

The Influence of the Media in Politics - Campaigns and Elections

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Abstract: *There is a wide-spread belief that there is a strong political bias 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. Page argues that various media outlets take distinctive stands, which can remain consistent over a period of time.*

Keywords: Negative campaign, syndrome, objectivity, Public policy, conveyor, small groups

1. Introduction

The Influence and Relationship of the Media in Politics, Campaigns and Elections - In an age of modern democratic system, the society demands for the information, in this context the media plays a crucial role in informing the public about politics, about the campaigns and elections. But while the public demands information from the media, there is also a chance for the media and politicians for negative campaign coverage and a perceived media bias. Additionally, the media helps influence what issues voters should care about in elections and what criteria they should use to evaluate candidates. This will be expected by the Government, There is a cyclical relationship between the media, the government and the public and while the media can occasionally shape public opinion, it has a greater influence in communicating to voters, weather issues are important or not, about those issues the media works more effectively by placing a spotlight on certain issues.

2. The Effect of a Media Bias

There is a wide-spread belief that there is a strong political bias 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. Page argues that various media outlets take distinctive stands, which can remain consistent over a period of time

The people's perception that certain publications are bias can have a negative effect on journalists as a whole. While the public demands that the press question politicians, Robinson says there is public discontent when bad news is reported due to the public's distrust in news and a "kill the messenger syndrome." 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. 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.

In this arena some news papers 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 .While it is hard to assess whether certain publications consistently have the same political stands and how they maintain those stands,

Here is a wide-spread belief that the media is becoming 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.

3. The Media as a Political Spotlight

While many are afraid that a biased media will shape people's views during elections, the media is more effective in dictating what issues voters should view as important and less effective in shaping those views. 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 Robinson agrees and says "while the media can play an important role in changing voters' perceptions, information, attitudes, and even behavior," their viewpoints do not drastically change and the media has more of a reinforcing role than it does in shaping viewpoints .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.

4. The Media Acting as a Spotlight in Elections

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. "Most of the new information voters receive over the course of a political campaign is transmitted either by news media or through social networks such as interpersonal discussion" .The media can greatly influence the public by limiting coverage of certain candidates. The media has the discretion to cover only the candidates it feels are legitimate candidates and have a viable chance of

winning the election. In this way, the media acts as a filter, by narrowing down candidates and sifting out lesser-known candidates and giving more coverage to the better-known. Although the public should ultimately decide on its own who they feel is a viable candidate. This could have a negative effect if voters are not voting on candidates that best represent their views on public policy. "Voters are less likely today to vote simply along party lines, and more likely to split their tickets and defect from their party's choice, if the candidate's stand on the issues or the candidate's ideology is relatively unattractive". The media cannot directly dictate how voters will think, but it can influence what they should be thinking about. In an indirect way, the media sets the agenda. People will not think about issues or events they are not informed about

5. The Media's Influence on Campaigning

The media can greatly effect elections by generating attention. Although, lately voters have become turned-off from all the negative campaigning and name calling, campaign consultants know that voters are still cynical of politicians and will react to any sign of doubt. "It can be argued that the negative campaign simply responds to cynicism, even as it amplifies it". The media also influences the public's perception on the viability of a candidate. If reports say a certain candidate is ahead in an election, the public will come to accept that evaluation, which can greatly influence how voters cast their ballots. For the most part, people do not want to waste time on candidates they believe do not have a chance to win.

6. Media's Influence on Government

Even after the election, the media still plays a large roll in influencing the government's agenda through spotlighting issues and directing public and political concerns. 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".

It can be argued that in some incidents the media can set the political agenda by covering issues the government does not want to focus on. "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".

7. Government Effect 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. The media has become dependent on using officials because of "the nature of newsgathering routines and the need for regular easy access to legitimate sources who possess valuable information". The government can shape the media's agenda by providing

the press with briefings, background, press releases, interviews and press conferences.

8. The Different Forms of Media

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. Paid media 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 and because voters have learned to tune-out political propaganda, free-media can be much more effective. With paid media it is not always easy to get the message heard by voters. Viewers are impatient now more than ever and political messengers must work in a 30-second commercial to break through cynical viewers who flip through channels and live in an entertainment-filled world. "They must sharpen and simplify their messages in order to be heard. And they must use the most popular entertainment medium as the conveyor of their messages"

9. 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. Although most people claimed they get most of their political information from television, it is printed media people frequently cite as the source of "specific news content",

Glaser found that newspapers are often read more by people who are educated, informed and already interested in politics. He also said newspaper articles can inform the viewer more than television coverage can. Robinson agreed that people who pay attention to the media during campaigns are normally already involved in politics.

"Attention to the media for campaign news is mainly found among people who are already involved in political activities". Glaser says television leaves a more lasting impression than other Medias. While much has changed since these surveys were conducted, the public is still concerned with timeliness, which I would argue is one of the leading reasons people turn away from print during elections.

I would argue that the internet has just recently begun to take the place of TV, just as TV took the place of print.

People go to the internet because it is accessible and immediate. I would also argue the internet has a clear advantage over television because viewers can chose 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. It breaks the saying that "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one".

Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Summer, 1982.): pp. 216-227

10. Conclusion

Through free media and paid media, the press is able to influence voters by telling them what issues are important at the time. While there is a wide-spread belief that they media are bias to either the right of the left, it should be less of a concern to the public because the media is largely unsuccessful in shaping opinion. The media also influences the government through the spotlight affect and discussing issues that might not have been at the top of the political agenda. The media has a very strong effect in politics, campaigns and elections by dictating what issues are relevant, what candidates will get the most coverage and what criteria they should use to evaluate candidates. Equally, the media is affected by the government, who is able to use the media as a political instrument by furthering the political views of whatever power is currently in office. While it is not absolute because outside factors also shape positions, the media, public and government has a cyclical relationship that influences one another.

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