

ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

Name

Course

Date

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The media plays an important role in disseminating information to the public about key issues and topics. Most of the knowledge that the public has about most issues stem from the information that they receive from the mass media. Media platforms that are used to provide information to individuals include television, radio, the internet and print media. The media is adept at constructing a public opinion. The influence that the media has on public perception is significant. Individuals who control the mass media could sway public opinion to their advantage. The media plays an integral role in influencing the masses on what they should view as important issues. Based on the fact that the media can easily sway public opinions, it is not far-fetched to state to a large extent, people's opinions are shaped by the media¹.

The media shapes public opinion by controlling what people hear and read. The media is an important initiator of several issues and matters of national discourse. Most of the time when an issue of public importance crops up, the media is usually the first avenue to bring the issue to attention. Media houses are selective with their news items and because of being selective with their news items; citizens can engage in informal debates about issues and topics that have been suggested by the mass media. Consequentially, the media determines what public views are important. The media makes it possible for individuals to form a certain perception about national politics².

1. McCombs, Maxwell. 2006. *Setting the agenda: the mass media and public opinion*. Cambridge: Polity.

2. Erikson, Robert S., Norman Richard Luttbeg, and Kent L. Tedin. 1980. *American public opinion: its origins, content and impact*. New York: Wiley.

There was a time when the media was widely viewed as the watchdog of democracy and a platform that reveals hidden parts of society; this has since changed. On several instances, the media has been involved in inaccurate reporting about issues. Given that there are people who view information from the media as absolutely correct, wrong information disseminated by the media is likely to make individuals make wrong decisions. The media has in many instances failed to divulge truth on matters of national importance. The media has been involved in concealing facts and fabricating ‘truths’ that has led to misleading the public on issues that are of significance to them. The media has also been involved in propaganda campaigns. There have been instances where the media has used photoshopped images of war to influence how the public views the necessity of the United States of America to engage in war. For instance, there is a local daily that photo shopped images about the conflict in Syria for propaganda purposes. The media controls public opinion by presenting certain ideas as facts when they are mere opinions! The media influences people’s opinion about ideal body shape and size. The media has gone to the extent of victimizing individuals who hold different views from what the mainstream media calls ‘factual.’³

The media can reveal important issues that have been hidden from society for a long time, but it doesn’t. The media has been involved in promoting corporate agendas that most of the time, are manipulative and selfish. Most of the media houses that are in America are owned by large corporations that would rather focus their energy on disseminating information that is ‘palatable’ to most Americans so that they may be popular and continue raking in huge profits. The media did suppress Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing footages from the United

3. Prosser, David, and Maxwell E. McCombs. 2016. *Agenda setting: readings on media, public opinion, and policymaking*. New York: Routledge.

States citizens for many years. Few weeks after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the United States government seized footages of the atomic bomb attacks to deny Americans an opportunity of seeing the magnitude of destruction that the atomic bombs had caused⁴. The footages were kept hidden up to the 1980's; to this point, they have never been fully broadcasted. The public has also been denied an opportunity to view the magnitude of destruction, suffering, and deaths that the United States military forces brought on Iraqi civilians during President George W. Bush's war on terror. The media also failed to reveal images of American soldiers who died in Iraq during the war on terror operation. During the time the war on terror operation was going on, most media houses failed to reveal the fact that a high number of American soldiers were dying during the operation. Independent sources have revealed that about 600 American soldiers died during the war on terror operation yet the media did its best to ensure that the public was kept in the dark with regard to deaths of American soldiers in Iraq. Media companies have gone to the extent of deleting articles from their websites that try to expose secrets about governments, institutions and corporations. In conclusion, it can confidently be said that public opinion is to a large extent shaped by the media⁵.

4. Nacos, Brigitte L., Robert Y. Shapiro, and Pierangelo Isernia. 2000. *Decisionmaking in a glass house: mass media, public opinion, and American and European foreign policy in the 21st century*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

5. Baum, M.A., and P.B.K. Potter. 2008. "The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis". *Annual Review of Political Science*. 11: 39-66.

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