



Impact Of Mass Communication On Social Policy Making And Practice

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Abstract

This article uses the Internet as a case study to examine how the media affects the making of public policy. In terms of its impact on public policy, the media serves as an intermediate and a watchdog, and it does so with remarkable unity. The mainstream media's influence on public policy has been greatly expanded with the advent of the anonymous, open, free, and initiative-filled internet in today's society. It is important to remember, however, that our flawed legal system and the people's apathy towards politics may have a negative impact on the media's ability to undermine governmental power and even influence the independence and accuracy with which public policy is established.

Keywords: The mass media, Internet, Public policy, Influence.

Introduction

As internet technology has advanced, the web has become a place where we may share our beliefs and apply them to our daily lives. The proliferation of the internet has ushered in novel forms of communication, altered the way the superstructure functions, and even altered the way people relate to one another on a spiritual level. When compared to conventional media, the internet's "Gatekeeper" limitation means that anybody with access to the internet may publish anything, but with limited discursive power.

As a result, the internet and other forms of mass media have encouraged us to participate actively in politics. This study has explored how the influence of

contemporary mass media on public policy is manifested via the lens of the internet.

The characteristics of public policy: Simply said, public policy is the policy that is intended to apply to the general population. It's not based on anyone's particular personality, but on the general desire and enthusiasm of the populace. However, since public policy is formed by a small number of government employees who, by definition, have been given the authority to make such decisions on behalf of the government. As a result, contemporary democratic constitutions often include provisions emphasising public service and accountability to the people. They are the foundation upon which all public policies are built.

For this reason, public policy may fail to get the attention it deserves since certain political elites will make decisions based on their own personal beliefs and ideals. For public delegates to be involved in policymaking and for lines of communication to remain open, it is necessary to build and strengthen mechanisms for expressing opinions, for participating in policymaking, and for monitoring public opinion.

The role of mass media in public policy : The media have the ability to delete, change, alter, and combine information, and as the information age progresses, we rely more and more on this information. As a result, print media like books, periodicals, television, and film, as well as digital media like the Internet, are exerting increasing influence on government policy. It is the public policy field with the greatest degree of leeway.

To begin, the media serve as an intermediary. The mass media rapidly reflect societal concerns and provide policymakers with more reference material through transmitting and expressing viewpoints between the public or the government, between interest group especially government, and between interest groups. The media, on the other hand, keep the public abreast of the development of policies and present the needs of different social interest groups to the government in an effort to have the policy's consequences be more to everyone's liking. Second, the persuasive power of the media is such that it may galvanise public interest and aid in government decision-making. Thirdly, the media serve as the watchdog of government action.

The media will report on the outcomes of the policy, such as whether or not it satisfies public demand and protects the public interest. From what has been said above, it is clear that the mass media, with its powerful appealing and supervising capacity, works as a mediator for numerous policy themes and a catalyst for policy-making.

Influence of mass media on public policy: Issues like peasant labourers and health care reform, for which democratic public opinion has been more influential since the late 1990s, are only two examples. When the public learned about and debated these concerns, they evolved into actual policies. The focal incident exemplifies the influence of the media on public policy, showing how public outcry may prompt swift action from policymakers. The public pressure will be so great that decision-makers will be forced to make changes to the policies, and the concentration of concern focused will assist to shatter the previous power balance. The introduction of the network media, which is public, open, interactive, varied, and instant, changed the logic of public agenda-setting.

In contrast to the days of conventional media, when the government had no trouble controlling the media and shaping the agenda, modern netizens have the power to elevate the topics they care about to the forefront of public discourse. Media outlets facilitate the normalisation of hostilities in addition to their role in uncovering public affairs. By increasing audience size and publicising formerly private issues, media companies influence government policymaking. They also serve as a link between the public and the government policy-making mechanism, allowing citizens to have a voice in policy decisions. As a result of the media's efforts, government policy is influenced by the will of the people rather than the whims of special interest groups. The media-public dialogue helps generate public outcry, which in turn gets the attention of the authorities.

Media as a Player in Their Own Right: The media's impact on representation and, perhaps, policymaking varies since the media itself are not impartial. The case for looking at the media as an institution has been made for quite some time (Cook 1998, Schudson 2002, Sparrow 2006). The media are a system with

its own set of actors, dynamics, and laws. The content and structure of reporting might change depending on these factors.

