

Effects of Iran Media Diplomacy in Afghanistan on Attracting Afghan Audiences

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Abstract

Media diplomacy is one of the tools that in the age of communications could be considered as a means of executing soft power and serving national interests. Therefore, employing media diplomacy by Iran as a regional power is of utmost importance. In this regard, effect of Iran's media diplomacy in Afghanistan on attracting Afghan audience is a topic of consideration. The purpose of this research is to examine the success of media diplomacy employed in Afghanistan in the field of attracting Afghan audience. In this research three hypotheses are mentioned, one of which have been rejected and the other two have been proved. This hypothesis which is: Iran appears to have succeeded in attracting the Afghan audience towards her policies in Afghanistan; has been rejected. Two other hypotheses such as: a) It seems that Iran has been unable to use the two countries' common language to its full advantage in dispelling Afghanistan's potential threats; b) Iran's media diplomacy seemingly has been unsuccessful in attracting and encouraging Afghan media to reflect Iran's views and outlook, have been proved. The result of assessing statistical data generally shows that Iran has not employed a suitable strategy in relation to her media diplomacy in Afghanistan to attract of Afghan audience.

Keywords: Media diplomacy, Afghanistan, audience, media power, singularizing, persuasion

Introduction

The speed with which communications infiltrate different aspects of the modern age is so high as to make ignoring it impossible, and one cannot develop or adopt specific approaches to different fields without taking this subject into consideration. Apparently what Marshall McLuhan famously declared about the media and power has come true. Every nation and state's authority hangs on paying attention to this matter, so that they can realize their own soft power. Just like all the other parts that have a crucial role in the realization of soft power, diplomacy, too, should take media and communications into consideration in order to facilitate meeting national goals and interests through a comprehensive look at the subject of media diplomacy.

Addressing the issue of media diplomacy in Afghanistan as a neighbor of Iran, and a country with some connections to the Iranian civilization and especially a host to Iran's political enmity (the U.S.) is of utmost importance, because realizing national interests can bring about national security.

This article aims at studying the extent to which Iran's media diplomacy in various fields in Afghanistan has been successful, and to see whether Iran's diplomacy system has succeeded in

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using the potentials of common language and culture in order to undermine the West's malicious objectives in Afghanistan (regarding Iran) and to make achievements in different fields, including economy and even combating drugs.

About the importance of the subject, the researcher believed that the growth of modern-day communications and the emergence of many opportunities for different fields is an advantage granted to human beings, and everyone uses them according to their needs. As an important factor in the international system, diplomacy and foreign policy have been affected by the dramatic changes in the field of communications. Thus, "media diplomacy" has emerged as a main branch of the foreign policy system and countries which have realized its importance have seriously paid attention to it. Iran's diplomatic advances in the world and regional countries, especially Afghanistan, have kept an eye on this issue which plays an important part in the realization of national interests and should never be overlooked.

Considering the definition of media diplomacy as the application of media in completing and promoting a country's foreign policies and global changes, and the fact that the realization of soft power depends on the better and more frequent use of media, the necessity of discussing the application of media diplomacy becomes more apparent.

With regards to Afghanistan, a country which shares a 936-km common border with three provinces of our country and is a host of U.S. and NATO troops as enemy forces, and considering the need to develop close relations with Afghanistan and make use of such advantages as proximity, common civilization traits, long borders, and the easiness of exporting goods and services to this country, and also considering Iran's support of Afghan military forces during the Soviet invasion and also the fight against Taliban, media diplomacy can be a good player in this field and serve the interests of public diplomacy, fulfill national interests, and realize the soft power of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

About media diplomacy, one should say that nowadays, leaders use global communications as an important tool in advancing negotiations and mobilizing public support for agreements. "Media diplomacy" is the most suitable concept for analyzing these applications. But any reference to this concept in a technical language is extremely muddled. For example, "Abu" generally defines this concept as: "Any use of media for expressing and promoting foreign policy." Media diplomacy is followed through different ordinary and extraordinary activities of media, including press conferences, interviews, meeting heads of state and intermediary officials in rival countries, and stimulating media events, which are organized with the purpose of opening a new era in mutual relationships. An example of the use of media diplomacy can be seen in what "Kissinger" did after the Arab-Israeli war in 1973; through his well-known and extremely successful "shuttle diplomacy", he manipulated the media into reflecting and imposing his own objectives. During foreign trips, he'd place leading American journalists in the field of diplomacy in his plane, so that they'd provide background reports and disclose the news he intended to use, more than anything else, to have an edge over the negotiating parties and remove all the stumbling blocks. In January 1998, Mohammad Khatami, Iran's president, chose "CNN" in order to send a message to the United States. Another example can be seen in the recent fuel agreement for Tehran Research Reactor.

