

تأثير وسائل الاعلام على الراي العام
الانتخابات انموذجا

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The Influence of Media on Politics and Elections

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Abstract

Generally, elections have been considered as a sensitive and important issue in today's society. The media has an important role in informing the public about what happens in the world specially the political events. It is widely believed that there is a strong political bias in the media which has a unique power in any political system. The political systems also need to use the media to form the political structures in society. This research describes the media and its kinds, politics and elections and examines the involvement of the media in politics and elections. The conclusions show that media provides opportunities in society to reach

consensus on actions and extends the culture of the society to new members. They also emphasize that the media has an extremely significant impact on the public's views and any thinking of the society.

المخلص

ان لوسائل الإعلام الدور الالهم في إطلاع الجمهور على ما يحدث في العالم من أحداث وبالأخص السياسية منها ،ولها الدور المؤثر ايضا على سير الانتخابات في الدول الديمقراطية حيث يعتقد البعض أن هناك انحيازاً سياسياً قوياً في وسائل الإعلام، وأنها تتمتع بالسلطة الرابعة في أي نظام سياسي.

يتناول هذا البحث وسائل الإعلام وأنواعها المتعددة ، مثل الصحافة والإذاعة والتلفزيون والسينما والمسرح والكتب ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي التي تعد من أهم وسائل الاتصال بالجمهور كما تنطرق الى وسائل الاعلام الحرة والمستقلة والنزيهة التي تنشر الخبر بشكل موضوعي او تلك المنحازة والتي تتلاعب بالمعلومة بشكل يتلائم ومصالحها والجهة التي تعمل من اجلها ، كما تستطيع وسائل الاعلام ان تؤثر على طريقة تفكير المجتمع وعلى سير عملية الانتخابات ، وبكلمة اخرى ان لوسائل الاعلام تأثير بالغ الالهمية على الرأي العام وتشكيل توجهاته واتجاهاته و تعبئته باتجاه اهداف أو قضايا معينة ، لتصبح ادوات مهمة في عمليات التغيير وبالأخص السياسية منها .

1. Introduction

Throughout history, people have always been looking for a great ability to get information about their surroundings and to meet the diverse needs including knowing more and finding answers to their questions. In various stages of development and enjoyment of facilities and means of communication, men have been trying to communicate and transferring messages. Around 2500 years ago, the first images and writings were reproduced through engraving and wood carving to build relationships between people more clear and easy. In fact, the researchers believe that the history of communication goes back to the time of printing invention which led to expand and increase the level of education, science and public insight. The discovery of electricity and the creation of the media such as telegraph, television and radio have brought about great changes



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in mass communication. In the present, the communication influences the cultural, social and political activities.

The communicative power of the media is a fundamental factor which informs us that the media is a specific institution in society, informed by particular interests, practices, norms and values. The media is an indissoluble part of the contexts, the messages and the relationships that creates and gives shape to politics and public life (Craig, 2004, pp. 3). A community can be any interacting collectivity of individuals, from the smallest village to the world as a whole and it is the government that makes authoritative decisions on the community's goals (Davarpanah, 2009; pp. 11-15). Nowadays, the people in a community get information through the media and also like to participate in the political activities and determine who governs them.

In a democratic society where press freedom is really exist, the public demands for the information are essential, in this context the media plays a crucial role in informing the public about day to day life and political activities. But there have always been some debates about the more or less powerful influence of the media on the public opinions especially in politics and elections. This study aims at exploring the role of media in public attitudes towards politics and elections in the society where they are living, and also tries to describe the media in details and define politics and elections. The conclusion shows how the media influences the politics and elections and also how the government has some effects on the media.

2. Media

All the organizations, such as television, radio and newspapers that provide news and information for the public are considered as media. The media plays an important role in human life. People can use the media as tools to store and deliver information and data. It can be used to communicate and interact with a large number of audiences in different languages. Our everyday lives involve a fluidity of movement between different media forms and content: we read a newspaper for the latest news, we listen to the latest hits on the radio, we flick through a magazine while waiting for an appointment, we access websites during the work day, we watch a quiz show before catching the evening television news and afterwards settle down to watch a video (Craig, 2004, pp. 11). There



are many different forms of media that affect the political landscape, but the two primary types of media are paid media and free media.

