

Media Guidance and Shaping of Public Opinion: Mechanisms, Ethics and Influences

Yichen Wang *

Camford Royal School Guoxian BIC Beijing, 102200, China

* Corresponding Author Email: zcy@chang-tang.cn

Abstract. The paper analyzed the role of media in guiding and shaping public opinion and its ethical issues through literature review. The results show that media should take into account many ethical factors in addition to conveying information when guiding public opinion. The first is the responsibility of the media, which is not only the accuracy of information, but also how the media balances commercial interests with the public interest, how they deal with sensitive or controversial issues, how they deal with different views and positions. Accountability is another important ethical consideration. Accountability helps ensure that the media does not abuse its power to guide public opinion and avoids bias and partisanship that mislead the public. At the same time, accountability can encourage the media to handle sensitive issues more carefully and maintain professional and ethical standards. When guiding public opinion, the media should fully consider the ethical factors, not only to achieve objective and fair information dissemination, but also to assume due social responsibilities. When the media guide public opinion, manipulation and freedom of speech are two ethical considerations that cannot be ignored. Manipulation occurs when the media influences public perceptions and attitudes through specific reporting angles, language, or content choices.

Keywords: Media Guidance, public opinion, ethical issues, Accountability.

1. Introduction

In today's era of information explosion, the media plays a vital role in guiding and shaping public opinion. The media is not only the disseminator of information, but also the shaper of social values and the leader of public opinion. They influence public perceptions and attitudes through various forms, such as news reports, comments, social media and online forums. First, the media influence public opinion by selectively reporting news. With limited reporting time and space, the media tends to selectively emphasize certain events or opinions while ignoring or trivializing other information. Such selective reporting may lead to one-sided or misunderstanding of certain issues by the public, thus affecting their attitudes and behaviors. Second, the media directs public attention by setting the agenda. By highlighting certain topics or events, the media focuses the public's attention on specific issues, thereby influencing their judgment of importance. Such agenda-setting can affect public perceptions and values, and even influence their political leanings and voting behavior. In addition, the media shape public opinion by guiding the conversation. The media provides a platform and opportunity for experts, scholars or political figures to speak out by inviting them to give their opinions. Such dialogue and exchange can shape public opinion by influencing public perceptions and attitudes on particular issues.

However, the media also face ethical problems in the process of guiding public opinion. Impartiality, objectivity and social responsibility are important ethical issues that the media must face. The media should maintain an objective and neutral stance and avoid bias and misleading the public. At the same time, the media should also shoulder social responsibilities, pay attention to public interests and social welfare, and promote social progress and development.

To sum up, the media plays a vital role in guiding and shaping public opinion. They influence public opinion and attitudes on specific issues by selectively reporting the news, setting the agenda, and steering the conversation. At the same time, the media also faces ethical issues such as impartiality, objectivity and social responsibility. Therefore, people need an in-depth study of how the media

influences public opinion in order to better address these challenges and promote healthy and rational public discussion and the development of a public opinion ecology. The research topic of this thesis is the role of the media in guiding and shaping public opinion and its ethical issues. Research methods include analysis and evaluation of media coverage, as well as surveys and observations of public opinion. The aim of the study is to gain insight into how the media influence public opinion and attitudes through selective reporting, agenda-setting and conversation steering, and to explore the ethical issues of impartiality, objectivity and social responsibility faced by the media in the process of shaping public opinion.

2. The media's mechanism for public opinion

The first thing people want to talk about is the mechanism of the media to public opinion, and human want to start with three parts. Agenda setting theory, framework theory, cultivation theory. Agenda setting theory provides people with a unique perspective on the relationship between media and public opinion [1]. The theory states that the media do not simply convey information, but by carefully selecting and emphasizing certain issues, they influence the degree of public attention and priority of these issues [2]. In short, the media not only tell people "What", but also "how" and "in what importance" to think about these issues. The core of this theory is to reveal how the media, through agenda-setting, invisibly guides the direction of public opinion. According to the framework theory, the media will selectively emphasize certain information when reporting news and form a specific reporting framework, thus affecting the public's understanding of news and views on related issue [3]. The core of framing theory is how media influence public perception and judgment by selecting, emphasizing, interpreting, and presenting information. Different media and journalists may choose different frameworks to cover the same event according to their positions, values and experience. The framework theory reveals the complexity and diversity of media in the process of forming public opinion, emphasizing that media is not only a transmitter of information, but also a transmitter of views and positions. Future research directions can be developed from the following two aspects:

Emotionalization and guidance of public opinion: Emotion plays an important role in the formation of public opinion. Research can focus on how media use emotional means (such as emotional words, pictures, videos, etc.) to guide public opinion on a certain issue, and the impact of such guidance on the direction of public opinion.

