

# Newspaper coverage of celebrity crimes media essay



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Media has a significant influence on people and so do the celebrities. These effects can be both positive and negative. The kind of coverage of celebrities and celebrity crimes by newspapers and magazines can influence the opinion of the public on the celebrity criminals. This kind of influence can be greatly attributed to the process by which the news about celebrity criminals is evaluated and presented for the readers to analyse. This paper is going to look at the effects of the print-media coverage of celebrity criminals which could be biased or unbiased and its influence on the public accordingly, thus questioning media credibility.

## **Introduction**

My interest in traditional form of media i. e., the newspapers has always been deeper than the other forms of media. Also, I believe that news in the newspapers is better evaluated and helps to form a strong opinion about issues and events that occur globally. This interest in understanding the impact of newspapers on public opinion developed even further when I read about coverage of celebrity crimes. The manner in which news is presented in the newspapers whether it is about national or international celebrity

crimes is something that caught my interest. In addition to this, my interaction with people of different ages and status regarding celebrity criminals considerably inspired me to choose this topic for my research.

Prosperity of both science and culture has made people familiar with supply of information in abundance. Modern media, such as the internet, mobile phones, television and the traditional media such as newspapers and magazines make news and variety of information easily accessible to us. However, the most common form of news is that about the celebrities and public figures. It has become very evident in the recent times that media pays too much attention to the personal lives of the celebrities (popular figures).

Addition to this, the important factor is that most of the reports on lives of famous people are always focused on brilliant achievements, lavish lifestyles and exaggerated enjoyments which overstate the attractive part and understate the painstaking part. Therefore, the masses especially young people are often biased and tend to perceive celebrities as their idols. They happen to adore their idols with such passion and zeal that the amount of negative news and information about celebrities can even change their perception towards life.

The extent and quality of celebrity news in the media appears especially inordinate today, multiplying and intensifying at such a rate that 'legitimate' news has fallen in precedence (Brown, 31). Whether it likes it or not, the public knows more about Britney Spears and how many pills she swallowed than about many political issues (Wright, 1).

It is a known fact that in India we treat celebrities no less than god. And the Indian media being very well aware of this fact ensures that celebs and celebrity crimes get a lot of coverage so as to garner attention of the masses. In this process of covering celebrity related news, media tends to sensationalize the stories, often focusing on irrelevant details about celebrities instead of the main crime that has taken place. This research informs about the news coverage of celebrity crimes, the faith of public on media (print media) and the manner in which the presentation of such news coverage influences their opinion.

In this vein, analyzing the content presented by newspapers, as well as celebrity-news magazines, offered the clearest method by which to examine how news on celebrity crimes is covered and publicized. Researching articles on the major, relevant topics of media ethics, the role of celebrity news in Indian society and credibility of media was instrumental in gaining a better understanding of the subject matter. More emphasis was placed on researching relevant topics, as it is difficult if not impossible to determine the exact effects of media coverage of celebrity criminals through a study or direct observation. One can constantly see and read about celebrity crimes, however the influence of such news on public opinion is what really matters. Through analysing media coverage of celebrity criminals, especially the print media with the help of several examples of celebrity crimes will enhance the objective of this research paper. The purpose of this research proposal is to see if media coverage of celebrity-crimes is biased and how this changes people's opinion and perception on celebrities, thus questioning media's credibility.

Articles and news reports covered by various newspapers (both English and regional), on the crimes committed by celebrities like Sanjay Dutt, Salman Khan, Shiney Ahuja, Saif Ali Khan and many more were looked upon in this research paper. Also a survey was conducted to understand the effects of newspaper coverage of celebrity crimes and how it influences opinions of the public. The survey acts as a supplement to the newspaper articles that were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the objective of this research paper.

The literature review provides

## **Literature Review**

To understand the influence on the people of the portrayal of celebrity-criminals by media, it is important to understand the terms celebrity, crime, media bias and public opinion. These terms may not be connected with each other directly; however the understanding of these together would contribute in assessing the study of this paper.

