

## THE UNSEEN RURAL DISCOURSE: TELEVISION MEDIA AND RURAL PUNJAB'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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### ABSTRACT

The political scenario of Punjab is the outcome of so many different factors such as religion, caste, region, gender, occupation, land ownership, kinship based relations etc. Based on these factors the political turf of Punjab is being set. For decades these issues provide content to different media houses especially the television news channels. Not only this, it is important to note that television media has been very selective towards the issues and matters related to rural society in Punjab. As many a time the issues related to the core of the people living in the rural setup hardly got any space on television. The present study examines the case of rural Punjab in context to the presentation of its issues by the television channels along with the impact the television put over the political opinion of people leading a rural lifestyle.

**Keywords:** television, punjab, rural society, voting behaviour, politics

### INTRODUCTION

Television as a source of information has greatly impacted the society of Punjab. The studies reveal television as one of the important factors, having the capacity to impact the political opinion of the people through its content. The issues to which television gives space become the issues of utmost importance and everybody seems to be concerned for any kind of development related to them. In all this it is often seen that the issues that are core and basic to the rural people hardly got any space on the television screens. On the other side, it is the culture that becomes an important source for the content of the television, as it is often seen that the people get their socio-cultural as well as their political positions verified through the content of the television. Therefore, it becomes important to decipher the content of the television in context to the rural society.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM PERSPECTIVE

Social constructionism is an approach to analyse media. According to this approach, the idea of perceiving society as an objective reality which is imposed on the individuals is contradicted with notion that the structures, forces and ideas of society are created by human beings and that are further recreated and reproduced and are also open to change. Therefore the social reality has to be constructed and is interpreted by the human actors. The idea of mass media influencing the reality that is largely seen in the propaganda theories, where the role of media is seen producing a false consciousness among its audience. As per the analysis done by the media scholars through this perspective, the presentation of the reality through news media is selectively constructed and is being interpreted through a particular angle (McQuail, 2009).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is conducted in the state of Punjab and for which the data has been collected from the primary as well as the secondary sources. Secondary data is collected from books, research journals, news papers, magazines, government reports, Census reports etc. The primary data is collected through the field work with the help of interviews, interview schedules of the selected sample and also through observations in the field. The data is analysed through tools such as average, percentage as well as WAS (weighted average score) based on five-point Likert scale, measuring the magnitude of agreement or disagreement, by assigning weights from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) respectively.

The sample of the study primary consists of viewers of television programmes. The selection of the sample is made by distributing the Punjab into three cultural regions i.e. Malwa, Doaba and Majha. Therefore, on the basis of Census 2011, from each cultural region each district with having highest percentage of television ownership i.e. rural households owning television sets to the total number of households got selected. Further, within the district two villages have been selected, one having the highest percentage of households having television ownership and another having the lowest percentage of households having television ownership. While doing the selection only those villages are made the part of the research whose population must be more than 500. Therefore, by adopting the above mentioned criteria village Bhagatpura (highest) and Ambe Majra (lowest) from Malwa region; village Kotha (highest) and Burj Hassan (lowest) from Doaba region; and village Sherpur (highest) and Jaswan (lowest) from Majha region have been selected. From each village the total of 60 respondents from three age cohorts i.e. 20 from less than 25 years of age, 20 from 26 to 50 years and 20 from 51 and above have been selected and from each age cohort half of the respondents are males and half are females respondents.

## TELEVISION AND THE POLITICAL AWARENESS

In order to understand the idea that television has inculcated the constructed reality among its viewers through its programmes, we have drawn the set of statements to be asked to the respondents on the themes such as, television generating the political awareness among the common people, TV revealing the truth about political events, influence on the voting behaviour of the people, creating awareness about the policies specific to rural areas that are made by the government, TV creating gap between the politicians and the ordinary people.