Artificial intelligence and public opinion analysis: With the development of artificial intelligence technology, public opinion analysis faces new challenges and opportunities. Research can explore how artificial intelligence techniques (such as natural language processing, machine learning, etc.) can be used to analyze public opinion data, and the application of these techniques in public opinion prediction, monitoring, and management [2]. Future research could further explore how media of different types and positions use frame theory to influence public opinion, and how the public reacts to different frames and forms their own views. Cultivation theory emphasizes the role of media in shaping and influencing public perception. Mass media convey symbolism and ideology, indirectly shaping perceptions and values. This influence often occurs unconsciously, making people tend to accept the "reality" presented by the media [3]. Media influence people's understanding and judgment of social issues, events and figures through daily reporting and information dissemination, and influence the public's cognitive framework and values by choosing reporting angles, highlighting certain information and ignoring other information. Training theories not only focus on the negative effects of media, but also recognize the positive changes it can bring about. Providing diverse sources of information and perspectives stimulates public thought and discussion and promotes social progress [3]. The role of media in shaping and influencing public perception is an important area of research. Future research may focus on the following areas: how to assess the impact of media on public perception; How to deal with the negative effects of the media: how to take advantage of the positive effects of the media, such as providing diverse information and resources; How to improve the influence of media on public perception through technological means [4]. Future research could further explore how the media shape public opinion through specific reporting strategies and content

choices, and how the public balances reliance on the media with critical thinking. People can also examine the dynamic changes in the relationship between media and public opinion in different cultural, social and historical contexts [4].

3. The influence mechanism of media on public opinion

The media plays a vital role in shaping and shaping public opinion. This process begins with the selection and presentation of news, which is the basis for influencing public opinions and attitudes [5].

When selecting news, media outlets filter according to specific criteria, values, and goals. This choice not only reflects the position and bias of the media, but also affects the range of information available to the public. Certain events or views may be magnified or ignored, creating bias in public view.

The way the news is presented is also critical. How the news is described and interpreted by the media, and what language, images, and audio and video are used, have a profound impact on the public's understanding of the news. Different presentations may stimulate emotional responses, guide logical thinking, or reinforce a cognitive framework that further shapes public opinion [6].

Through the selection and presentation of news, the media invisibly affects the public's cognition and judgment. This influence is not one-way, but interwoven with the public's existing perceptions, emotions, and values. Therefore, it is crucial for the media and the public to understand the mechanism of news selection and presentation, which is not only related to the accurate transmission of information, but also related to social consensus and harmony [5]. Media bias and partisanship are important mechanisms for media to influence public opinion. The media has a significant influence in guiding and shaping public opinion [6]. In addition to news selection and presentation, media bias and partisanship are also important factors in this process. Media bias often stems from the media's positions, values, and reporting guidelines. This bias may take the form of overemphasis on certain events or ideas, distortion of facts, or selective neglect. When the media deliver biased reports, the public may receive incomplete or one-sided information, thus forming biased public opinion. Partisanship refers to the tendency of the media to support or oppose a political position or group. The media's partisanship is particularly evident in politically charged stories. By selectively emphasizing certain information or ignoring other information, the media supports or opposes a certain political viewpoint or policy, thereby influencing the political inclination and attitude of the public.