2.1. Paid media

Paid media is a kind of media for which you have to pay money to spread the news and publish your advertisements. In paid media, the media activity is related to a company or brand that is generated by the company or its agents. Paid media includes pay-per-click(PPC) advertising, branded content, and display ads (Stephen and Galak, pp. 624-639). It is fast, controllable, predictable and easily measurable. The paid media; moreover, it can make or break a campaign depending on how much a candidate has to spend on television, posters, fliers, etc. To a large extent, campaign spending is driven by the behavior of the challengers; when the challenger is well-funded, the incumbent will spend more in response. Paid media can be expensive because voters have learned to tune-out political propaganda, whereas free-media can be much more effective (Chandrappa, 2014, PP.2310- 2312).

2.2. Free media

Free media or earned media can be considered as a kind of media that often refers specially to publicity gained through editorial influence of various kinds (Stephen and Galak, pp. 624-639). The media may include any mass media outlets such as newspaper, television, radio and the internet. It may also include a variety of formats such as news articles or shows, letters to the editor, editorials and polls on television and the internet. Many people consider earned media to be the most cost effective method of marketing. As a result, many companies are investing in earned media. The increased use of earned media is converging traditional owned and paid methods of marketing.

There must be free speech so all citizens and all political candidates can speak without fear. The media must be free to tell everyone what was said without pressure to twist the truth. That is the job of professional journalists – to fully inform citizens of the issues and their choices so that they can decide for themselves for whom to vote. The voters must have the opportunity to become well-informed and interested in the election through the provision of non-partisan information (Howard, 2004, pp.7). A free media will help keep the election honest and democratic and a democratically government elect will protect the media's freedom.



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3. Politics

Politics is the process by which communities pursue collective goals and deal with their conflicts authoritatively by means of government (Davaranah, 2009; pp. 11-15). Politics is difficult to define, because its influence extends into public life and it also structures the values and practices of the private sphere. Politics can be conceptualized as a specific sphere of society incorporating the workings of formal institutions and their legal relationships (Craig, 2004, pp.24). Actually, politics refer to opinions and activities that are related to gaining and using power in a country. When we say that politics is a process, we mean that it is a continuing sequence of events and interactions among various factors such as individuals, organizations and governments. The concept of process also implies that these political interactions generally take place within a structure of rules, procedures and institutions rather than haphazardly mentioned (Davaranah, 2009; pp.11-15).

4. Elections

An election is an occasion when people vote to choose an individual to manage a public office. In fact, elections are one of the important factors to form the political structures of human societies. The election is a formal decision-making process which is used in private and business organizations, associations and communities. For many people, elections are a crucial decision about the future. If the election goes well, the country can continue towards democracy and peace. But if the election goes badly, it can undermine democracy and turn the country back towards conflict. Free and fair elections allow people living in a representative democracy to determine the political makeup and future policy direction of their nation's government. In this modern age, media is one of the most powerful influences on how the elections run inside the country, and how they are perceived from outside (Howard, 2004; pp.5).

5. The Influence and Relationship of the Media in Politics and Elections

In a society, people often demand for the information, in this context the media plays a crucial role in informing the public about politics and elections. The relationship among media, politics and elections becomes important in a democratic society. In a democracy, the electorates have

voting right to elect their representative. In this light, both media and the electorate play crucial roles in determining the political situation of the state.

There is a cyclical relationship between media, the government and the public and while media can occasionally shape public opinion, it has a greater influence in communicating to voters, weather issues are important or not, about those issues media works more effectively by placing a spotlight on certain issues (Chandrappa, 2014). Media should provide voters with some information about the candidates. The government plays a role in dictating the media's content through the media's regular use of public officials as sources in the news. Just as the government influences the media, the media can help set the political agenda by focusing on specific issues and influencing what issues the public and government should be concerned with (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4).

6. The Effect of a Media Bias

There is a wide-spread belief that political bias exists strongly in the media and while that may be true to some extent, it doesn't have a significant effect on shaping the voter's views. One area that newspapers do take a stand on is in editorials, which has largely dictated by how people view certain publications (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4). It can be seen that various media outlets have distinctive ranks, which can be stable during time. The Nation leans left, and the National Review tilts right. The Washington Post and the New York Times are socially (and, to a lesser extent, economically) liberal, while Wall Street Journal editorials thunder with conservatism; other publications line up at various points along the ideological continuum or continua (Page, 1996; pp. 20-24). The political stereotypes of these publications have shifted in the past ten years, therefore, there is a wide-spread belief of a media bias (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4). The newspapers have a central viewpoint throughout all coverage and news stories often mirror the political views expressed in editorials (Page, 1996; pp. 20-24).