Commercially driven media have strict guidelines that dictate what may and cannot be considered news. What counts as news is determined by the dominant news values of outlets and the industry as a whole (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). When considering the impact of the media, it's important to go beyond individual journalists and consider the whole media system, which includes the market, potential ideological bias in reporting, the structure of ownership, and the regulatory backdrop (Hardy, 2010). Certain problems or forms of coverage of policy making and certain prior frameworks are more likely to be favoured by the particular mix of norms in a given system or at a certain outlet (Lee et al., 2008). These rules and regulations amount to a sort of censorship since they selectively prioritise certain problems while ignoring others. Also, since different players have different degrees of access to the media, a hierarchy is established as a result of this gatekeeping (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). As may be expected, those in positions of authority tend to have easier access to the media (Bennett, 1996).

In this setting, ownership is crucial. There is a considerable correlation between ownership structure and the degree to which news outlets prioritise public service (Benson et al. 2018, Picard & Van Weezel 2008). The entertainment and informational content produced by commercial media outlets is constantly evolving to meet the needs of an increasingly fickle audience. The media's focus on sensationalism and other forms of entertainment sometimes leads to a shallower examination of important policy problems and content (Dunaway & Lawrence 2015; Van der Meer et al. 2019; and others).

Market pressure and commercial rationale are less likely to dominate public media and media owned or controlled by civic society. According to the research of Curran et al. (2009), this sort of media ownership increases citizens' familiarity with government and policy issues. The role of technology is equally significant. Television, newspapers, and online publications, among others, may provide more or less in-depth coverage of some topics than others.

Commercial or economic limitations that operate in tandem with one another may bolster this distinction.

In conclusion, the proliferation of commercial media and the shifting tastes of media consumers may ultimately result in a shift towards a greater emphasis on conflict and strategic coverage of failure. Expect it will be harder to get a fair account on policy decisions being made. There is a risk that policy coverage may become more partial and skewed as a result of privatisation and the turn towards a more commercial rationale by many publicly funded media organisations. However, Brants and van Praag (2017) point out that in today's more hybrid settings, several logics operate independently.

Media sceptics often presume a far bigger bias than the media really displays. Among the first to recognise the media's influence, Lippmann (1997, p. 195) argued that it must be used for the benefit of "a specialised elite whose personal interests go beyond the neighbourhood." This approach holds that "intelligent manipulation of the public mind via propaganda" (Robinson 2019, p. 2) has always been a vital responsibility for ruling elites. Herman & Chomsky (2010) have criticised the closeness of media to the political and economic spheres, beginning with a criticism of the Creel Committee in which Lippmann participated. Many academics, even those who disagree with Herman and Chomsky's findings (see the section labelled Governments and Elite Influence on Media), believe that the media place too much weight on official sources when reporting on politics and policymaking. So, even in democracies, there might be a systemic advantage for narrow interests.

Communicative Advantage of Internet: A necessary prerequisite for the rapid expansion of the internet is the evolution of computer technology, since computers are the primary carrier of network media. The prefix "com" is shared by the terms "computer" and "communication." "communicate" means "to take part in" in Middle English. College students in the United States study mass communication rather than journalism. In this context, "communication" is inextricably linked to "participate in" and "trade" with others. The proliferation of websites frequented by millions of internet users has helped establish the web as a true mass media. Since the network can disseminate

data more quickly, cheaply, visually, and efficiently than any other media, it is equipped with the ability to express, participate in, and oversee.

When it comes to politics, the average citizen has historically been limited by formal channels of engagement. The National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference are the primary venues for citizens to have input on government decisions in China. Letters to and visits from government officials, public hearings, and similar activities fall under "additional measures." The network media, with its anonymity, openness, and freedom, is, nevertheless, more favourable for citizen engagement in politics due to the danger of identity exposing.

Second, there is a low barrier to entry into the network. Any citizen with even rudimentary computer abilities may use a network terminal to voice their opinion on current events, express their dissatisfaction with the government, provide constructive criticism, and propose solutions.

