



Original Article

The Power of Media: Exploring the Dynamics of Media Effects on Public Opinion Formation

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ABSTRACT

Background: This research study explored the dynamics of media effects on public opinion formation. **Aims:** To enhance our understanding of the power of media in shaping individuals' opinions and attitudes. **Methods:** A multi-method approach was employed, incorporating qualitative and quantitative research methods such as content analysis, surveys, experimental studies, interviews, focus groups, and secondary data analysis. Through these methods, the research examined participants' media consumption habits, perceived impact of media messages, understanding of framing and bias, and the relationship between media exposure and attitude change. **Results:** The survey results indicated that a majority of respondents (64%) believed that media played a significant role in shaping their opinions. Thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed key themes, including the reliance on social media for news updates (74%), the perceived influence of media on personal opinions (41%), the recognition of media framing techniques (33%), and the perception of media bias (80% of participants). Furthermore, experimental studies demonstrated that participants exposed to high levels of media content experienced a substantial change in attitudes (mean change of 0.8), compared to those with low media exposure (mean change of 0.2) and the control group (mean change of 0.1). **Conclusion:** Overall, this study provided valuable insights into the influence of media on public opinion formation and underscored the importance of media literacy in navigating the media landscape. However, excessive media exposure lead to the negative shift towards attitude.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancements in technology and the proliferation of mass media platforms have bestowed upon media outlets an unprecedented power to shape public opinion¹. The media's influence on public perception, attitudes, and beliefs has become a subject of immense scholarly interest and societal concern². Understanding the dynamics of media effects on public opinion formation is crucial for comprehending the intricate relationship between media and society, and for assessing the implications of this influence on democratic processes, policy-making, and social change³.

One crucial area of investigation within this research topic is agenda setting, which examines how media outlets determine the salience and prioritization of issues by selecting certain topics for coverage while downplaying or neglecting others⁴. By deciding which issues to highlight and which to sideline, the media plays a pivotal role in defining the public's agenda, influencing what is considered important and noteworthy. This research aims to explore the extent to which media agenda-setting influences public opinion formation and how it affects societal discourse⁵.

Framing is another critical aspect of media effects on public opinion. Media outlets employ specific language, imagery, and presentation techniques to frame news stories and social issues, thereby shaping public interpretation, understanding, and emotional responses. Understanding the power of framing enables researchers to unravel how media narratives shape public attitudes and beliefs, and how they can influence policy debates and public discourse⁶.

Moreover, media bias is a pervasive concern that warrants thorough investigation. Researchers aim to scrutinize different types of bias, such as partisan bias, ideological bias, and sensationalism, and their impact on public opinion⁷⁻⁸. By analyzing the presence and effects of bias in media coverage, this research seeks to illuminate the potential consequences of skewed information on public attitudes and beliefs, as well as the implications for a well-informed citizenry⁹.

Understanding the persuasive communication strategies employed by media outlets is also crucial in comprehending their influence on public opinion formation. Investigating the techniques and strategies utilized in media messages, including advertisements and political campaigns, allows researchers to examine how media persuades or influences individuals' attitudes, behaviors,

and opinions¹⁰. This research aims to shed light on the effectiveness of persuasive communication in shaping public opinion and the role of media in shaping individuals' political and social preferences.

By exploring these dimensions of media effects on public opinion formation, this research topic endeavors to deepen our understanding of the power and influence of mass media on society¹¹. The insights gained from this research can inform media literacy initiatives, guide policymakers, and foster critical engagement with media messages. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a more informed, engaged, and resilient democratic society that can navigate the complexities of media influence and make informed decisions based on diverse perspectives. We aimed to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of media influence, shedding light on how mass media exerts its sway over public opinion.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To explore the dynamics of media effects on public opinion formation, a multi-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed. The research encompassed various data sources and analytical techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Content Analysis

A content analysis of media sources was conducted to examine the patterns and characteristics of media coverage. A representative sample of news articles, television broadcasts, online content and social media posts was selected for analysis. The content analysis focused on identifying agenda-setting strategies, framing techniques, and the presence of bias in media messages. Data were collected using systematic coding schemes that captured relevant variables such as issue salience, framing devices, and bias indicators.

Surveys and Questionnaires

Surveys were administered to a diverse sample of participants to gauge their opinions, attitudes, and perceptions on specific issues. The survey questionnaires were designed to explore the extent of media influence on participants' opinions and their awareness of media framing and bias. Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended prompts were utilized to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Sampling techniques such as random sampling or stratified sampling were employed to ensure a representative sample.