**Celebrity** – The word ‘celebrity’ is derived from the word ‘celebrate’, in that a person is supposedly famous because the community celebrates him or her (Rockwell, 20). The term celebrity indicates someone whose fame rests overwhelmingly on what happens outside the sphere of their work and who is famous for having lifestyle. The celebrity is thus constructed through gossip, press and television reports, magazine articles and public relations (Redmond & Holmes, 99).

**Public Opinion** – Commonly the concept of public opinion is taken literally to mean the opinion of the public. While this is not incorrect, it constitutes a <https://assignbuster.com/newspaper-coverage-of-celebrity-crimes-media-essay/>

rather naïve understanding of the concept. A more sophisticated conception must acknowledge the element of publicity in public opinion: ‘public’ opinion as distinguished from ‘private’ opinion. Indeed public opinion is a shared aggregate phenomenon. It is a collective social entity, and publicity is necessary for its formation. It is the knowledge of the very existence of others who share values, beliefs and concerns that forges a host of discrete opinions into a viable social entity (Shamir, 1).

Based on these factors there have been researches that explain how biased media-coverage plays a crucial role in forming biased public-opinion. Media has a fixed agenda of providing certain news in a certain manner so that it is perceived in the manner that print media wants it to be perceived as by the people. ‘Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda setting role of the news media (McCombs, 1). This theory of agenda setting is applied by the media and describes a very powerful influence of media – its ability to tell people what issues are important. It explains the correlation between media and people – the rate at which media covers a story and the extent that people think this story is important.

‘Studies into the agenda-setting function of the press confirm that media “have a great deal of influence” upon political decision making and that they are especially influential in telling the general population what to think about’ (Kuypers, 5). The media tends to be biased whenever it provides flawed or irrelevant facts to support a certain viewpoint. It is also biased <https://assignbuster.com/newspaper-coverage-of-celebrity-crimes-media-essay/>

when it 'frames' certain issues in a particular manner. Such framing is done so that the issue is perceived in a particular way. According to many scholars our perception of a certain issue is more or less dependent on the way the issue is framed (Kuypers, 7).

There are millions of events that occur globally in today's world. And to examine these events and report about them there are thousands of people around the world who are employed by media organizations. The media decides and tells us which issues are important and which ones or not. We have never physically witnessed the war situations of Afghanistan, Iraq or even Kashmir. Despite this we have the pictures of these events in our heads. The media reports inform about the latest events and issues that are taking place in the world and are inaccessible to us. Thus, most of our perceptions about the world are based on the second-hand reality created by the media organizations. There is no guarantee that this reality is an accurate picture of the world (Saqib Riaz, 1). This explains how gate-keeping is done by the media, wherein it chooses the newsworthiness of certain news and evaluates it based on a variety of reasons and preferences.

The aspects of a certain event that are covered in the news and the kind of importance that is given to these aspects leads to significant differences in people's perception of that event. The portrayal of news stories results in the people's understanding of the journalist's consideration of important issues and who the most prominent public figures of the day are. Thus from the details of the coverage of news stories and their evaluation by the media helps the public form their perception of these news stories and the public figures (McCombs, 7-8).

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Thus from the above literature it is evident that public opinion is formed on the basis of the kind of information that media prioritizes and later provides to the public. The media does set the agenda of what is discussed around the world on a daily basis. It chooses stories that are reviewed by the public regularly. Not many people seem to be aware that the stories they read are picked by the media organizations before getting printed. The impact of someone selecting the news stories for the masses to read can be positive as well as negative.

Therefore, even when crimes committed by celebrities are covered by the media, it tries to change people's opinion depending upon a positive or a negative coverage of that particular news. Media can manipulate news using a variety of strategies that can alter people's perception.

