

Does fake news  
mislead the media



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Does fake media mislead the public? Media has emerged as the epitome of all forms of communication. It is used both to store and to transmit information to wide audiences. (McQuail) In recent years print and other forms of media have been displaced largely by electronic media. The decisive influence of the media is an unchallenged fact. However, the power of the media to mislead publics is still a controversial issue. Some schools of thought contend that media has the necessary power to mislead while others believe that media does exert a large influence but misleading through media is overemphasised. The first line of argument contends that modern media in its various forms is a tool in the hands of media barons. These people hold the power to change public opinion to anything that benefits them. There is little doubt of course that people are convinced by media but the extent is often in question. (Biagi) Media outlets have been shown to be powerful enough to convince consumers to buy more. In 2010 alone, advertising spending was some \$300 billion in the United States and around \$500 billion around the world. (Kantar Media) There is little doubt that the media is extensively relied upon to sell products. It could therefore be surmised that if the media can convince people to part with their money, then it can be used to mislead people as well. The media is often bombarded to portray certain things in an askew manner so that it benefits the interests of a few people. This can have the adverse impact of misleading people. As an example, the pre-Iraq war period saw media convincing the general public that Saddam Hussein was housing WMDs (weapons of mass destruction). However, the subsequent attack and occupation of Iraq failed to produce any real evidence of any suspected WMD program. Effectively, this can be seen as a primal example of the media's power being used to rally public support

for something that was never true. In this instance, it is clear that the media has the power to mislead the people and that fake media can mislead target audiences with efficiency. However, there are other schools of thought that contend that the media does wield large power over the masses but ultimately the media is one factor for consideration and not the entire story. People at large are assumed to be sensible enough to decide for themselves if something suits them or not. These critics argue that consumption patterns may be one thing but changing the opinions of an entire public is too much for the media to accomplish. They contend that media can encourage selling but media cannot encourage total market domination. For example, if a company prepared a large advertising campaign, it might be able to boost sales levels and market share but it would not be able to drive the competition out of the market altogether. (Caron and Caronia) In this sense, the media can be seen to have tremendous power over people's decision making but that tremendous power cannot be assumed to be absolute power. Had that been the case, media conglomerates would have been able to contain people's dissent through changing their opinions. The fact of the matter is that when things go too far, the media can only stand on the sides and watch. The recent Arab Spring that shook the Middle East and North Africa is a prime example of media's influence overtaken by people's frustration. Media in the Arab world is controlled largely by the government and its stooges in the media business. The people or public is fed with information that suits the government. If the power of the media to sway public opinions was unquestionable, then there would have been little chance of an uprising throughout the Middle East and North Africa. (Posusney and Angrist) Moreover, as the uprisings developed, the local

governments did their best to reinforce their positive image through the media but it had little effect. The government ensured that only its point of view reached the public. Internet and other digital sources were censored by the governments in order to drive their stance into people's minds. However, it failed to work altogether. Regime change is a reality in the Arab world today. This example clearly indicates that the media does have a large influence over public but it does not wield absolute authority on people's minds. Based on the arguments presented above, it can be established that the media does have the power to convince people. Fake media is successful in certain instances in changing public opinion for a short time. However, the application of fake media does not mean that people will always be misled. If conditions come to such a situation, popular public sentiment ultimately overtakes fake media's power to convince public. Bibliography Biagi, S. Media Impact. Wadsworth Pub Co, 2004. Caron, A. H and L. Caronia. Moving cultures: mobile communication in everyday life. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. Kantar Media. Intelligence. 2011. 22 July 2011 . McQuail, Denis. McQuail's Mass Communication Theory. London: Sage, 2000. Posusney, Marsha Pripstein and Michele Penner Angrist. Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005.