

# Media, Entertainment and Development Communication: Perspective of a Developing Nation

<sup>1</sup>DR. SONAL PANDYA, <sup>2</sup>WISDOM PETER AWUKU

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Head of Department and Professor, Department of Communication and Journalism C/O H. K. Centre for Professional Training, Gujarat University, Navrangpura-380009, Ahmedabad-Gujarat, India Contact: 079-27913902, 9408078664. E-mail: [sonalp14@gmail.com](mailto:sonalp14@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D Scholar at the Department of Communication and Journalism. C/O H. K. Centre for Professional Training, Gujarat University, Navrangpura-380009., Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. Contact: 09499553251/+233244366910. E-mail: [kofiageshe@gmail.com](mailto:kofiageshe@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Media, Entertainment and Development Communication can be the catalyst in the paradigm shift in India's approach to its developmental agenda as an emerging economy among developing nations. The Media, Entertainment and Development Communication have become the stimulating factor to activate India's human and natural resources to demystify the old concept of "Top-Down" approach to development. Development communication is founded on a paradigm. This paradigm puts the modern media of social communication at the service of development. Development is making use of a country's human and material resources in order to increase the production of goods and services to enhance the general progress and welfare of its people. The core essence of development communication is for behavioural change. To Everett Rogers, "Development communication refers to the uses to which communication are put in order to further development." The development communicator must devise innovative approaches in explaining development process to the ordinary person in a manner that would influence change. Development communication is a skill. Its purpose or objective is to help at developing social awareness, we-feeling and responsibility towards one's fellow beings, community and country. "It bothers on social consciousness. Hence, the term, "conscientisation," the sensitizing of the conscience." One of the most important roles of the Media in development communication is the provision of information, enabling platform for effective discourse on national issues, explaining ideas, skills for a transformed life and a catalyst for consensus building for national cohesion. India has taken advantage of the media and exploited its potentials for its development agenda since its early inception in the 1940s. Development journalism became the focal point of the media. It is the central focus of the media and constitutes the whole communication process. It means change in attitudes on the part of the government and the media: both electronic and print. As a developing nation, India has no choice, in considering development issues as major policy decisions that directly or indirectly affect the life of its people. When development communication became the vehicle for transformation in the 1940s in India, different languages were used for radio broadcast to make the ordinary person part of the process of development. In Entertainment, it is said that music transcends borders, cultures, languages and continents. One does not need to understand the lyrics to appreciate the beauty of music. It is just an expression of a feeling. This feeling cannot be measured. In the same vein, films offer a deeper appreciation as compared to music. Films use both visual and audio; the interplay of both verbal and non-verbal communications. The influence of Cinema on India's culture, education, leisure and propaganda became the channel for transformation. In a 1963 report for the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), looking at Indian Cinema and Culture, the author, Baldoon Dhingra, quoted a speech by Prime Minister Nehru who stated, "...the influence in India of films is greater than newspapers and books combined." Sadly, it is becoming more rhetorical than practical.

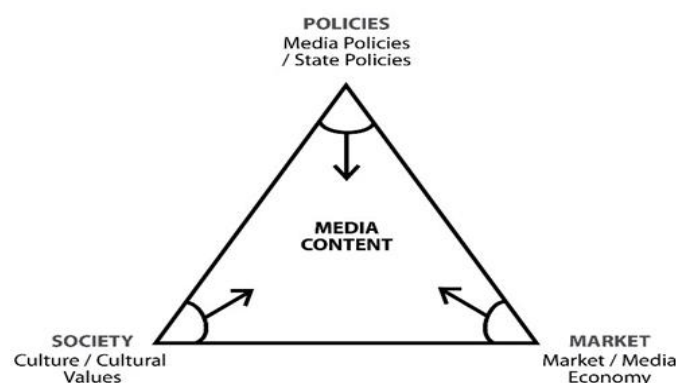
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

