

MEDIA, POLITICS AND RESPONSIVE ADMINISTRATION

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With the advent of democracy, the role of media has been becoming increasingly important in championing the public causes and espousing the wishes, aspirations and grievances of the general public. Media has been playing a singular role in both assisting as well as criticising the Government and the Administration in effectively meeting the challenges of Governance and fulfilling the aspirations of its people as envisaged in a democratic polity and welfare State like India.

Both traditional media and especially the recently popular social media are often regarded as a set of new communication practices which are likely, if deployed effectively, to make public accountability and administration more responsive to the popular will of the people in whom all Sovereignty lies. The role of media may be studied in context with the various stakeholders with whom they interact and upon whom they exercise influence. In this context, responsiveness is usually approached as the governmental response leading to an administrative action to take corrective measures or function of establishing additional channels of information and responding faster to citizen queries. Notwithstanding the importance of these objectives, this study aims to reconceptualise the relationship and influence of both the traditional media as well as social media upon government action & administrative responsiveness.

Drawing on the contemporary and current media, both the print media as well as the electronic media and literature, in connection with the case of the 2G Spectrum Allotment Scandal in India, the study identifies the role and effectiveness of the new dimensions of traditional as well as social media in Governmental and administrative responsiveness. The findings of this study may provide useful insights both for the various stakeholders including the political class, the media organisations, the Governmental decision-making process and the administrative machinery and members of the general public. This study might also be of some assistance to the researchers in the field and perhaps also for those in the process of formulating and developing media strategies both in the government and its various constituencies.

Case Study: The 2G, Spectrum Allotment Scandal

In 2011, the Time magazine listed India's 2G Spectrum Allotment Scandal at number two on their " Top 10 Abuses of Power" list, just behind the infamous Watergate scandal of the seventies.

The 2G spectrum allotment scam was a sensational scandal involving politicians and government officials in India, illegally undercharging cellphone companies in the private sector for frequency allocation licenses, which they would

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then use to create 2G spectrum subscriptions for cell phones.

The shortfall between the money collected and the money that the law mandated to be collected was estimated to be nearly Rs. 1766.45 billion, as valued by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. This estimation was based on 3G and BWA spectrum auction prices in the year 2010. In a chargesheet filed on 2 April 2011 by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the loss was estimated to be about Rs. 309845.5 million.

All the speculations of profit, loss, and no-loss were put to rest on 2 February 2012 when the country's apex court, the Supreme Court of India, delivered its speaking judgement on the public interest litigation (PIL) which was filed regarding the 2G spectrum scandal. The Supreme Court declared the allotment of spectrum as "unconstitutional and arbitrary" and quashed all the 122 licenses issued in 2008 during the tenure of A. Raja, the then Minister for Communications and IT, from 2007 to 2009, who was the main accused in the 2G scandal.

The court also observed that the accused A. Raja sought to unduly favour certain companies at the cost of the public exchequer" and that he "virtually gifted" away important national asset." The zero loss theory was further demolished when as per the directions of the Supreme Court, the Government of India revised the base price for 5 MHz 2G spectrum auction to Rs.140 billion, leading the value of spectrum to amount to about Rs.28 billion per MHz : a figure quite close to the CAG's estimate of Rs.33.5 billion per MHz..

Role of Media

The Indian media, both the print, electronic as well as the social media did extensive reporting and discussion about the various aspects of the 2G Spectrum Allotment Scandal. This case emerged as one of the classic examples of what makes government & administration responsive to citizens' ire and grievances?

This paper endeavours to highlight the role of media in carrying out its primary function of representing the public sentiment and information flow about policy actions. In a democracy where the writ of the people should run, having an informed and politically active electorate strengthens incentives for government responsiveness.

An indepth study and the available evidence from an-detailed analysis of the various media in India shows that the government and administration grew more responsive when media raised this issue vociferously, media presence and its impact upon the public were higher, newspaper circulation was considerable and electoral accountability greater. It thus indisputably emerges from the study that there is undoubtedly a role for mass media and India's democratic institutions in ensuring that citizens' preferences are reflected in governmental policy and its administrative

response.

Analysis

An attempt to understand what makes government responsive to citizens' needs is particularly important in a maturing democratic polity like India where the government of the day is bound by the Constitution to periodically seek the people's mandate for renewed sanction for governance.

Government and administration have been found to be more likely to respond to the public demands especially when electoral turnout is high and political competition intense. Mass media has been found to have played a significant role by enabling vulnerable citizens to monitor the actions of the incumbent government and to use this information in voting decisions.

These findings and conclusions are derived from an objective study of facts, information and data collated from both the traditional as well as the social media. India has an active press and a vibrant media catering to a large electoral population which is regularly affected by, and often influences, government policies and administrative responses. Representative democracy and free and independent media are key factors in protecting the national interests of the citizenry.

Findings

1. The Central Government has been found to be more responsive to when it was perceived that the presence, role and impact of media, newspaper circulation, resultant public awareness, the enquiring ability of the public and electoral accountability were higher.
2. The media in general including the various television news channels, national, regional as well as local newspapers published in state- specific languages, tend to report the national, regional and the localised events in a reasonably proportionate and balanced measure that, in turn, has an impact upon the process of opinion-formation and the electoral decision-making process on the part of the public. The television news channels as well as the newspapers, therefore, play a role in making the political class- and the administrative machinery more responsive to the citizens' concerns, demands and grievances.
3. Greater electoral concern on part of the government has been found to be largely associated with greater administrative responsiveness.

As perception, as being reflected in the media, and apparent political standing in the public eye appears to fall or apprehensions of likely electoral damage increases, these factors together and jointly tend to increase government reaction and administrative responsiveness.

4. Levels of public awareness and public preferences appear to elicit proportionate response from the politically competing groups and the likely timing of general elections, have been found to be important factors that appear to increase in election or pre-election years.
5. Economic development appears to be relatively less important in this study; rather political awareness, as reflected in the media, appears to be a more relevant factor irrespective of the economic strata of the electorate.

These findings are consistent with earlier literature examining the importance of the media in similar or comparable situations and policy responses. The findings and results underline the potential role of media and the administrative responses of the government of the day in an effectively functioning democracy.
6. Elections provide an incentive for politicians to perform as per the wishes of the public, which can be enhanced by progress and development of the media. The responsiveness of government to issues such as find great importance in the public mind is likely to be greater where the media is more active and developed.
7. Institutions alone of the political competition, for e.g. general elections may not necessarily be found to be enough to deliver a responsive government unless the electorate are vested with the authority to discipline corrupt and ill-functioning incumbents. This may require effective institutions for information transmission to the electorate.
8. Results point to the importance of mechanisms for improving accountability in encouraging government action and administrative response. This compares favourably with demands for an improved and responsible governance in a developing nation like India where political corruption is seen as a socio-political malaise.
9. The findings also underline the vulnerability of the electorate in-as-much as they are often gripped by a sense of being helpless in the face of attempts to, stonewall their just and reasonable demands unless a free and independent media might come to their relief and possibly raise the larger issue of governance and administrative responsiveness.
10. There appears to be ample scope for further studies that might seek to analyse the relationship between government policy, administrative responsiveness and the role of media. Such a study appears to be all the more significant in the context of media development, especially in a developing country like India.

The media also gave extensive coverage to the various Policy Responses and Determinants of Government Action Taken, as well as to the voice of an indignant

public and a vociferous opposition. The extensive media coverage had a massive effect upon the imminent general elections. The media, thus, played a key role in forming and shaping of public opinion, thereby directly affecting the complexion and the outcome of the historic general elections, which had a direct bearing upon the polity of the country.

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