It can navigate their audience through what it feels is potent and viable concerning topics specifically related to celebrity crimes. The aspects that contribute in the assessment of opinions of the public are the audiences of the media, their lifestyle, interests and their level of sophistication.

Nevertheless, there are many other dependent variables that create a different representation of truth. And through this, media has the power to influence people's point of view.

## **2. 1 Media and Celebrities**

Usually news about celebrities is considered to be soft news (entertainment) unless a crime has been committed by a celebrity. Media today places a lot of importance to celebrity news. Reports of soft news outweigh the amount



of hard news that gets reported in today's mass media including the traditional media i. e., the newspapers and magazines.

According to Bennett (2007), some of factors affecting the increase of soft news include the economics of the news business, journalists' dependence on sources who control information, routine news-gathering practices, professional norms and a need to fill the news hole that has been created by 24/7 news coverage. Celebrity focused, soft news tends to be quick and easy to report about. Additionally, such stories have proven to be popular among audiences and are easy to dramatize. Celebrity stories may also serve the uses and gratifications of many audience members. Bennett (2007) suggests that in addition to learning, many viewers use news to satisfy their needs for curiosity and surveillance, entertainment and escape, and social and psychological adjustment. ' With the advent of the Web and the Internet, increasing numbers of citizens turn to alternative information channels that deliver politically packaged information in a format better integrated with personal interests and various citizen-action options' (Bennett, 2007). This statement is valid not only for politics but all kinds of news information. There are websites, magazines, newspapers, television stations, etc. to suit every different need and people have the choice to visit only the ones that interest them. Therefore, the shift seen in news coverage from informative to entertaining cannot be blamed solely on the media.

“ Celebrities become products and are endowed with expertise outside of their celebrated areas” (West & Orman, 2003: 118). The celebrity culture today expects that stars be spokespersons for all kinds of issues, as well as bear the responsibility for issues that are problematic. This power is not <https://assignbuster.com/newspaper-coverage-of-celebrity-crimes-media-essay/>

derived from within these stars, but rather from the audience's interest in them. Celebrities are expected by many to be shining examples of model citizens, yet their good deeds like activism are overlooked in favour of scandalous, dramatic, negative reports about them (Amanda Jones, 2009: 8). This sheds light on how media portrays celebrities. There are times when media will provide sensationalized news about celebrities to garner attention and increase readership.

“ Journalist Caspar Llewellyn-Smith makes this point when he states that the guiding principle of celebrity gossip magazines is to show famous figures ‘ off-guard, unkempt, unready and unsanitized’ (Llewellyn-Smith, 2002: 120, cited in Holmes, 2005: 23)” (Holmes & Redmond, 2006: 184). According to McCracken's findings, the mass media are, in effect, making a concerted effort to provide unflattering coverage of celebrity personalities. It is these kinds of news stories that are increasingly present in our every day mass media outlets. Such stories provide the drama and sensationalism that media consumers are looking for (2009: 311).

The above literature explains that media often portrays the celebrities negatively by presenting sensational news about them. The news coverage on celebrities and celebrity crimes done by the media is negative often to create drama and stir the public's interest.

## **2. 2 Media Coverage of Celebrity Crimes**

The role of the press is to educate and create awareness amongst the masses, however in the recent times it seems to have switched this role with that of entertainment. Instead of focusing on the details of the crimes

committed by the celebrities, media tends to divert the attention to the celebrities' lives and sensationalizes the news about them. In covering the most titillating or personal aspects of a story, present-day coverage often trivializes more important structural and procedural issues. During the 2005 Michael Jackson molestation trial, the Los Angeles Times, which ran approximately 317 stories on the case, printed only two pieces focusing on the crucial new California statute that allowed prosecutor Tom Sneddon to introduce evidence of past allegations against Jackson. Much of the Times coverage offered almost daily trial updates, which consisted primarily of subjective descriptions of the personal behavior and appearance of the various witnesses and courtroom actors in the case (Fox et al., 2007: 6).