These researchers in their quest to look at Media, Entertainment and Development question, decided to narrow their narrative on Padmavati. The controversy surrounding this movie as a result of the decision by some states, including Gujarat, to ban it, has cast a slur on the creative industry of India. As mentioned earlier in the abstract in the quote by Prime Minister Nehru that “..the influence in India of films is greater than newspapers and books combined,” there is no gain-saying, that in one breath, India is making use of the potentials of development communication as a vehicle for transformation and in another breath, muzzling the entertainment industry for parochial interest. It must be pointed out that communicating information and messages to the people is not the only aspect of development communication. There is more to development communication than just selling or sharing ideas. It involves the total participation of all stakeholders and the ability to assess the situation. One of the most powerful industries under development communication is the film industry also known as the creative industry. Cinema has become a powerful vehicle for culture, education, leisure and propaganda. Film reflects society, both present and past. Movies are a form of communication; their story lines are reflections of the society- not just where society is presently and what it is doing now- but the current position of that society in the creative industry. This has been that way for as long as movies have been around! There is no doubt that India movies are some of the most watched movies around the globe. It is estimated that, between 1500-2000 Indian films are produced every year. This makes the Indian film industry the biggest exporter of its culture worldwide, fetching the industry over \$2.1 billion in December, 2015 and it is expected to hit \$3.7 billion in revenue by the year, 2020. It is not just about laughter, excitement, immeasurable feelings or satisfaction that one gets but it is also a big business. Beyond this big business, film epitomizes self-expression. Freedom of Speech! Development communication does not mean dealing with only economic poverty and underdevelopment. It also deals with intellectual poverty. India has been a beneficiary of massive and prolific literary scholars who have written thousands of books to feed its educational system and the reading public. According to the 2011 population census of India, the literacy rate is 74 percent. The literacy rate in India, even though, is not one of the best in the world, has seen very significant increase since independence from Britain. This success story could, obviously, be attributed to the works of literary giants. The film industry, for which India is well noted, is part of the creative industry or the intellectual revolution. Society would suffer if these creative intellectuals decide to lay down their tools in protest against what can be described as being hounded by obnoxious social and traditional pressures. The creative industry is the base of social development. It helps to preserve the traditional knowledge. There can never be social development without creative liberty. Unfortunately, this creative liberty is made to suffer at the hands of social and religious pressure. The media operates under both specific and general policies; the policy of liberalisation also known as market force economy. The state-owned media benefits from government subvention or financial support. Their roles are specific and straightforward.

The private media must survive and by so doing, they operate under rigid market forces economy. In all these, the media policy is specific. The state policies toward development are usually general. Films are therefore used to deal with specific issues of society. However, when it comes to social, traditional or religious norms, there are no specific or straightforward policies. They hide behind subtle pressure and indirect forms of agitation and intimidation. It is caste identity against creative liberty values. This is illustrated in two diagrams in what we term the “Triangles of Media Content and Developing Society.” Triangle A shows the Media content and Triangle B-Developing Society (Developed by Prof. Dr. Sonal Pandya and Wisdom Peter Awuku).

### TRIANGLE OF MEDIA CONTENT



In this triangle, The Media Content is in the middle and it is influenced by these three factors; namely, (a) Policies –both Media policies and State Policies, (b) Market-Market Economy and Media Economy and (c) Society-Culture and Cultural values.

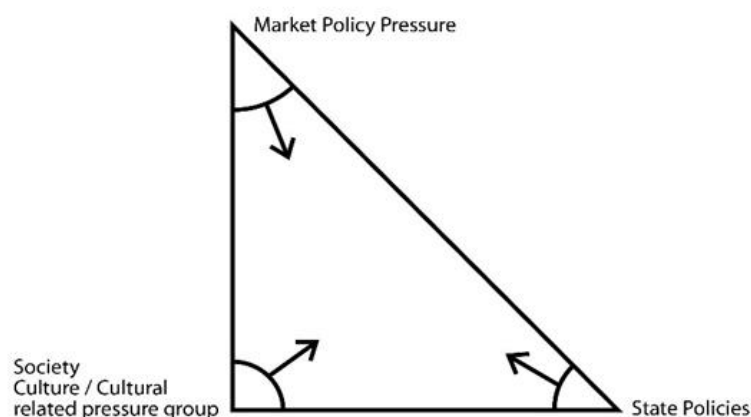
**1. Policies-** over the years, both the State and the Media have functioned various forms of policies that go a long way to give India and other developing countries their vibrant media. It is true that the Indian constitution has not categorically mentioned or given any special place to the Media, that is, the Freedom of the Press, but indications are that, “the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression” as provided in Article 19 of the Indian Constitution is believed to include freedom of the press. This freedom is not exclusively to those in the media but to the ordinary person. State Policies are those defined and unidentified activities of the state to either enhance development needs of its people or undercut measures that bother on corruption. Parliamentary debates, reading of the budget, state elections, Press Releases, Scheduled assignments, etc, form the basis for media content. The media has its own policies; either to take news and information from the state as its source of their content or do independent news sourcing or both. It goes without doubt, that both policies constitute the contents of the media.

