

The media's role in society

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Introduction

The media plays a very significant role in our society today.

The media is all around us. From the shows we watch on TV, the music we listen to on the radio, to the books, magazines, and newspapers we read each day.

Without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but from governments, law-makers, and neighbouring towns and cities.

The flow of info/intro of technology

The flow of information is important for the development of communities and the media facilitates this. Without a wide array of information, people's opinions and views would be limited and their impressions and conclusions of the world around them stunted.

Historically, the most common form of the distribution of information was word of mouth, with the news often beginning with the words, "Did you know...".

Indeed, word of mouth is still one of the most powerful tools in the sharing of information today, particularly in tourism, but technology has allowed for this exchange to take place in an instant, forging the way for bigger and better media houses with the instant access to information with the instant gratification factor.

Interpreters/surveillance guys

Media workers are in essence interpreters of information. All of us at some point have been to the library to do research for a paper or report, sifting through piles and piles of information to support a thesis in 1,000 words or more, or to simply explain an event, situation, or person.

Journalists in the media do much the same. They don't just provide pages of facts and statistics that the average person might not understand. Instead, they weed out the important issues and points, putting them in a context that the average reader and listener can make sense of in order to form their own opinions.

How terrible would it be if we all had to sift through piles of documentation and statistics, or sit through press conferences, just to find out that the price of rice in China has risen?

Journalists provide the six basic areas of information: Who, what, where, why, and how. Most of the time, that's all we need to know.

In this way, the media keeps us focussed on the issues that matter in a surveillance-type way.

Some aspects of media surveillance include the latest stock report, sports scores, entertainment news, progress and results of an election, and so forth.

Watchdogs

While the media has historically been viewed as being overly aggressive and insatiable in their plight for the latest and hottest news, their watchdog-type function is essential in a democratic society where people MUST know what their governments are doing.

The media has the capacity to hold governments accountable, forcing them to explain their actions and decisions, all of which affect the people they represent.

In a democratic society, people should know all their options if they are to govern themselves, and the media is a vehicle for the dissemination of such information.

The assumption in some societies is that the press speaks for the people, thus the Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press Acts in the United States and in many other countries. The reason for Freedom of the Press is to ensure that democracy is able to function, so it is important to understand that such legislation does not only protect the functions of the press.

With press freedom we then know what the differing views in society are, opening the floor to debate, and discussion, all of which are healthy functions of a democratic society. The Soviet Union and East Germany both crumbled for this same reason – the people would not be dictated to any longer.

Conclusion

Finally, one of the most powerful strengths the media has in any society is the ability to effect change, both on a social and governmental level.

While my focus in this presentation has been on the role of media in society, it is also important to acknowledge the **responsibility** of the media in society.

As journalists we all have the responsibility to report the unbiased, accurate information as it is received from reliable sources. It is our obligation to obtain all sides of a story, and to report on both the good and bad stuff.

However, “responsible journalism” also requires a balance of the good and bad stuff in newspapers and in broadcast reports. The lack of such balance, particularly in Caribbean news publications, is what necessitated the formation of our organisation, Caribbean Media Organisation for Sustainable Tourism (CMOST).

CMOST members feel that without reporters and editors seeing the importance of balanced news reporting, and paying closer attention and more care to the placement of the bad stuff in publications, our region’s tourism product will continue to be hindered.

As I said earlier, technology has allowed for that instant gratification for the sharing of information, and we cannot ignore the fact that news is still being spread with the “Did you hear...” mouth to ear system.

CMOST encourages journalists and media houses to assist in the plight to sustain tourism in the region, by being more responsible, and seeking the good, as well as the bad stuff.

