in the last decade of 20th century and these considerations were given ample significance by the concepts of a democratic journalism through its participatory, innovative and professional outlook (Kunzik Michael 1999). Michael Kunzik further elaborated that "the concepts of journalism are different across the globe due to diversity in culture, social norms and economic status of world nations however, it should be viewed the nature of media rules, constituted either by state, under public law or by the private sector". However, it is understood that the media has potential to contribute for democratic process through building a democratic citizenship and ethical readership and this can be called civic-journalism (Schroll J Christopher 1999).

¹ John Perivolaris raised certain questions in the same context as "what is the meaning of democracy? Can unprecedented access to visual means of self-representation on a global scale translate into meaningful representation in a sociopolitical sphere increasingly mediated by digital technologies? Is the basic condition of the new world order of digitized democracy a creative consent to capitalism? Can a democratic republic of photography be glimpsed on the horizon?"

Contextualizing Myths & Realities: The history of Pakistani electronic media is spanned over 44 years since people got their access to state owned TV in 1964. The state-owned TV seemed necessary to follow the policies of every government either elected or unelected. This argument is further strengthened while looking into the political history of the country that mainly carried an ideological outlook e.g. Zia's regime for Islamization, Musharaf's regime of enlightened moderation and Zardari government a mixed of both legacies.

Due to the process of ideological and indoctrination, the media never eased itself to fight for building public discourse on democracy. There are obvious many reasons as majority population in the rural areas has accessed only to single state TV and trends and impacts of globalization and democratization didn't reach to this part of world.

However, in 1990's things are changed when commercial aspects are entered in e-media and it had also brought in the form and presentation of drama and other entertainment tools in the industry. New media (Private Electronic Channels) has brought many changes in the landscape of media in the country and this has been happened during the Musharaf's era. These changes are viewed in technology, audience, nature of programmes new media especially Private Electronic channels.

The new e-media in Pakistan's 61-year history played a central role in restoring elected civilian government led by PPP-led coalition in Feb. 2008 (Khan Zafarullah & Joseph Brian 2008) and also Chief Justice of Pakistan after long march in March 2009 (political pundits described its street power that compelled a civilian and an elected government to accept public demand). The emergence of e-media is always credited during the Musharaf's era but it need was felt during the Kargil war between Pakistan and India in 1999, where people had limited access to the rightful information, this turned them to Indian channels² (Khan Zafarullah & Joseph Brian 2008).

However, the financial factor or commercialization aspects also dominated the landscape of e-media in Pakistan. This was dominated on e-media or new media in Pakistan during the general elections held in February 2008. The leading parties have got an alternative to publicize their manifestations by paying advertisements on these independent channels than ever³ (Khan Zafarullah & Joseph Brian 2008). But, the role

² Aside from a vibrant print media, there are more than 40 TV channels (54 satellite-TV licenses have been issued); 50 FM radio stations (102 licenses issued); and 1,218 local cable-TV operators.³ The government-controlled Pakistan Television (PTV) network has four channels, reaching nearly 90 percent of the country, while the 25 state-run radio stations, which broadcast in nineteen languages, have a countrywide reach" & this information can be viewed on www.accountancy.com.pk/docs/economic-survey-pakistan-2007-0802.pdf.

³ From 11 December 2007 to 17 February 2008, the Centre for Civic Education, Islamabad recorded 36,339 advertisements carried on 38 television channels, all of them together costing an estimated US\$8.6 million. Tellingly, only 13 percent of all party ads appeared on the state-run PTV; the remaining 87 percent went out via private stations. Each of the leading parties used paid ads. (URL Cited: <http://www.civiceducation.org>)

of middle class of the country with its amalgam of political outlook could be possible only through the presence of new media. The new media has diverted the potential entertainment viewers into news-thirsty audience. Because, the foremost assessment of any nation's freedom is the degree of freedom that its people are openly using and exercising in speaking, writing and publishing as this argument may support the above discussion. But, this phenomenon is not applicable to Pakistan where public and democratic rule was missing for more than 30 years in 60 years life of the state (Hasan Mehdi 2001). As for as, media in Pakistan is concerned, the concepts of liberalization, competition, market segmentation and cross-media ownership are also dominant in local scenario.

De-Contextualizing Visual Democracy Discourse: Despite good happenings and mushroom growth of TV channels, the troika of people-media-state is running on the tight robe. There are certain forces or pressures in terms of financial, legal, moral, ethical, social or political those have hindered the development of public discourse on visual democracy through a vibrant and free media. Because, Pakistan is still considered not safe haven for journalists as they are most vulnerable community who lay down their lives while performing public duty⁴.

Taking the role of e-media in political events in last two years, it can be said easily that media was the first victim of state either led by a military ruler or a civilian. During the live coverage of the Chief Justice of Pakistan in 2007, the political parties had severely criticized the Musharaf's regime for imposing restrictions on live coverage of lawyers' movement on private TV channels. The present government which was in opposition was the staunch supporter of e-media and its freedom⁵, but, once they got power to rule the country then they have also adopted same state's owned methods to curb the media freedom and live coverage of Long March on March 16, 2009⁶.