**2. Market** – Market Economy and Media Economy- The market economy is ostensibly profit maximization. A market economy is an economic system in which economic decisions and the pricing of goods and services are guided solely by the aggregate interactions of a country's individual citizens and businesses. There is little government intervention or central planning. This is the opposite of a centrally planned economy in which government decisions drive most aspects of a country's economic activity. Businesses would want to advertise in the media in return for profit. Most of the news contents are paid for. The media relies on the corporate world for businesses that make them stay in business. Revenue generation among the media is not homogenously spread. The print media depends on sale of its newspaper and advertisement. The electronic media, made up of largely radio and TV, also rely on content and advertisement. Their contents are influenced, largely, by profit maximisation and social responsibilities. The media is subdivided into private and state owned. As a private entity, the private media would focus more on profit while the state media would be development oriented.

**3. Society-** Culture and Cultural values-The society is made of people who are identified as Indians with their own peculiar Culture and Cultural values. The culture is made of art, music, traditions, language(s), films, cuisine, etc while values are set of unwritten rules that govern the society. All these are considered as part of India’s media content. In effect, the media reflect the society, its culture and cultural values. These set of culture and cultural values in turn, influence the media content.

However, this research by these researchers, is indicating that after many years of influencing media content, the triangle where State and Media Policies, Market and Media economies and Society equally serve as a push-pull factor in the media content, Society has succeeded in putting pressure on the media to the extent that it has changed the dynamism in the triangle. This is evident in Padmavati and other films that have been banned. Here is the demonstration with the second triangle.

#### TRIANGLE REGARDING DEVELOPING SOCIETY



As a developing society, the media content is experiencing a very strong pressure from the society with its culture and values. Most of the decisions taken to ban movies are based on the pull factor from society based on its set of values. These values are not clear-cut and do not have parameters. These values are interpreted based on idiosyncrasies or sentiments of an individual or a group of people without recourse to rule of law. Films are based on creativity. They do not need to conform to historical antecedents or facts. Unfortunately, this gain could be eroded as India continues to ban movies without recourse to the negative impact of it action. The latest of movies to suffer this fate is the movie "Padmavati."

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this paper is to look at the media, entertainment and development communication, the perspective of a developing nation and specifically, look at the banning of the movie, "Padmavati" and other movies as affront to Free Speech and Freedom of Expression.

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What informed the decision to ban the film?
2. What are the major implications of this ban on the creative industry?
3. What would motivate the ban on films?
4. What are the significant consequences a ban on a film have on freedom of speech, expression and on the rule of law?

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive research method. This involves describing the characteristics of a particular situation, event or case (Brownlee, Varkevisser, & Pathmanathan, 2003). Two prominent personalities Dr. Drashti Patel, Freelance Teacher and a Ph.D Guide in Gujarat University and Nasarg Trivedi, faculty at the Department of Communication and Journalism, Gujarat University, Film-maker and Producer and Film Critic, were interviewed on their assessment of the historical, cultural, religious and political significance of the movie and the negative effect of the decision to ban the movie in respect to freedom of speech. Consequently, this study uses the descriptive method to describe the role of entertainment, media and development communication in India's developmental agenda with regards to the banning of Padmavati and other films in India.

## 5. REASONS FOR BANNING SOME OF THE FILMS IN INDIA

Taking a look at some of the reasons for banning some of the films in India, including Padmavati, it is observed that some of the movies banned were perceived to depict the country in a bad light. Did Padmavati depict India in a bad light? How was this determined when the Censor Board had not watched the movie. The second reason is that movies that are perceived to portray the life of a leader in unfavourable manner. Thirdly, movies are banned when they are seen showing signs of depicting communal violence. Which communal violence did Padmavati depict? The fourth point is that movies that are considered to affect the religious sentiments of a group of people. The next one is when there is too much obscenity and finally, films that deal with tabooed subjects, such as lesbianism, and trans-sexuality.

## 6. BACKGROUND TO THE MOVIE

The historical antecedent of Rani Padmavati is not very certain because there are no recorded documents for future references. The story about Padmavati has always been transmitted orally and with passage of time some historical facts were either lost or distorted. The story line about Rana Padmavati, often referred to as Rani Padmini, has so many versions retold in many different ways. One of the most common versions is that Padmini, the 13th-century Rajput warrior queen, is maligned in the movie because it suggests a romance between her and Delhi sultan Alauddin Khilji. The legend is that after her husband was killed in battle, Padmini set herself ablaze to avoid being taken captive by Khilji, who was obsessed with her beauty. This was said to have angered the Rajput caste and a representative of this group, Karni Sena, led the protest to have the movie, "Padmavati", banned. Their fear was that the movie might distort history and the desecration of their religious icon.