Finally, the consultative platform allows for active downloading and sharing of information by netizens. With this newfound ability to access information, internet users are better able to exercise their right to know. Internet users' knowledge and feedback improves government transparency and fairness and has a far-reaching impact on policymaking at all stages of the process. The network, for instance, provided a platform for public discourse on controversial issues like the "Guo Meimei incident," acting as both a megaphone and a trigger. The internet's features have resulted in the unprecedented speech right of ordinary netizens and the end of the black box operation of public rights. For instance, the public was unaware that mining accidents in the 1980s were far more severe than those of today. Since the mid-1990s, mining incidents have gained widespread attention because to in-depth coverage in the media, especially on the internet.

Rythmic Timing and the Policy Cycle: The issue of when media impact on policymaking is most probable is a basic one. Once again, the focus of policy studies and political communication are distinct. Scholars of communication have traditionally given greater attention to the dynamic nature of political struggle, events, and communication than public policy researchers have. In

the context of a media agenda that is already full, exerting influence on a specific subject becomes more or less challenging.

While the policy cycle's heuristic value has been called into question, it continues to serve as a useful framework for thinking about the many steps involved in formulating policy (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). According to common sense and the vast literature on agenda formation (McCombs 2004, Cobb & Elder 1971), media coverage is more influential at the outset. It's true that many groups work to raise support for or opposition to certain agenda topics. According to research by Jones et al. (2009), "friction" increases when one attempts to influence policymaking at a lower level of the decision making process. Therefore, even if media attention rises, it should decrease from one stage of the policy making process to the next (Tresch et al., 2013).

Furthermore, contextual factors and the particular dynamics of the political timeline codetermine many facets of the media-policy nexus. For example, during an election, everyone pays extra close attention. Voters are more engaged in active information seeking; but, in the setting of tremendous mobilisation of all stakeholders, this may only lead to more contradicting information (Iyengar & Simon, 2000). In addition, party organisations, incumbents, and opponents devote substantial resources to shaping the media agenda, and the media are likely to be inundated with material (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Media impact on government decisions may thus be mitigated by the election cycle.

Last but not least, there is only so much room on the media agenda. When the news cycle is busy, it's difficult to fit additional topics into an already full schedule. Agenda planning is a zero-sum game (Zhu 1992), meaning that prioritising one problem reduces the time and resources available to focus on another. In contrast, a slower agenda allows for better coverage, which may in turn impact the media's reaction to the topic at hand. Media coverage of natural catastrophes in the United States, for example, is demonstrated to be poorer if they occur at the same time as other events, such as international sports championships, according to research by Eisensee & Strömberg (2007). Consequently, it is crucial to comprehend the synergistic impacts of agenda variety and intensity in order to appreciate the likelihood of media influence

on policy discussions and policy decisions (Boydston et al., 2014, pp. 176-77). Other players, such as opposition parties, may be less likely to communicate concerns to the media when agendas are crowded "for fear of being drowned out by other news topics" (Nyhan 2015, p. 442). Similarly, "media storms," or "a sudden surge of attention to a specific topic" (Walgrave et al. 2017, p. 556; see also Boydston et al. 2014), may permanently disrupt attention patterns and thereby limit the likelihood that certain issues will be prioritised.

Governance, Policy Making and The Rise of Social Media: The media-policy nexus has been dissected in depth during the last two parts. This is a dynamic connection, and the direction of causation between the two parties may shift over time. The advent of new media formats and social networks has added another layer of complication. Instead of trying to provide a history of the media in the last 20 years, this part will focus on the policy consequences of the constant shifts in the media environment.

Numerous academic studies and news reports on the political effects of social media have been published in the wake of Brexit and Trump's victory. We may safely infer that a new, "hybrid," media system is emerging, with "old" and "new" media logics (Chadwick 2017), even if we take a cautious approach. This media structure is more varied and has already shifted traditional media power structures. The "hybridity empowers and also disempowers," as put out by Chadwick (2017, p. 286), results in a far more multicentric media environment. Since traditional news organisations have lost much of their historical gatekeeping role (Jungherr et al., 2020), they must make adjustments so that they can continue to serve their audiences and participate in the mediated political public sphere. For conventional channels, this decline in importance may be mitigated by the development of a "network media logic" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). The proliferation of alternative media and the popularity of new media forms, however, have led to a general fall in gatekeeping (though also Meraz&Papacharissi, 2013) (Noam, 2016).

