

The effects of media and what affects media

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The media has been dubbed as the fourth estate in the branch of government separate from the executive, legislative and the judiciary. Media has much influence on public opinion and behavior, however, businesses have also affected the media in a sense that the media needs advertising income from the business sector for its survivability. In everyday life, people are exposed to various media such as television, radio, newspapers and the internet and the content available in these channels of the media have greatly influenced the decision making and outlook of many people.

The influence provided by media is not always good. There is a need for parents to guide their children accordingly in responding to the content that is being shown in various media channels. On one aspect, the media has been much criticized because of showing violence which allegedly affects the behavior of children. Media influences grow more powerful as children grow.

Media has a tendency to stereotype and because of this, the thinking of children would most likely be swayed by such stereotyping. Parents can counteract such stereotyping in the media by guiding their children. The media also often show images involving alcohol, drugs and sex and parents should inform their children the consequences of such acts (Teresa).

Whether or not media violence affects the behavior of children remains to be a debatable topic.

Professor L. Rowell Huesmann of the University of Michigan states that based on 50 years of evidence, exposure to media resulted in children showing more aggressiveness which in turn affects them when they reach adulthood while Jonathan Freedman of the University of Toronto specifies that scientific

evidence does not indicate exposure to media violence produces violent behavior on people (Media Awareness Network). Research studies done by RAND and the University of North Carolina indicate that teenagers who have been exposed to sex by media have more of a tendency to engage in sexual acts.

It was indicated that teenagers have been reliant on the media for sexual information because such is not available in other channels. Proper guidance from parents about sex will better educate children about it as the media tends to leave out the three C's which is commitment, contraception and consequences (Teresa). On the other hand, media is also being used to forward propagandist movements. According to Miren Gutierrez, the editor-in-chief of Interpress Service, there are many propaganda strategies taking into account the recent war against Iraq.

These strategies include “ incompleteness, inaccuracy, driving the agenda, milking the story (maximizing media coverage of a particular issue by the careful use of briefings, leaking pieces of a jigsaw to different outlets, allowing journalists to piece the story together and drive the story up the news agenda, etc.), exploiting that we want to believe the best of ourselves, perception Management (in particular by using PR firms) and reinforcing existing attitudes, simple, repetitious and emotional phrases (e. g. war on terror, axis of evil, weapons of mass destruction, shock and awe, war of liberation, etc) (Shah, Propaganda and the Media).

Military control of information during time of war is an essential element of propaganda and the military often has power to manipulate the mainstream

media by choosing or censoring information that it does not want to publicize. This practice results in the lack of objectivity in media reports (Shah). During the war against Iraq, US and British media people who covered the war sought protection from the US and British military but there is an agreement that the military can censor information. This led to inaccurate and biased reports in different media channels.

The reports only focused on the good outcomes of the war and some unfortunate circumstances. The reports did not include the more critical aspect of war such as the death tolls and civilian casualties. Only media men who are not under the protection of the military reported such incidents (Kellner). One weakness of the media is that it is reliant on businesses for income. The media mainly relies on subscription services and advertisements for income and large corporations often indirectly get control over the media because of fear from the media group of the pulling out of advertisements.

Also, many large multi-national companies own the media networks. Media networks risk losing income from advertisements if they publish or broadcast stories that the advertisers do not like. Due to this aspect, media reports tend to lack objectivity and may even prove to be biased (Shah, Media and Advertising). Reports from Mother Jones magazine indicate that there are eight media companies in the United States wherein people get most of their knowledge and information and these companies are Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Viacom, General Electric which owns National Broadcasting Company, News Corporation, Yahoo!

Microsoft and Google. Mergers of media companies with multi-national companies have negative consequences because the media might no longer reach out to the masses taking into account that the media is the main source of information for many people. Mergers could result in reduced diversity in the approach of certain issues and may also result in unwarranted political influence (Shah, Media Conglomerates, Mergers, Concentration of Ownership).

Noam Chomsky points out that for New York Times and other similar media companies that “ the product is the audience and the customers are the corporate advertisers. ” Although the readers are the ones that buy the paper, income is generated from the advertisements. To the advertisers, the audience is the product that the newspaper delivers. In short, the market of the media is the advertisers and not the readers (Shah, Media and Advertising). The dependence of media on advertisements also coined the term “ advertorials” which is “ advertisements disguised as news”.

Media bodies sometimes craftily incorporate advertisements in their news reports and editorials and because of large ownerships of companies, a news company will advertise a program from its network of companies disguised as a news story (Shah, Media and Advertising). “ Advertainment” also came into the media scene which is “ advertisements disguised as entertainment”. These include short films that are not actually aimed to entertain but rather to advertise a product. This advertising method aims to entertain while promoting a product which is done in a subtle manner.

It is argued that there is nothing wrong with this as it is just aimed as a means to sell products but it would be better if the people are informed that what they are watching is a commercial (Shah, Media and Advertising). The media should be responsible enough in a sense that it is the basic source of information of many people. Media companies have a responsibility to inform the society about truth and not mislead the public from what is right with biased reports. The media should ensure that their decisions are not affected by external factors to maintain objectivity.

Works Cited

<http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Military.asp>

<http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Corporations/Ads.asp>