## 7. FINDINGS

According to the two resource persons, government has no right to ban any creative product such as films, books, music, etc. This phenomenon is becoming very common in South Asia countries where the creative industry continues to suffer from political interference. This political interference is always engineered by pressures from religious and cultural groups. They attributed the decision to ban Padmavati to the election in Gujarat where the BJP was determined to consolidate its 22 years of political stronghold on the state by kowtowing to the few minorities. They were of the hope that after the election and the outcome, the ban could be lifted. This is left for posterity to be the best judge. They described it as a “political gimmick.” It was purely ego rubbing. The show of political power! It was not well-informed decision!

Additionally, the decision to ban the movie is a sign of intolerance, not only in India, but also across the world. The creative industry continues to suffer at the hands of religious fundamentalists who see filmmaking as a clash between religion and creativity, self-expression and free speech. The story about Ahmed Salman Rusdie, the Indian born British citizen and his controversial book “The Satanic Verses,” published in 1988, is a classical example of intolerance. Why should a writer suffer a fate of death threats including *fatwa*, which called for his assassination, issued by a head of state? This is how intolerant religion can affect creativity.

The villain in Padmavati is a Muslim who is obsessed with the beauty of a Hindu Goddess. This is a taboo for such a union to exist between these two religions. Intolerance also stems from the fact that people watch movies with emotions attached to them. They cannot differentiate between fiction and non-fiction. This bothers on lack of literacy among the people of India and other South Asian countries. This literacy is about the real purpose of movies. This is not so in European countries or the United States. The difference between the European and US movie watchers and those in India is that the European may use appropriate and legitimate channels to express their sentiments against what they perceive to be a poor reflection of the movie. The situation in India and what happened to Padmavati and other movies is different and in their case, the agitators attacked the casts and destroyed their equipment; movie houses were burnt, running into millions of dollars. Who pays for these items destroyed? For many to ‘see’ or hear that the queen is seen dancing in a folksong with her subjects in public is culturally not acceptable. Queens do not dance in public. For them, it is a twist of their culture and slap in their face.

Another concern of the experts is that the agitation was based on what they termed “Social Fear.” The fear of the people of Rajasthan was that the shooting of the movie would open up their ‘world’ to the outside world thereby creating the grounds for invasion of their tradition, culture and beliefs.

Another remote cause for this agitation is that the film-maker, Sanjay Leela Bhansali is noted for creating controversies about his movies and notorious for twisting historical facts in his movies including creating scenes that depicted some cultural people as violent. It is also believed that these controversies surrounding this movie were a publicity stunt, created by the filmmaker to generate public interest. Unfortunately, it backfired! At the heart of these controversies, the media have been cited for the cause of the agitation and the subsequent rioting and ban. The various media review and commentaries might have given the wrong signal and misunderstanding of the content of the movie, thereby sparking the protest.

## 8. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

These researchers want to recommend that filmmakers should use dialogue and participatory approach by engaging with community, traditional and religious leaders for their inputs when writing scripts for films. It could be through the process of Focus Group Discussion to collect their views. It may not necessarily mean their views would have any serious impact on the movie but engaging them would erase any suspicion. Again, the producers should involved some of the leaders to be part of the previewing of the movie for their comments. It is refreshing to hear that the government through a Parliamentary panel, has invited the film-maker to explain the whole concept of the movie and why it should not be banned. The difficulty for these researchers is why is the Parliamentary Panel not interested in watching the movie for firsthand information from the filmmaker? According to Bhansali, the movie was based on a 1540 poem written by the Poet Malik Muhammed Jayasi and therefore had no bearing on any historical facts. He also denied the depiction of the issue of Jauhar, which is the practice of the age-old sati. Sati or suttee is an obsolete funeral custom where a widow immolates herself (Anumarana) on her husband's pyre or takes her own life in another fashion shortly after her husband's death. This custom has been banned in India. The question on the mind of many people is why didn't the Parliament of



India, together with the Censorship Board, watch the movie before taking any action? What is happening is like putting the cart before the horse. The ban on films, which criticise the nation, clearly reveals Indians immaturity in accepting criticism of themselves. Perhaps, time has come for them to examine themselves in the light of what non-Indians have to say about them as people, and as a nation. Even if the national leaders are being criticised, or a part of their personality or character is being questioned, maybe, they should be mature enough to take the criticism in their own stride.

Finally, according to experts the main obstruction in the path to development is that the scope of information is not available to everybody and that the development brought through development communication should be equally shared by all section of the society. It is obvious that those who have taken strong stands against Padmavati have not watched the movie.

In conclusion, when issues about social development are raised, there is too much emphasis on the physical. Cultural development is not all about taking pride in history and historical events. It is about social and cultural reforms. It is about assertiveness; it is about opening up the frontiers of one's culture to accept reforms. Such reforms include allowing the creative industry to make use of its creativity without being attacked or considered as distorting historical facts. This is what development communication is all about.

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