The role of media diplomacy should also be described in the following three fields: a) making the role of ambassadors insignificant; b) breaking diplomatic deadlocks and creating a good atmosphere for negotiations; c) providing suitable conditions for closing a deal. (Gilboa, 1388: 33-35)

Theories related to the effects of media foreign policy have evolved in two main directions; firstly, these theories have switched from believing in the high influence of media on the

audience to its having a limited effect; and secondly, instead of regarding the audience as passive, they consider the audience as active in receiving and interpreting media's messages. In political communications, in addition to accepting these two theoretical perspectives, they've also developed theoretical outlooks to explain the relationship between news media and politics. However, this theory sometimes acknowledges the media as effective (CNN's theory) and sometimes talks about the effect of politics on media (approval production theory, elite theory and elite-media interaction theory); but nowadays the advanced communication and information technology has promoted the growth of diplomacy and foreign policy in the newspapers, internet networks, and global TV and radio. This is the factor that necessitates the interaction between diplomats and media in the age of the information society.

About the power of media, one should say that media's power is mainly symbolic and persuasive. This means that media have the ability to guide or influence the minds of their readers or viewers to some extent, but they don't have a direct impact on the audience. Excluding instances such as the use of coercive or physical force, the purposeful control or guidance of human conduct, generally done implicitly, and the guidance of purposes, programs, knowledge, ideas or human theories, i.e. the mental reflections that control human's external behavior, is possible. Although there are other sources of information and media, unlike other legal or administrative bodies, lack the power of accusing or punishing citizens who violate the law, a total mental guidance of the audience is not possible. In contrast, psychological and sociological evidences show that despite the pervasive and symbolic power of media, the audience generally retains their freedom of action and independence, and actively engages in collective communications. In other words, regardless of the symbolic power of news media, at least a part of the audience can resist persuasion. This means that the mental influence of media is effective under certain circumstances, when the audience is not aware of the consequences of this influence, or when they willingly change their ideas, or when they think the news tell the truth and journalists' statements are legitimate and truthful. (Macquail, 1385: 123)

Related theories about the subject, the researcher cited the following theories: The persuasion theory is one that favors media diplomacy. Persuasion has always been a part of human life and people always try to influence others. Aristotle was one of the first people who analyzed the concept of persuasion in his works on oratory and it was studied thoroughly afterwards. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) has identified 7 methods of advertising and laid the foundation of theorizing persuasion by introducing the following three parts: a) the main emotional component (assessing something emotionally or having feelings towards it; b) the cognitive component (conceptual reactions, verbal statements or beliefs); and c) the behavioral component (obvious actions). The realization of these three parts can lead to a change in attitude and, ultimately, persuasion. In this regard, source credibility is one of the factors over which the communicator has some control and whose control can influence the audience and result in persuasion. (Tankard, 1384: 235-263)

Agenda setting is one of the ways through which mass media can influence the public. This theory can help to achieve efficiency in media diplomacy. Agenda setting means that the news media determine what the public think about through the news they broadcast. Accordingly, in the field of agenda setting when the mass media focus on a particular subject, the public pay more attention to it.

In this category, priming is one way of realizing agenda setting; priming is a process in which the media pay attention to some issues and do overlook others. Favoring priorities is another thing the media pay attention; by highlighting or downplaying a particular ideology they determine its being favorable or unfavorable. Based on researches conducted, "Gladys Engel"

and “Kurt Lang” believe that the process of prioritizing an issue for the public takes time and passes through several stages. Accordingly, the method the media use for highlighting an issue and the important words with which they describe it could be effective. It should be noted that agenda setting is not the same for everyone and is defined according to two factors: The information’s relativity to the individual, and the degree of their ignorance of the message. The more related these two are, the more guidance is needed, the more the effects of agenda setting by the mass media is accepted. (Tankard et al, 1384: 348-349)

Methodology

In order to study this subject, the field method of using a survey was adopted. A 20-question survey was given to 50 experts, officials, available diplomats, reporters active in the field of Afghanistan, and a few Afghan officials; the results were then analyzed through SPSS software and the resulting data was analyzed.