Media is important to note that media bias and partisanship are not always negative. In some cases, they may reflect the diverse voices and viewpoints of society, facilitating public thinking and discussion. However, when the media are overly biased or partisan, they can lead to narrow views and biased judgments that mislead public opinion. Therefore, when receiving media information, the public should have the ability to discriminate and carefully consider information from different sources to form independent judgments. At the same time, the media should also strive to maintain an objective and impartial attitude and provide comprehensive and balanced coverage to promote a healthy environment for public opinion [7]. In addition to news selection, presentation, bias and partisanship, persuasive communication strategies also play a key role in shaping public opinion. Persuasive communication strategy is a communication method that conveys information purposefully and systematically to influence the audience's attitude and behavior. Media enhance the appeal and persuasiveness of information by carefully selecting and arranging the content of information, adopting specific expression and rhetorical skills. In order to effectively influence public opinion, the media will use various means of persuasion, such as emotional appeals, logical arguments, and authoritative endorsements. Emotional appeals use human emotional responses to influence attitudes by eliciting empathy or fear; Logical arguments rely on facts and arguments to persuade the audience in a rational way; Authoritative endorsement is to use the influence of experts, celebrities and other opinion leaders to convey views. In addition, the media will also adopt the way of narration, through storytelling narration techniques, the information in a more vivid and concrete way to the audience, improve the attractiveness and credibility of the information. The application of persuasive

communication strategies enables the media to more effectively capture the audience's attention and guide their attitudes and behaviors in the era of information overload. However, it also requires the media to be objective, truthful and impartial in conveying information and to avoid excessive manipulation or misleading public opinion. Therefore, when receiving media information, the public should maintain critical thinking and carefully evaluate the authenticity and credibility of the information. At the same time, the media should also consciously assume social responsibilities and rationally use persuasive communication strategies to promote a healthy and rational public opinion environment.

4. Ethical considerations for media guidance of public opinion

In guiding public opinion, the media needs to take into account many ethical factors besides conveying information. First and foremost is the responsibility of the media, that is, the media should act in the public interest, provide truthful, objective and comprehensive reports, and refrain from spreading false or misleading information. Media responsibility is not only about the accuracy of information, but also about how the media balances commercial interests with the public interest, how they deal with sensitive or controversial issues, and how they deal with different views and positions [8]. Accountability is another important ethical consideration. The media should accept external oversight and be responsible for their reporting and speech. Accountability helps to ensure that the media do not abuse their power in guiding public opinion and avoid bias and partisanship that mislead the public. At the same time, accountability can encourage the media to deal with sensitive issues more prudently and maintain professional and ethical standards. When guiding public opinion, the media should fully consider ethical factors, not only achieve objective and fair information transmission, but also assume due social responsibilities. By strengthening external accountability and internal self-discipline, the media can better perform their duties and create a healthy and rational environment for public opinion [8]. When the media guide public opinion, manipulation and freedom of speech are two ethical considerations that cannot be ignored. Manipulation mainly involves the selection, presentation and interpretation of information by the media. Manipulation can occur when the media influences public perceptions and attitudes through specific reporting angles, language, or content choices. Such manipulation may be motivated by commercial interests, political positions, or other external pressures that lead to asymmetric dissemination of information to mislead the public. Therefore, when guiding public opinion, the media should avoid excessive manipulation and respect the public's judgment and right to know. Freedom of speech is another important ethical principle for media to guide public opinion. Freedom of expression means that the media has the right to express opinions, criticism and dissent, while also bearing the responsibility to respect the freedom of expression of others. In guiding public opinion, the media should encourage the expression of diverse voices, avoid suppressing or excluding different views, and promote public discussion and rational dialogue. Freedom of speech does not mean that the media can spread false or harmful information at will. In exercising freedom of speech, the media should follow legal and ethical norms to ensure the authenticity and impartiality of information [9]. In guiding public opinion, the media should balance the relationship between manipulation and freedom of speech, neither abusing the power of manipulation, but respecting and protecting freedom of speech. This requires the media to have a high degree of ethical awareness and self-discipline to ensure that their actions are in line with the public interest and social justice. Media literacy and critical thinking are ethical considerations that media should pay attention to when guiding public opinion. Media literacy refers to the public's ability to identify, analyze and judge media information. In the age of information explosion, the public needs to be media literate, able to identify the truth, objectivity and bias of media reports, and not blindly believe or spread unverified news. The media itself should also take responsibility for improving the media literacy of the public, providing accurate and comprehensive information and leading the public to critical thinking [10]. Critical thinking is the ability to critically analyze, evaluate, and judge information. In the process of media guiding public opinion, critical thinking can help the public identify false or misleading information and not be influenced by one-sided or biased reports. The

public should have critical thinking skills, be skeptical of media reports, and not blindly accept or spread unverified information.