## TELEVISION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS GENERATING POLITICAL AWARENESS

In this part assertions have been drawn on the basis of the response given by the respondents regarding the contribution of television in generating political awareness to the common people in rural society. The detailed analysis is as under:

**Table- 1 - Television contributed in Generating Political Awareness to the Common People in Rural Society**

| Responses  |                    | Strongly Disagree | Disagree   | Neutral      | Agree         | Strongly Agree | Total        |              |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Region     | Malwa              | Bhagatpura (H)    | 0          | 0            | 5             | 30             | 25           | 60           |
|            |                    | Ambe Majra (L)    | 7          | 6            | 11            | 18             | 18           | 60           |
|            |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 7<br>(5.8) | 6<br>(5)     | 16<br>(13.3)  | 48<br>(40)     | 43<br>(35.8) | 120<br>(100) |
|            | Majha              | Sherpur (H)       | 0          | 1            | 7             | 29             | 23           | 60           |
|            |                    | Jaswan (L)        | 0          | 0            | 4             | 56             | 0            | 60           |
|            |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 0<br>(0)   | 1<br>(0.8)   | 11<br>(9.2)   | 85<br>(70.8)   | 23<br>(19.2) | 120<br>(100) |
|            | Doaba              | Kotha (H)         | 0          | 0            | 0             | 60             | 0            | 60           |
|            |                    | Buraj Hasan (L)   | 0          | 2            | 0             | 58             | 0            | 60           |
|            |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 0<br>(0)   | 2<br>(1.7)   | 0<br>(0)      | 118<br>(98.3)  | 0<br>(0)     | 120<br>(100) |
|            | <b>Grand Total</b> |                   | 7<br>(1.9) | 9<br>(2.5)   | 27<br>(7.5)   | 251<br>(69.7)  | 66<br>(18.3) | 360<br>(100) |
| Gender     | Male               | 7<br>(3.9)        | 4<br>(2.2) | 0<br>(0)     | 115<br>(63.9) | 54<br>(30)     | 180<br>(100) |              |
|            | Female             | 0<br>(0)          | 5<br>(2.8) | 27<br>(15)   | 136<br>(75.6) | 12<br>(6.7)    | 180<br>(100) |              |
|            | <b>Total</b>       | 7<br>(1.9)        | 9<br>(2.5) | 27<br>(7.5)  | 251<br>(69.7) | 66<br>(18.3)   | 360<br>(100) |              |
| Age        | Up to 25 years     | 2<br>(1.7)        | 3<br>(2.5) | 5<br>(4.2)   | 91<br>(75.8)  | 19<br>(15.8)   | 120<br>(100) |              |
|            | 26 to 50           | 3<br>(2.5)        | 2<br>(1.7) | 6<br>(5)     | 84<br>(70)    | 25<br>(20.8)   | 120<br>(100) |              |
|            | 51 & above         | 2<br>(1.7)        | 4<br>(3.3) | 16<br>(13.3) | 76<br>(63.3)  | 22<br>(18.3)   | 120<br>(100) |              |
|            | <b>Total</b>       | 7<br>(1.9)        | 9<br>(2.5) | 27<br>(7.5)  | 251<br>(69.7) | 66<br>(18.3)   | 360<br>(100) |              |
| <b>WAS</b> |                    | 4                 |            |              |               |                |              |              |

**Note:** Figure in parentheses represents percentage of share in total number of respondents.

From Table 1, the data revealed that across all the three regions of Punjab i.e. Malwa, Majha and Doaba, majority of the respondents with 88 per cent have shown their agreement towards the statement that television has played an important role in generating political awareness to the common people. Similar results have been observed while analysing the response of the respondents on the basis of their region, gender and age. The weighted average score of 4 indicates the agreement of the majority respondents towards the above mentioned statement.

## TELEVISION AND ITS CONTENT REGARDING POLITICAL ISSUES

In this part assertions have been drawn on the basis of the response given by the respondents regarding the idea that television is presenting truth about the political situations. The detailed analysis is as under:

**Table- 2 -Television is presenting the Truth about the Political Situations to its Viewers**

| Responses  |                    | Strongly Disagree | Disagree      | Neutral       | Agree        | Strongly Agree | Total        |              |
|------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Region     | Malwa              | Bhagatpura (H)    | 12            | 13            | 7            | 26             | 2            | 60           |
|            |                    | Ambe Majra (L)    | 19            | 11            | 13           | 12             | 5            | 60           |
|            |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 31<br>(25.8)  | 24<br>(20)    | 20<br>(16.7) | 38<br>(31.7)   | 7<br>(5.8)   | 120<br>(100) |
|            | Majha              | Sherpur (H)       | 15            | 22            | 12           | 6              | 5            | 60           |
|            |                    | Jaswan (L)        | 2             | 29            | 2            | 27             | 0            | 60           |
|            |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 17<br>(14.2)  | 51<br>(42.5)  | 14<br>(11.7) | 33<br>(27.5)   | 5<br>(4.2)   | 120<br>(100) |
|            | Doaba              | Kotha (H)         | 0             | 52            | 2            | 6              | 0            | 60           |
|            |                    | Buraj Hasan (L)   | 2             | 42            | 5            | 11             | 0            | 60           |
|            |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 2<br>(1.7)    | 94<br>(78.3)  | 7<br>(5.8)   | 17<br>(14.2)   | 0<br>(0)     | 120<br>(100) |
|            | <b>Grand Total</b> |                   | 50<br>(13.9)  | 169<br>(46.9) | 41<br>(11.4) | 88<br>(24.4)   | 12<br>(3.3)  | 360<br>(100) |
| Gender     | Male               | 42<br>(23.3)      | 84<br>(46.7)  | 7<br>(3.9)    | 39<br>(21.7) | 8<br>(4.4)     | 180<br>(100) |              |
|            | Female             | 8<br>(4.4)        | 85<br>(47.2)  | 34<br>(18.9)  | 49<br>(27.2) | 4<br>(2.2)     | 180<br>(100) |              |
|            | <b>Total</b>       | 50<br>(13.9)      | 169<br>(46.9) | 41<br>(11.4)  | 88<br>(24.4) | 12<br>(3.3)    | 360<br>(100) |              |
| Age        | Up to 25 years     | 15<br>(12.5)      | 62<br>(51.7)  | 11<br>(9.2)   | 27<br>(22.5) | 5<br>(4.2)     | 120<br>(100) |              |
|            | 26 to 50           | 18<br>(15)        | 56<br>(46.7)  | 10<br>(8.3)   | 31<br>(25.8) | 5<br>(4.2)     | 120<br>(100) |              |
|            | 51 & above         | 17<br>(14.2)      | 51<br>(42.5)  | 20<br>(16.7)  | 30<br>(25)   | 2<br>(1.7)     | 120<br>(100) |              |
|            | <b>Total</b>       | 50<br>(13.9)      | 169<br>(46.9) | 41<br>(11.4)  | 88<br>(24.4) | 12<br>(3.3)    | 360<br>(100) |              |
| <b>WAS</b> |                    | 2.56              |               |               |              |                |              |              |

**Note:** Figure in parentheses represents percentage of share in total number of respondents.

The Table 2 reveals the disagreement of the respondents with 60.8 per cent of them towards the statement that television is presenting truth about the political issues to its viewers. Also, the weighted average score of 2.56 also reveals their denial towards the statement mentioned above. From the above mentioned table it is revealed that though people considered television to be an important source of information that can be held responsible to generate awareness among them however they raised a question towards the authenticity of content being served to them by the television.

### TELEVISION AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF THE PEOPLE

In this part assertions have been drawn on the basis of the response given by the respondents regarding the idea of television through its programmes influence the voting behaviour of the public. The detailed analysis is as under :