⁴ Attacks against media in Pakistan in 2008 reflected the general trend of violence in the country with 12 journalists killed and over 201 cases of abuses recorded against the media in the year, a new annual report on the state of media reveals. The statistics also reveal that during 2008, on an average every month one journalist died, more than three were arrested or abducted, six were injured in assaults, about 10 were threatened or intimidated, nearly two media organizations were issued gag orders and overall more than 17 cases of violations against the media occurred each month. (URL Cited: www.intermedia.org.pk)

⁵ The spokesperson of the PPP, former Senator Farhatullah Babar said the ban on live broadcasts was "malafide and illegal" and against the provisions of the law regulating private broadcasting. Under article 26 of the PEMRA law, coercive action can be taken only on the recommendations of the Council of Complaints to which any aggrieved party may complain "against any aspect of the programmes." The law does not permit the government to unilaterally ban live broadcasts, he said. (URL Cited: Asia Media: <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu>)

⁶ Geo News Managing Director Azhar Abbas said the government ordered cable operators to either stop the transmission of "Geo News" or move it to the tail-end of the transmission spectrum, making it difficult for viewers to locate the channel. The order, he said, was apparently in response to our live coverage of the Long March and related protest demonstrations which the government didn't like. He said that the one-year-old government is under intense political pressure due to the number of protests occurring in the country, which appear to have prompted it to ban independent media coverage. (URL Cited: Pakistan Press Foundation www.pakistanpressfoundation.org)

In the same breath, the state owned media controlling authority i.e PEMRA adopted policies that are always negate the freedom of expression and growth of e-media in Pakistan. The issue of live coverage of lawyers' movement in 2009 gave mixed signals to the public⁷. Whereas, the coverage of elections in February 2008, e-media played a pivotal role in contrast to the state owned media (PTV)⁸. These elections were held first time in the presence of an independent and pluralist media that also created opportunity to get advertising money in exchange for soaring viewership. The impact of e-media in this regard itself became a major political story **(Rehmat, Adnan, 2008)**.

The representative bodies of journalists (PFUJ) have always on huge and cry for 'Free Media for Fair Polls'⁹. The PEMRA's Third Amendment Ordinance 2007 notified seven new violations. But, the presence of e-media that can be called as 'Citizen's Broadcast' was evolved when emergency was imposed in the country. The 24/7 channels (off- aired) were became available on internet that created a public discourse through emails and blogs against suppressions. This was also supported by 70 million users of mobile phone sin the country **(Rehmat, Adnan, 2008)**.

Conclusion: The development of public discourse for visual democracy in Pakistan is also undermined when the societies accept the verdict of extremism then the notions of freedom of speech, free access to information and open spaces for cultural discourse is curtailed. This is evident in the series of terrorist activities across the country where the question of media freedom, media usage by the extremist groups for their won vested interests (pirate-media), psychological effects on society and brutal killings of journalists by those groups.

Despite above facts, the evolution of e-media in Pakistan is encouraging and maturing with the passage of time. The concepts of visual democracy are interlinked with the

⁷ PEMRA's letter to TV Channels stated that "In clear disregard of the orders of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and PEMRA laws and code of conduct, the broadcasters are running live talk shows and discussions on the chief justice's reference which is sub judice." It is worth mentioning that several federal and state ministers have also been participating in the talk shows on the CJ issue, but the PEMRA letter has no mention about participants of the programmes. (URL Cited: **Waseem, Aamir (2009)** 'Channels barred from airing shows on CJ issue' Asia Media <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu>

⁸ Media monitoring carried out by Human Rights Watch indicates that the state-controlled Pakistan Television (PTV), which has a wider reach than private channels, is heavily biased towards the Musharraf-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Q and its allies. Human Rights Watch monitored PTV's election coverage in three phases prior to elections: December 19-26, January 7-14, and February 7-10. During this time, the state media gave PML-Q and its allies broadcast time far in excess of its coverage of the opposition. In addition, PTV completely ignored the parties advocating a boycott of elections. Privately-owned channels, however, do report on the activities of these political parties, which have participated in previous elections. A disproportionate amount of air time was allotted to Musharraf supporters, particularly after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on December 27 (URL Cited: **Pakistan: Media Restrictions Undermine Election** <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/02/16/pakist18088.htm>)

⁹ The government on its part did not even follow its own PEMRA Ordinance, on Nov 3, when over 45 TV channels and two FM radio were put off air. PFUJ believes the action was illegal and without any lawful authority.

freedom and an ethical framework and also a public and democratic discourse. This is the only way that paves for a vibrant, free and democratic media, also keeping intact the public-media-state troika for developing public discourse in the public interest.

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