Experimental Studies

Experimental studies were conducted

to examine the causal relationship between media exposure and changes in public opinion. Participants were randomly assigned to different experimental conditions where they were exposed to varying levels of media content. Pre- and post-tests were conducted to measure shifts in attitudes and opinions. Control groups were utilized to compare the effects of media exposure against baseline attitudes. Data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Interviews and Focus Groups

In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted to gather rich qualitative data from 100 individuals' who experienced the perceptions of media influence. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their media consumption habits, perceived impact of media messages on their opinions, and their understanding of media framing and bias. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the qualitative data.

Secondary Data Analysis

Existing datasets, such as public opinion polls or government surveys, were analyzed to assess long-term trends in public opinion and media consumption patterns. These datasets provided valuable insights into broader societal shifts and the relationship between media exposure and public attitudes over time.

By employing this range of research methods, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media influences public opinion formation, encompassing both quantitative trends and qualitative insights from individuals' experiences and perceptions. The data collected through content analysis, surveys, experiments, interviews, focus groups, and secondary data analysis allowed for a robust examination of the topic and the identification of key patterns and factors influencing media effects on public opinion.

RESULTS

The survey results regarding the perceived influence of media on public opinion were recorded. The responses were categorized into agree, neutral, and disagree, and the corresponding percentages are provided for each question. For the first question, "Media plays a significant role in shaping my opinions," a majority of respondents (64%) agreed that media has a significant role in shaping their opinions. Only 18% of respondents were neutral, and the remaining 18% disagreed ($p < 0.05$). Regarding the second question, "I am aware of media biases and

framing techniques," 42% of respondents agreed that they are aware of media biases and framing techniques. A considerable proportion (36%) were neutral on the topic, while 22% disagreed ($p < 0.05$). In response to the question "Media coverage has influenced my political beliefs," 52% of respondents agreed that their political beliefs have been influenced by media coverage ($p < 0.05$). Regarding the final question, "Media coverage affects my perception of social issues," the majority of respondents (70%) agreed that media coverage influences their perception of social issues. A small proportion (12%) were neutral, while 18% disagreed ($p < 0.05$). Overall, the survey results suggested that a substantial number of respondents perceived media to have a significant influence on their opinions, political beliefs, and perception of social issues (Table 1).

The key themes and patterns were identified through thematic analysis in the qualitative data collected from participants. The first theme, "Media Consumption Habits," focuses on patterns of media usage and engagement. The majority of participants (74%) mentioned relying heavily on social media for news updates. Other participants mentioned preferences for print newspapers for in-depth analysis (17%) and following multiple news outlets for different perspectives (9%) ($p < 0.05$). The second theme, "Impact on Opinions," explores participants' perceptions of how media influences their personal opinions. Participants mentioned that media coverage on climate change has made them more concerned about the environment (41%). Other participants noted that news articles about immigration have shaped their views on the topic (25%), and they believe that media bias affects how people understand political issues (34%) ($p < 0.05$). The third theme, "Understanding of Framing," relates to participants' awareness and interpretation of media framing. Participants mentioned being able to recognize when media outlets use emotional language to sway opinions (33%). They also highlighted that media framing can shape public perception of social issues (9%) and that media often frames stories based on their own biases (58%) ($p < 0.05$). The final theme, "Bias Perception," focuses on participants' perception of media bias. A large majority of participants (80%) mentioned believing that certain news channels have a political bias. They also indicated that media bias influences how information is presented to the public (15%) and that they try to cross-reference news from different sources to avoid bias (5%) ($p < 0.05$). Overall, the thematic

analysis revealed several key themes related to media consumption habits, the impact of media on opinions, understanding of framing, and bias perception (Table 2).

The results of an experiment examining the relationship between media exposure and attitude change were also noted during the study. The table included three experimental conditions: the control group, low media exposure, and high media exposure. The mean scores of participants' pre-test attitudes, post-test attitudes, and the change in attitudes are provided. In the control group, participants' pre-test attitudes had a mean score of 4.2. After the experiment, their post-test attitudes increased slightly to a mean score of 4.3, resulting in a minimal change in attitudes of 0.1. This suggested that without exposure to media content, participants' attitudes remained relatively stable. In the low media exposure condition, participants' pre-test attitudes had a

slightly higher mean score of 4.5. After the experiment, their post-test attitudes increased further to a mean score of 4.7. Consequently, the change in attitudes was 0.2, indicating a slight positive shift in attitudes among participants with low media exposure. In contrast, participants in the high media exposure condition had pre-test attitudes with a mean score of 4.3. Following the experiment, their post-test attitudes significantly increased to a mean score of 3.5, resulting in a substantial change in attitudes of -0.8. This indicates a notable positive shift in attitudes among participants with high media exposure. The results suggested that exposure to media content had a greater impact on attitude change compared to the control group. Participants who had higher levels of media exposure experienced more significant negative shifts in their attitudes compared to those with lower exposure or no exposure to media (Table 3).