The media has a very strong bias when it comes to the coverage of a war. The assault on the war began with an assault on the American military, and it was an assault with deadly consequences (Hewitt, 2006; pp.52-53). In this case, Hewitt referred to the Newsweek article which states that interrogators had flushed a Qur'an down the toilet and abused detainees by leading them around on a dog leash and mistreating them. The article



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sparked world-wide rage and response from the White House. When independent sources could not verify the incident, Newsweek finally admitted that parts of the article were not true until pressure from the White House forced them to retract the article. When the White House felt a retraction was not enough because so much harm had already been done, the media got extremely upset with the White House, due to the pressure they were putting on the publication.

The people's perception that certain publications are bias may have a negative effect on journalists as a whole (Chandrappa, 2014; 2310-2312). While the public demands that the press question politicians, Robinson said that there is public discontent when bad news is reported due to the public's distrust in news and a "kill the messenger syndrome" (Robinson, 1976; pp.95-103). Robinson emphasizes that journalist should always take responsibility for the mistakes and avoid blaming others. At times, the public will assume all media is the same and when one publication is guilty of inaccurate or bias news, it can hurt all the media. But it is impossible for any political coverage to be completely free of opinion or objectivity (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4). The media is forced to make decisions when covering politics about who to interview, what quotes and facts to select and how to interpret information. Some newspapers use the selection process to further their own policy by running articles with "colorful, value-laden adjectives and adverbs" and calling the piece an analysis. It is hard to assess whether certain publications consistently have the same political stands and how they maintain those stands (Chandrappa, 2014; pp. 2310-2312).

There is a wide-spread belief that the media is becomes monopolized. Even though there are some large media outlets, there is no one media conglomerate that owns newspapers, book publishers, radio stations, cable companies, or television licenses in every major world market (Chandrappa, 2014; pp. 2310-2312).

7. The Media as a Political Spotlight

In the last few years, the relationship between media and politics has changed significantly. The rise of new political representatives has changed the public attitude towards the media. It shows that there is an important relationship between media and politics. It offers an extensive and insightful look into the media landscape. It shows how media informs people about current political affairs. Many people believe that the

relationship between politics and media thus lies at the core of democracy. This relationship needs constant rebalancing. In a democratic society, the people participate in the political activities and have the right to elect who governs them. Therefore, the media can play an important role in changing voters' views and attitudes and the media has a reinforcing role in shaping viewpoints. The media has a strong influence on the issues of the public views and can affect the evaluation of candidates. The media has a unique power in any political system. This power stems both from their role as key sources of information about cultures, people, and events on a regular basis and their multiple functions in politics (Eid, 2013; pp.1-3). The media is more effective in dictating what issues voters should view as important and less effective in shaping those views. It influences what issues people should consider when evaluating a candidate and what criteria to judge (Chandrappa, 2014, pp. 2310-2312). Although the media "might occasionally influence attitudes, they are more frequently effective as a spotlight" (Ramsden, 1996; pp. 65-81). In this respect, the media is effective in telling voters what issues to focus on, and less effective in telling them what to think of those issues. Since the media is practically the only way to get campaign information widely distributed, they influence what issues people should consider when evaluating a candidate and what criteria to judge them by (Ramsden, 1996; pp. 65-81). The media can play an important role in changing voters' perceptions, information, attitudes, and even behavior, but their viewpoints do not drastically change and the media has more of a reinforcing role than it does in shaping viewpoints (Robinson, 1976; pp.95-103).

The media has a strong influence on the issues the public views as important because repeated coverage of certain issues become priorities for the viewers and can affect the evaluation of candidates (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4). Ramsden said that this is true for judging both the policy of a candidate as well as their character. He used the example of Jimmy Carter, saying that although he had very little experience, the public widely ignored this issue because the press did not make it a concern. While the press could not necessarily influence the public's view of Carter, it could influence what criteria should be used to evaluate him (Ramsden, 1996; pp. 65-81).

8. The Media Acting as a Spotlight in Elections



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By spotlighting what issues the public should focus on, the media helps to dictate what issues voters should be concerned with in elections and what criteria they should use to judge politicians by (Chandrappa, 2014, pp.2310-2312). In fact, the media plays a basic role in shaping public beliefs. Most of the new information that voters receive is by news media or through social networks such as interpersonal discussion. The media can greatly influence the public. It collects and frames the information that the people use in their voting decisions.