The media should focus on cultivating the public's media literacy and critical thinking. By providing objective, truthful and comprehensive reports, the public is guided to rational analysis and judgment, and a healthy and rational public opinion environment is promoted [10]. At the same time, the media themselves should strengthen self-discipline, avoid spreading false or misleading information, and ensure that their behavior complies with ethical norms and social responsibilities.

5. Conclusion

The mechanism of media's influence on public opinion is a complex issue, which involves many factors. According to agenda-setting theory, the media not only tell people "What" but also "how" to think about these issues, and "how much" to think about them. Frame theory emphasizes how media influence public perception and judgment by selecting, emphasizing, interpreting, and presenting information. Cultivation theory emphasizes the role of media in shaping and influencing public perception. These theories provide us with a comprehensive perspective to analyze the influence of media on public opinion. In China the news media, as the main carrier of public opinion, undertakes the important duties of disseminating information, propagating the work of the party and the government, educating the people, supervising the society and so on. Therefore, the media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and guiding social values.

In practice, the media should follow the principles of objectivity, fairness and truthfulness and avoid spreading false and inaccurate information so as not to have a negative impact on public opinion. At the same time, the media should also pay attention to improving their professional quality and moral standards in order to better serve the people and the development of the country.

In conclusion, the influence of media on public opinion is a complex process involving multiple theories and factors. In China, the media should give full play to its positive role to build a harmonious society and promote the development of the country.

Future research could further explore how media of different types and positions use framing theory to influence public opinion, and how the public reacts to different frameworks and forms their own views. Future research could also examine the dynamics of the relationship between media and public opinion in different cultural, social, and historical contexts. In addition, research can explore how the media shape's public opinion through specific reporting strategies and content choices, and how the public balances reliance on the media with critical thinking. It can also examine the dynamic changes in the relationship between media and public opinion in different cultural, social and historical contexts. Due to the characteristics of fast, wide range and easy tampering of information spread on social media, it is also easy to become a hotbed of rumors breeding and spreading. Therefore, how to effectively deal with network rumors has become an urgent problem to be solved.

In short, the influence of media on public opinion is a complex and diverse topic. With the development of technology and the popularity of social media, the role of media in shaping and guiding public opinion has become increasingly prominent. Therefore, they need to pay attention to how the media uses different theories and techniques to influence public perception and behavior, and how the public forms independent, rational judgments in the face of numerous information.

Future studies should continue to explore these issues in depth in order to provide useful enlightenment and suggestions for the development of the media industry. At the same time, people should also improve people media literacy, learn how to screen valuable information in the era of information explosion, and avoid being misled by false and untrue information. Only in this way can peter better cope with the media's influence on public opinion and jointly build a more harmonious and rational social environment.

References

- [1] C. Williams, J. Fedorowicz, does social media promote the public's perception of the police: Survey results on trust cultivation. Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS-52), (2019).
- [2] J. M. Balkin, Routledge, 325 – 382 (2017).
- [3] A. C. L. G. G.tps://d Commun. Rese., 25(5), 486–504 (1998).
- [4] E. Peterson, M.B. Allamong, APSR, 116(2), 719-733 (2021).
- [5] D. Shultziner, Y. Stukalin, Mass Commun. Socie, 24 (3), 372 – 393 (2020).
- [6] D. Shultziner, Y. Stukalin, PB, 43 (1), 201 – 222 (2019).
- [7] F.V. Tommasi, A. Ceschi, R. Sartori, M. Gostimir, G. Passaia, S. Genero, S. Belotto, EJ TD, 47, 85 – 104 (2021).
- [8] Y. N. Wong, R. Jones, R. Das, P.J.B. Jackson, BDS, 10, (2023).
- [9] M.S. Yan, Research on the Impact Mechanism of Public Opinion in News Production on Environmental Crisis Reporting: Comparison of the Frameworks based on the Reports of “Neighboring Movements” in China and Japan. January 1, 2019, Retrieved from <https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Agcd%3A11%3A9399963/detailv2?sid=ebsco%3Aplink%3Ascholar&id=ebsco%3Agcd%3A136265098&crl=c>.
- [10] O. Alvarado, H. Heuer, V. Vanden Abeele, et al. Middle-aged video consumers' beliefs about algorithmic recommendations on YouTube. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction 4(CSCW2), 1 – 24 (2020).