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## THE ROLE OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION IN SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS CRIME

### INTRODUCTION

In a representative democracy, the role of the press is twofold: it both informs citizens and sets up a feedback loop between the government and voters.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary society, the term ‘media’ includes *print media*,<sup>2</sup> *broadcast media*,<sup>3</sup> *internet media*,<sup>4</sup> *new media*.<sup>5</sup> Broadcast media or the Press is considered the fourth pillar of democracy. It acts as a bridge between the government, the judiciary and the citizens.

In modern media coverage, social media, mainstream news outlets, and television entertainment play a pivotal role in shaping public perception of crime.<sup>6</sup> The freedom guaranteed to Media and the Press under Article 19(1)(a)<sup>7</sup> is a concept that includes expression and communication through various means. Freedom of Press is a fundamental right in order that the fourth pillar can work efficiently and disseminate thoughts, information, opinions, etc. without restrictions or censorship.

The media plays an indispensable role in shaping public opinion towards the crime. It is through media representation that people come to know about the crimes and the criminals. However, most of the time, the media in order to gain TRP and people's attention broadcasts made-up news which is inaccurate, biased and sensationalised.

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<sup>1</sup> Danny Crichton, et.al, *journalism in the digital age*, STANFORD UNIVERSITY (april 2, 2024, 5:43 pm), [https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index7f0d.html?page\\_id=16](https://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/cs181/projects/2010-11/Journalism/index7f0d.html?page_id=16)

<sup>2</sup> This includes newspapers, magazines, books, encyclopedias, and brochures.

<sup>3</sup> This includes radio and television.

<sup>4</sup> This includes social media and podcasts. Internet media is a type of digital media that transmits data from one source to another.

<sup>5</sup> This is a form of mass communication, such as the internet. New media is a two-way communication

platform, unlike traditional media.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Myers, *the influence of media on public perception of crime*, NORTHWEST CAREER COLLEGE (april 4, 2024, 4:47 pm),

<https://www.northwestcareercollege.edu/blog/the-influence-of-media-on-public-perception-of-crime/#:~:text=In%20modern%20media%20coverage%2C%20social,and%20at%20a%20national%20level.>

<sup>7</sup> INDIAN CONST. Art 19, cl. 1, sub cl.(a).

## HOW MEDIA SHAPES PUBLIC OPINION?

We live in an age saturated by media and it plays a crucial role in our everyday life.<sup>8</sup> Also, this age has seen a great surge in criminal activities as well as concern regarding the same.<sup>9</sup> The media shapes public opinion by various means:-

### SELECTIVE REPORTING:

Nowadays, the press broadcasts only that news which is in favour of the government or those headlines which have no impact on anyone's life. Gone were the days when the media acted like the fourth pillar of democracy. Now it is no less than a puppet at the hands of governments around the world. Selective reporting is also known as cherry-picking. For example, a news outlet may report extensively on crimes committed by immigrants while downplaying or ignoring the fact that immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than native-born citizens.<sup>10</sup> This type of selective reporting can create a distorted view of reality and can contribute to the spread of misinformation.<sup>11</sup> In India, no mainstream media is currently reporting on Sonam Wangchuk's determination to make Ladakh a State and to provide necessary safeguards to protect the identity, land, and resources of the people of Ladakh.

### SENSATIONALISM AND FEARMONGERING:

Sensationalism and fearmongering are the core of biased media. Sensationalism refers to the idea of presenting a piece of news in such a manner that it sparks controversy regarding the same and misleads the public from the objective of the news. A particular kind of sensationalism known as "fearmongering" entails purposefully inciting or amplifying feelings of fear, worry, or menace in order to sway public opinion or behaviour. For example, inter-religious and inter-race disputes are portrayed in a way that adds fuel to the fire.

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<sup>8</sup> Srabnee Ghosh and Trisha Mukherjee, *narcotisation by media: the public perspective of crime*, manupatra, <https://www.manupatra.com/roundup/375/Articles/Narcotisation%20by%20Media.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Faster capital, <https://fastercapital.com/keyword/selective-reporting.html#:~:text=For%20example%2C%20a%20news%20outlet%20may%20report.can%20contribute%20to%20the%20spread%20of%20misinformation.> (april 4, 2024, 8:33 pm)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

### **THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA:**

The way the media presents crime, criminals, victims, and law enforcement agencies has a significant impact on the way we understand and respond to crime in society.<sup>12</sup> Through the creation and distribution of content, social media platforms have significantly changed how the public takes account of crime and how people perceive it. This has allowed regular people to be heard more loudly through citizen journalism, viral videos, and user-generated content. Sidestepping the usual news media gatekeepers, people may rapidly and frequently post firsthand experiences and personal narratives of criminal situations using sites like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Videos that go viral showing criminal activity can start a lot of conversations and change people's perceptions of crime and justice. But social media's decentralised structure can also encourage the spread of false information and sensationalism, making it harder for the general public to tell fact from fiction. Additionally, a lot of crime coverage over every other platform and site made people aware of the happenings around the world however it also made, not everyone, but a large number of people emotionless and they don't want to pay any heed towards any of the happenings.

### **ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES:**

Alternative media sources and counter-narratives play a vital role in challenging mainstream media representations of crime. These alternative outlets, which encompass news websites, podcasts, and social media accounts, provide platforms for voices often marginalized or overlooked by mainstream media. By offering alternative viewpoints, they shed light on systemic injustices and disparities in law enforcement practices. Moreover, alternative media sources often prioritize investigative reporting and in-depth analysis, uncovering stories that may be ignored or underreported by larger media organizations.

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<sup>12</sup> Francisco Falkembach dos Santos, *Media Criminology – The role of the media and its influence on contemporary society*, RESEARCHGATE (april 6, 2024, 3:46 pm), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378114287\\_Media\\_Criminology\\_-\\_The\\_role\\_of\\_the\\_media\\_and\\_its\\_influence\\_on\\_contemporary\\_society](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378114287_Media_Criminology_-_The_role_of_the_media_and_its_influence_on_contemporary_society)

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the media, encompassing traditional outlets such as newspapers and broadcast networks as well as newer platforms like social media, holds a significant influence over public perception of crime. However, the role of the media in shaping public opinion is not without its complexities and challenges. While the media serves as a vital conduit for information in democratic societies, it is also susceptible to bias, sensationalism, and manipulation.

Selective reporting, sensationalism, and fearmongering are prevalent issues that contribute to the distortion of reality and the spread of misinformation. The pursuit of ratings often compromises the integrity of media coverage, leading to skewed representations of crime and criminals.

Nevertheless, alternative media sources and counter-narratives provide a vital corrective to mainstream representations of crime, offering platforms for marginalized voices and shedding light on systemic injustices. By prioritizing investigative reporting and in-depth analysis, these outlets contribute to a more nuanced understanding of crime and criminal justice issues.

In the future, it will be crucial for media users to assess the information critically and look for other viewpoints from various sources. Media organisations also have a responsibility to report with honesty, fairness, and impartiality in order to fulfil their function as pillars of democracy.

The media can be a force for good in society, but only if it makes a deliberate effort to protect journalistic ethics and support a range of viewpoints.