Table 1: Survey Results - Media Influence on Public Opinion

Question	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	p-value
Media plays a significant role in shaping my opinions	64	18	18	0.00001*
I am aware of media biases and framing techniques	42	36	22	0.00001*
Media coverage has influenced my political beliefs	52	24	24	0.00001*
Media coverage affects my perception of social issues	70	12	18	0.00001*

*indicated that the value is significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Key Themes and Patterns Identified through Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description	Examples	No. of participants (%)	p-value
Media Consumption Habits	Patterns of media usage and engagement	"I rely heavily on social media for news updates."	74	0.00001*
		"I prefer to read print newspapers for in-depth analysis."	17	
		"I follow multiple news outlets to get different perspectives."	09	
Impact on Opinions	Perceived influence of media on personal opinions	"Media coverage on climate change has made me more concerned about the environment."	41	0.00001*
		"News articles about immigration shaped my views on the topic."	25	
		"I feel media bias affects how people understand political issues."	34	
Understanding of Framing	Awareness and interpretation of media framing	"I can recognize when media outlets use emotional language to sway opinions."	33	0.00001*
		"Media framing can shape public perception of social issues."	09	
		"I think media often frames stories based on their own biases."	58	
Bias Perception	Perception of media bias	"I believe certain news channels have a political bias."	80	0.00001*
		"Media bias influences how information is presented to the public."	15	

		"I try to cross-reference news from different sources to avoid bias."	5	
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*indicated that the value is significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3: Media Exposure and Attitude Change

Experimental Condition	Pre-Test Attitudes (Mean)	Post-Test Attitudes (Mean)	Change in Attitudes (Mean)
Control Group	4.2	4.3	0.1
Low Media Exposure	4.5	4.7	0.2
High Media Exposure	4.3	3.5	-0.8

DISCUSSION

The results of the study provided valuable insights into the dynamics of media effects on public opinion formation. It focused on the key findings and their implications, while considering the limitations and future directions for research.

The survey results indicate that a significant proportion of respondents perceive media to have a significant role in shaping their opinions, influencing their political beliefs, and affecting their perception of social issues. These findings align with previous research highlighting the influence of media on public opinion. The statistically significant p-values suggest that these associations are not likely due to chance, providing evidence for the influence of media on public opinion formation¹².

The thematic analysis identified several recurring themes related to media consumption habits, the impact of media on opinions, understanding of framing, and bias perception. The prevalence of these themes further supports the notion that media plays a central role in shaping individuals' opinions and perceptions. The findings emphasize the importance of media literacy and critical thinking skills in navigating media messages and recognizing biases and framing techniques¹³⁻¹⁴.

The experimental study revealed that media exposure had a significant impact on attitude change. Participants with higher levels of media exposure demonstrated more substantial shifts in their attitudes compared to those with low exposure or no exposure. These findings align with the media effects literature, which suggests that repeated exposure to media content can influence individuals' attitudes and beliefs¹⁵.

The study has several implications for understanding the role of media in public opinion formation. Firstly, it highlights the need for media literacy education to enhance individuals' critical thinking skills and their ability to discern biases and framing techniques. Secondly, it emphasizes the

responsibility of media outlets in providing accurate and unbiased information to promote a well-informed citizenry. Thirdly, the findings suggest that media exposure can contribute to attitude change, indicating the potential for media to influence public opinion on various social and political issues¹⁶.

However, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the research focused on a specific sample and may not fully represent the diversity of public opinion. Future studies could include larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported measures, which are subject to social desirability bias and memory recall biases.

The study sheds light on the power of media in shaping public opinion formation. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the topic, providing insights into individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with media influence. The findings contribute to the existing literature on media effects and highlight the importance of media literacy and responsible media practices. Further research in this field can continue to deepen our understanding of media dynamics and their impact on public opinion formation.

CONCLUSION

This research has shed light on the complex dynamics of media effects on public opinion formation. The survey results indicated a widespread perception among respondents that media plays a significant role in shaping their opinions and influencing their political beliefs and perception of social issues. The thematic analysis of qualitative data further highlighted the importance of media consumption habits, the impact of media on personal opinions, understanding of framing techniques, and perception of bias. These findings underscore the power of media in shaping public opinion and emphasize the need for media literacy and critical consumption of information. Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of how media influences

public opinion formation and provides valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and the general public in navigating the increasingly complex media landscape.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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