**Table- 3 - Television through its Programmes Influence the Voting Behaviour of the People**

| Responses    |                    | Strongly Disagree | Disagree    | Neutral      | Agree         | Strongly Agree | Total        |              |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Region       | Malwa              | Bhagatpura (H)    | 0           | 0            | 4             | 33             | 23           | 60           |
|              |                    | Ambe Majra (L)    | 8           | 1            | 12            | 20             | 19           | 60           |
|              |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 8<br>(6.7)  | 1<br>(0.8)   | 16<br>(13.3)  | 53<br>(44.2)   | 42<br>(35)   | 120<br>(100) |
|              | Majha              | Sherpur (H)       | 0           | 0            | 6             | 44             | 10           | 60           |
|              |                    | Jaswan (L)        | 6           | 17           | 3             | 30             | 4            | 60           |
|              |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 6<br>(5)    | 17<br>(14.2) | 9<br>(7.5)    | 74<br>(61.7)   | 14<br>(11.7) | 120<br>(100) |
|              | Doaba              | Kotha (H)         | 0           | 4            | 0             | 56             | 0            | 60           |
|              |                    | Buraj Hasan (L)   | 0           | 0            | 0             | 60             | 0            | 60           |
|              |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 0<br>(0)    | 4<br>(3.3)   | 0<br>(0)      | 116<br>(96.7)  | 0<br>(0)     | 120<br>(100) |
|              | <b>Grand Total</b> |                   | 14<br>(3.9) | 22<br>(6.1)  | 25<br>(6.9)   | 243<br>(67.5)  | 56<br>(15.6) | 360<br>(100) |
|              | Gender             | Male              | 13<br>(7.2) | 13<br>(7.2)  | 0<br>(0)      | 105<br>(58.3)  | 49<br>(27.2) | 180<br>(100) |
|              |                    | Female            | 1<br>(0.6)  | 9<br>(5)     | 25<br>(13.9)  | 138<br>(76.7)  | 7<br>(3.9)   | 180<br>(100) |
| <b>Total</b> |                    | 14<br>(3.9)       | 22<br>(6.1) | 25<br>(6.9)  | 243<br>(67.5) | 56<br>(15.6)   | 360<br>(100) |              |
| Age          | Up to 25 years     | 5<br>(4.2)        | 5<br>(4.2)  | 3<br>(2.5)   | 92<br>(76.7)  | 15<br>(12.5)   | 120<br>(100) |              |
|              | 26 to 50           | 5<br>(4.2)        | 10<br>(8.3) | 4<br>(3.3)   | 82<br>(68.3)  | 19<br>(15.8)   | 120<br>(100) |              |
|              | 51 & above         | 4<br>(3.3)        | 7<br>(5.8)  | 18<br>(15)   | 69<br>(57.5)  | 22<br>(18.3)   | 120<br>(100) |              |
|              | <b>Total</b>       | 14<br>(3.9)       | 22<br>(6.1) | 25<br>(6.9)  | 243<br>(67.5) | 56<br>(15.6)   | 360<br>(100) |              |
| WAS          |                    | 3.85              |             |              |               |                |              |              |

**Note:** Figure in parentheses represents percentage of share in total number of respondents.

The response of the respondents is recorded and mentioned in Table 3 in which majority of the respondents across all the regions of Punjab with 83.1 per cent of the total have shown their agreement towards the idea that the television influence the voting behaviour of the people. The weighted average score of 3.85 indicated the majority having affirmation for the above idea. In a study done by Duggan and Martinelli (2010), reaffirmed the above drawn assertions that the way media displays the political scenario, lead the multidimensional politics to one dimensional space to the voters. The voters who saw less coverage of their representatives are less likely to recall their names and rate them. In another study by Prat and Stromberg (2011) stated that media plays an important role in generating information to the voters and making them responsive to the policy outcomes. Therefore, it is evident that television media plays an important role in setting the political narrative in the society. It has the capacity to highlight or to suppress any issue of public importance while influencing the voters to cast their votes.

Also in the analysis done by Wagner (1983) that in comparison to newspapers, television leads to the muting of political differences further leads to the decline in the voting turnout, as television led to suppress the differences. It is important that these political differences are vital for the well being of democracy and public must be enlightened about these. Also Gerber et.al (2007) have drawn that the media exposure leads to the public slant which directly and indirectly helps in opinion building of the society. According to Ellul (2006) television is the great distracting machine. The propaganda in the form of TV game shows, football games, computer games etc. try to engage the people in something to get them away from the politics.

#### TELEVISION AND ITS IMPACT ON POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG PEOPLE

In this part assertions have been drawn on the basis of the response given by the respondents regarding the notion that television through its presentation of political situations has created gap between the politicians and ordinary people by generating idea that politics is beyond the understanding of the common people. The detailed analysis is as under:

**Table- 4 - Television has created a Gap between Politicians and Ordinary People by Generating Idea that Politics is beyond the Understanding of the Common People**

| Responses |                    | Strongly Disagree | Disagree   | Neutral     | Agree        | Strongly Agree | Total        |              |
|-----------|--------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Region    | Malwa              | Bhagatpura (H)    | 0          | 1           | 29           | 7              | 23           | 60           |
|           |                    | Ambe Majra (L)    | 2          | 9           | 13           | 12             | 24           | 60           |
|           |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 2<br>(1.7) | 10<br>(8.3) | 42<br>(35)   | 19<br>(15.8)   | 47<br>(39.2) | 120<br>(100) |
|           | Majha              | Sherpur (H)       | 0          | 3           | 11           | 45             | 1            | 60           |
|           |                    | Jaswan (L)        | 0          | 0           | 9            | 51             | 0            | 60           |
|           |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 0<br>(0)   | 3<br>(2.5)  | 20<br>(16.7) | 96<br>(80)     | 1<br>(0.8)   | 120<br>(100) |
|           | Doaba              | Kotha (H)         | 0          | 0           | 0            | 60             | 0            | 60           |
|           |                    | Buraj Hasan (L)   | 0          | 0           | 3            | 57             | 0            | 60           |
|           |                    | <b>Total</b>      | 0<br>(0)   | 0<br>(0)    | 3<br>(2.5)   | 117<br>(97.5)  | 0<br>(0)     | 120<br>(100) |
|           | <b>Grand Total</b> |                   | 2<br>(0.6) | 13<br>(3.6) | 65<br>(18.1) | 232<br>(64.4)  | 48<br>(13.3) | 360<br>(100) |

|        |                |            |             |              |               |              |              |
|--------|----------------|------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Gender | Male           | 2<br>(1.1) | 3<br>(1.7)  | 4<br>(2.2)   | 127<br>(70.6) | 44<br>(24.4) | 180<br>(100) |
|        | Female         | 0<br>(0)   | 10<br>(5.6) | 61<br>(33.9) | 105<br>(58.3) | 4<br>(2.2)   | 180<br>(100) |
|        | Total          | 2<br>(0.6) | 13<br>(3.6) | 65<br>(18.1) | 232<br>(64.4) | 48<br>(13.3) | 360<br>(100) |
| Age    | Up to 25 years | 1<br>(0.8) | 5<br>(4.2)  | 16<br>(13.3) | 81<br>(67.5)  | 17<br>(14.2) | 120<br>(100) |
|        | 26 to 50       | 1<br>(0.8) | 5<br>(4.2)  | 16<br>(13.3) | 82<br>(68.3)  | 16<br>(13.3) | 120<br>(100) |
|        | 51 & above     | 0<br>(0)   | 3<br>(2.5)  | 33<br>(27.5) | 69<br>(57.5)  | 15<br>(12.5) | 120<br>(100) |
|        | Total          | 2<br>(0.6) | 13<br>(3.6) | 65<br>(18.1) | 232<br>(64.4) | 48<br>(13.3) | 360<br>(100) |
| WAS    |                | 3.86       |             |              |               |              |              |

**Note:** Figure in parentheses represents percentage of share in total number of respondents.

The Table 4 depicts that majority of the respondents have given their affirmation towards the statement that television through its content has created a gap between politicians and ordinary people by generating idea that politics is beyond the understanding of the common people. However, the weighted average score of 3.86 indicates the agreement towards the statement among the majority of the respondents. In a study by Wagner (1983) reveals that television put a suppressive impact on the political interest of the news watchers. Television leads to muting of political differences that further lead to the decline in voting turnout. Also television forces to communicate more “coolly” and more effectively suppress the important differences that are vital for the well-being of democracy and enlightened public.

However, interestingly, large number of respondents from Malwa region seems to be ignorant regarding the political scenario of their land. Also, the large number of female respondents, with 33.9 per cent of them has replied that they don't know anything about the politics and also they are least interested in political programmes. Also they cast their vote according to their family or the local caste leaders.

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the television through its programmes impose the systematically pre-constructed reality on the individuals. Adorno (2001) in his analysis constructed that the television programmes are the sole example of pseudo art, in which the programmes made in fragments are further tied together and interpreted in the way their producers wants. It is seen that majority of the respondents have affirmed that television makes them aware about the political scenario, however they contradicts by telling that television does not display the reality to its viewers. One must understand the presented information through television. Many of the media researches believe television and other media outlets to be neutral, however one must remove the spectacle of neutrality, as it manufactures the reality among its audience.

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