After collecting the questionnaires, the resulting data was analyzed by using SPSS software. In this process five questions were defined as the independent variable and 15 questions as the dependent variable, and after calculating the Kendall tau-b coefficient, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables was calculated and was subjected to the F Test and the acceptance or rejection of each hypothesis was established. To prove the validity and reliability of this study, Cronbach’s Alpha was used; in this process 15 questionnaires were chosen first, and the result of calculating the Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.8834 which was quite acceptable and, therefore, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed.

Results and Discussion

On the basis which the first hypotheses, i.e., "Iran appears to have succeeded in attracting the Afghan audience towards her policies in Afghanistan." was rejected (Level of Significance is 0.250, F=1.426). The table of this hypothesis' F-test is as follows:

| Source of Change | Degree of Freedom | Sum of Squares | Mean Squares | F Quantity | Level of significance |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Inter-group | 2 | 0.665 | 0.332 | 1.426 | 0.250 |
| Intra-group | 47 | 10.955 | 0.233 | | |
| Sum | 49 | 11.620 | | | |

Based on the resulting data, the second hypothesis, i.e., "It seems that Iran has been unable to use the two countries’ common language to its full advantage in dispelling Afghanistan’s potential threats" was confirmed (Level of Significance is 0.000, F=10.002). The table of this hypothesis' F-test is as follows:

The F-Test Concerning of Restraining of Threat

| Source of Change | Degree of Freedom | Sum of Squares | Mean Squares | F Quantity | Level of significance |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Inter-group | 2 | 6.096 | 3.048 | 10.002 | 0.000 |
| Intra-group | 47 | 14.324 | 3.305 | | |
| Sum | 49 | 20.420 | | | |

After analyzing the results and the statistics, the third hypothesis stating that "Iran's media diplomacy seemingly has been unsuccessful in attracting and encouraging Afghan media to reflect Iran's views and outlook." was confirmed as well. (Level of Significance is 0.007, $F=5.566$). The table of this hypothesis' F-test is as follows:

The F-Test Concerning the Attraction of Afghan Media

| Source of Change | Degree of Freedom | Sum of Squares | Mean Squares | F Quantity | Level of significance |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Inter-group | 2 | 1.746 | 0.873 | 5.566 | 0.007 |
| Intra-group | 47 | 7.374 | 0.157 | | |
| Sum | 49 | 9.120 | | | |

Conclusion

The analysis of statistical data on the whole showed that Iran has not adopted a proper and satisfactory strategy regarding its media diplomacy to attract Afghan audience. Therefore, the foreign policy system has been unable to use all the existing potentials to their full advantage. This failure is also apparent in achieving national security, because Iran has been constantly in danger from its eastern neighbor's side and, therefore, its security is challenged all the time.

The suggestions and strategies based on this study are as follows:

Paying attention to the subject of media diplomacy in Afghanistan by using the common language and culture. Assisting the establishment of independent press and publications in this country with the help of Afghan politicians close to Iran. Trying to introduce Iran's many different services to the Afghan public through the media and the politicizing measures of the Iranian Embassy in Kabul. The foreign policy system's active use of the media and media diplomacy as a step to deal with the threats posed by Afghanistan. Using cyberspace and creating Iranian websites whose themes are related to Afghanistan in order to attract Afghan audiences. The strong presence of Iranian journalists in Afghanistan, using FM radio and the establishment of audio-visual media, especially radio which is highly influential. Thorough news coverage of events and accidents in Afghanistan by Iranian media and providing an Iranian interpretation of them to the Iranian and Afghan audiences. Trying to make contact with the Afghans living in Iran and involving them in TV shows, radio broadcasts and other media events in order to present a positive image of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the services provided for the Afghan refugees. Providing the means for the presence of Afghan media in Iran in order to reflect Iran's views and creating ground for dialogue, and participating Iranian officials in their programs. Broadcasting Iranian satellite TV channels in Afghanistan with the help of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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