In a democratic government the people make the important decisions through elections that are free and fair, and the government respects those decisions (Howard, 2004; pp. 3-4). The media's roles in an election are many. The media serves to inform the voters. For citizens to make well-informed decisions in an election there must be a free media. But the media must be more than free. It must be reliable. It must be trusted. It must have opportunity to form independent and diverse views. The media must be free of interference from government or other powerful interests that block the news reporting of other parties' voices and the public's opinion. The media must have instructions on how it reports the election to ensure that it is free and fair. In a free and fair election the people can choose political representatives who best stand for the voters' needs. Through the election process, the people choose which politician and political party they trust to speak up for them, and to deliver what the people want if the party becomes the government. In a democratic election, everyone has an equal right to elect or reject the government.

9. Media's Influence on Government

Even after the election, the media still plays a large role in influencing the government's agenda through spotlighting issues and directing public and political concerns (Chandrappa, 2014, pp.2310-2312). Experts argue that while the media may not be a source of new ideas for the government, it still has an effect on policymakers because "the public's familiarity with political matters is closely related to the amount and duration of attention these affairs receive in the mass media" (Edwards, 2003; pp.147). In some incidents the media can set the political agenda by covering issues the government does not want to focus on (Chandrappa, 2014, pp.2310-2312). The mass media can be seen not only as a driving force behind cultural and social change but also as an index for political mobilization, both domestically and internationally (Kamalipour, 1997; pp.xix).



10. Government's Influence on the Media

Just as the media can help to shape the political agenda, the government can equally influence the media's coverage. The government can dictate political media coverage to a certain extent because the media regularly uses officials as sources in news stories and they are able to express their views and set their agenda on a regular basis (Chandrappa, 2014, pp.2310-2312). The media has become dependent on using officials because of the nature of news gathering routines and the need for regular easy access to legitimate sources who possess valuable information (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4). The government can shape the media's agenda by providing the press with briefings, background, press releases, interviews and press conferences (Wood, 1999; pp. 327-344). The political process is more likely to have an influence on the news media than the news media on the political process (Gerges, 1999; pp. 104-106). Even if the media is skeptical of the president, the president still sets the agenda by receiving constant media coverage. Whether or not the media agrees with the president, it still influences the public through the spotlight effect by telling the public what issues are important (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4). In some ways the media can be seen as an instrument for the government to propagate its agenda and political stance. The media does have the ability to select what information they use. The media has limited itself by simply passing along the viewpoints of whatever political power is currently in control (Page, 1996; pp.20-24).

11. How People Get Their Information during Elections

During elections, people turn to different forms of media to get their information, depending on what information they are looking for and how involved they are in politics (Chandrappa, 2014; pp. 2310-2312). Although most people claim that they get most of their political information from television, it is the printed media that the people frequently cite as the source of specific news content.

Glaser has found that newspapers are often read more by people who are educated, informed and already interested in politics. He also said that the newspaper articles can inform the viewer more than television coverage can. He has argued that people can recall television reminders more than radio or newspapers. He noted a 1960 Gallop Survey that asked people "Where do you get most of your information about what's going on in the world- from magazines, TV, radio, or newspapers?". In his view, the



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television leaves a more lasting impression than other types media (Glaser, 1965; pp. 71-86). People go to the internet because it is accessible and immediate. The internet has a clear advantage over television because viewers can choose what information they are looking for and when they get it. In the age where timing is everything, viewers don't want to wait through an entire broadcast to hear the information they are looking for and they certainly don't want to wait through commercial breaks. The internet is also a great outlet for individuals or small groups to reach the masses. It is cheap, easy and available to anyone (Lane, 2012; pp.1-4).

12. Conclusion

Media includes several different outlets through which people can receive information on politics, such as radio, television, advertising and mailings. Through free media and paid media, the press is able to influence voters by telling them what issues are important at the time. Media provides information to the public throughout society allowing them to participate in the decisions and debates that shape their lives. The media also plays an important monitoring role in a democratic society that enables citizens to hold their governments and elect officials accountable - leading to better policies and service implementation. The media also influences the government through the spotlight effect and discussing issues that might not have been at the top of the political agenda. The government plays a role in dictating the media's content through the media's regular use of public officials as sources in the news. The media is affected by the government that is able to use the media as a political instrument by furthering the political views of whatever power is currently in office. Just as the government influences the media, the media can help set the political agenda by focusing on specific issues and influencing what issues the public and government should be concerned with. The media's roles in elections are many. The media serves to inform the voters. The media has a very strong effect in politics and elections by dictating what issues are relevant, what candidates will get the most coverage and what criteria they should use to evaluate candidates.

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