Mass Media Effects Essay, Research Paper

Mass Media Effects

Have you ever given any serious thought to the mass media? How it influences your life and the lives of those around? Or have you ever wondered how the media has the power to some of the things that it does? Many people do not give these questions any thought or much less even care. The field of Mass Media is one of large speculation. Full of scholars who have strongly opposing views of the effectiveness the mass media has.Technically mass media refers to the instruments by which mass communication is achieved (mass communication being the transfer of messages, information, texts, and the like from a sender of some kind, often a person in some large media organization, to a mass audience). These instruments may be classified as print (newspapers, books, magazines, billboards, newsletters), electronic (radio, television, computers, CD-ROM, Internet), and photographic (photographs, film, video)It is the media that decides what is conveyed in the form of news to the people. This gives them great power over our lives and the decisions we make. Since there are so many different events going on in the world, the media deciphers what it thinks will interest its consumers. The media tends to do this with a bias though. Individuals and private institutions primarily own mass media in America, not the government. Which includes large corporations, who are shoving their way into the media field more and more. In a study done by Ben Bagdikian, it is shown that fifty corporations owned half or more of the mass media outlets, and the number of owners continues to shrink.1) This study was reported in 1985, so obviously these numbers have changed a great deal, especially with all the great merges of companies over last few years. Today there is over 4,000 magazines, 1,500 daily newspapers (not including weekly publishings), the availability of close to 500 television channels, and the ever-expanding cyberworld. These numbers of media outlets allow great leeway for companies to expand into the media fields with ease.Corporations become involved in the media for numerous and selfish reasons. Once a corporation owns a media outlet, they have power over what news is transmitted through it. Major corporate leaders have the ability to promote their own products or actions. This also plays true to their own political interests. The ownership of the media gives them a form of control over the politicians. This ownership also allows them to sell airtime to which ever they choose. Even though there are laws meant to keep the use of media fair and in the public’s best interest, one must wonder if these lenient laws are being followed to the fullest degree. The handful of media owners all share similar interests and agendas. I find it hard to believe that these few business tycoons are more interested in what is best for the public over what is on their own personal agenda.How the media effects one can depend on their political standings. For instance a popular democrat may criticize the media for being to flashy and concentrating more on entertaining viewers rather than informing them. An elite democrat may worry that the media tears down morals and defies the established authority of the elite’s.No matter how one sees the media, Americans still rely on the media for information. This has not always been the case. Where politics are concerned, before radio and television were popular, Americans depended on such things as their church, families, political parties, and on actual campaigning for political information and directioning. Anymore political campaigns rely largely on the media for gaining familiarity, confidence, and the liking of the voters. Which indefinitely allows the people to be deceived. Once a candidate’s media consultant has put together their idea of what will sell the political candidate, more often than not are we seeing a totally different image of the person than we would have in a face to face meeting with the candidate. The media has pushed its way into our lives and is now something we all undoubtedly depend on in some way or another. The expansion of the network CNN, since its addition to media row in 1980, proves that news sells. At any given time of the day you can find some sort of a news program on the television, whether it be a show with the high standing of 60 Minutes, or the controversial likes of Politically Incorrect with Bill Mahr. Since networks are in such heated competition with one another, they are constantly adding and pulling shows to gain ratings and the attention of audiences. This creates large confusion amongst viewers because every show starts to look the same. Networks want to keep the viewers attention; therefore they will cut and paste news so severely just to emphasize catch phrases and actions of political leaders (as well as other figures in the public eye). A grand example of this would be the way that the media has handled what has widely become known as Lewinsky-Gate . During President Clinton’s speech in which he denied sexual relations with “that woman, Miss Lewinsky”, the news shows continuously repeated the statement above with the view of him shaking his finger at the nation.How does the media have the capability to do this? How have they gained such an information monopoly? After the Vietnam War when news started becoming the more in your face type broadcasting, people became rather interested, and some disgusted at the same time, in what the media in general was saying. The media started to really root around for information. They had access to events and to people in high places. The media has become able to stick its nose in places that the common people are not able to get to. There are many different forms of mass media and the mass communication of the media. I have researched four, which is not to say they are the best or the most important, just four of the main systems.The first system was found when the Soviet Union was controlled by communism and in other communist countries. It may still be found, to a degree, in the People’s Republic of China. The Communist Party performed control and operation of the media. They used the media to spread the Communist ideals and principles, to convince the people of the efficiency of their government.This makes me skeptical on the effectiveness of this system of media control, considering how the people of the majority of the Communist countries have kicked out the Communist leaders.The second system, the Libertarian System, allows for what can be called a free-media, which allows private corporations to operate networks under various agencies of the government’s supervision. In many Western European countries and in the United States this is found where the government run networks does not have a monopoly.The third system is also found in areas with “free” media such as America. But this system focuses on the social responsibility of those who own and control the media. There is a continual battle in the United States between the corporations that would like to be free to maximize their profits (essentially at the cost of the people), and the people who fear that the media is not being used in the best interest of the voting capable population. The authoritarian system, our last group, is nothing more than an extreme form of the media control that was found in the former Soviet Union. North Korea is a prime example of a country in which this form is exercised. The expansion of technology has made this system a difficult one. Such as in China where it is easy to pickup shows from outside of their area that is not controlled by the government. Some scholars believe that this was a large factor in the reunification of Germany, since East Germans were able to see West German television shows which exposed them to a consumer culture that they were longing for. Although America does not have such strong media control as the authoritarian system, we are still being controlled to the extent that the people who own our airwaves and our newspapers all have hidden agendas when it comes to what they place before us. The media still hides things that might prove damaging to their investors or their own corporation itself, but is still news that we should be informed of. Chaim Eyal supports the notion of strong media effects on voters in this noting:The limited effect notions are conceptualizations of the past. Very few, if any,theoreticians cling to those ideas. In the first place, the notion of null, or limited,effects originated from a very narrow line of research-the impact of political campaigns, studies in the late 1940s and the early 1950s. Not much later it was recognized effects are not only in the realm of behavior but also in the area of cognition: awareness, knowledge, opinions, etc. With this recognition, which paralleled the development of the concept of attitudes by social psychologists, came the recognition that the mass media do have an impact–indeed different types of impact–in specific areas of people’s thoughts, information processing, and life in general. So the next time you read your paper, watch the nightly news, or even see a commercial on your television, maybe you’ll stop and think of the effect that form of information was intended to have on you.

Resources: The U.s. Media: Supermarket or Assembly line? Bagdikian,B(1985) Journal of Communication 35(3). Four Theories of The Press Fred Siebert, Thoedore Peterson, Wilbur Schramm. Essentials of Mass Communications Theory Arthur Asa Berger- this book is where the Eyal comments came from.