In addition, the proliferation of social media has drastically reduced the price of communicating with prospective supporters. The iconic Arab Spring mobilisations in and around Cairo's Tahrir Square provide evidence that this shift aided in the organisation of social movements (Tufekci& Wilson, 2012).

In addition, via "connective mobilisation" (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; see also Chadwick 2017, ch. 10), it has drastically reduced coordination costs for social movements. There is both an opportunity and a challenge that the proliferation of social media poses to political parties. Gomez and Ramiro (2019) note that new parties, like the Spanish Podemos, often establish a single membership category that grants full participation privileges but requires no membership fee. However, the "weaker patterns of loyalty" that seem to accompany the reduced barriers to membership are concerning. (Margetts et al.

When those within the system start playing fast and loose with facts, and when audiences increasingly can choose what they want to hear, the barbarians have... effectively begun to operate inside the gates (Bennett 2017, p. 256), a more negative consequence of the rise of social media and the decline of gatekeeping. As a consequence, the dissemination of information becomes more decentralised and less reliant on censorship from higher-ups. As stated on pages 257-258 in Bennett (2017)

The new media have allowed previously minor political players access to the public sphere and the ability to affect the reality perceptions of their audiences. This is especially true for populist political players, who tend to come from the extreme right in mature industrial democracies (Engesser et al., 2017). The methods of audience segmentation and biased framing, however, have been increasingly adopted by more established politicians (Heiberger et al. Increasingly like populist politicians, they are focusing on very particular groups and promoting extremely biased images, which threatens societal cohesiveness by eroding common ground with other groups. Barberá et al. (2019) found that politicians are more influenced by social media trends. In addition, when mainstream media sources cover politicians who are active on social media, they may propagate the false information they publish (Waisbord, 2018).

There is a correlation between the diversification of audiences and the democratisation of truth. Many people expected the emergence of the internet to lead to more media freedom and democracy, challenging the authority of traditional elites and their control over the mediatized public sphere (Trippi,

2004). Today, this hopeful outlook is hotly debated. Although the echo chamber and cognitive bubble theses have been challenged (Barberá et al., 2015), Song et al. (2020) demonstrate that social media users often fall for the "news finds me" illusion. People who rely on "ambient news" (Song et al. 2020, p. 65), such as social media reposts, to be informed are really far less informed than those who actively seek out news sources. Evidence suggests that high-choice settings widen the information gulf by allowing some people to avoid the news while providing others with more opportunities to consume it (Aelst et al. 2017, Prior 2007, Shehata & Strömbeck 2018).

Effects of the Changes Affected by Media: What does this signify for how policies are formulated? My hypothesis is that the proliferation of social media both greatly amplifies certain current tendencies and presents a number of new issues for policymakers. An effective chain of response is necessary for media impact on policy, as seen above. Some members of the public may find it difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with policymaking and understand the major issues because of the widening knowledge gap. Furthermore, there is a shift occurring in the general coverage of politics and policy making as the gatekeeping roles of traditional media sources decrease. Confusion in the reporting and preference formation processes may be favoured by audience fragmentation and biased political discourse, which in turn may promote sentiments of "inefficacy, alienation, and cynicism" (Balmas, 2014). We still don't know enough about how social media might supplement the conventional media's less concentrated impact (Feezell, 2018).

For less visible communities, the current media climate presents a golden opportunity. There is little doubt that "connective action" (Bennett & Segerber, 2013) makes it easier to advocate on behalf of certain causes, including policy concerns. E-petitions are becoming a popular and effective method of online mobilisation (Wright, 2016). Authorities nowadays keep a constant eye on social media and often address concerns voiced there (see, for example, Bekkers et al., 2013). For example, the social effects of austerity and economic crises in the case of the Spanish Indignados have received increased attention from the public thanks to the more open media environment (Anduiza et al. 2014, Theocharis et al. 2015). Recent years have seen a rise in activism among

high school students across most of the developed world thanks to the Fridays for Future movement (Boulianne et al., 2020).

The rise of social media coincides with less centralised control over the distribution of news by governments and other political leaders. More players attempt to influence the media agenda as the cost of mobilisations decreases. While governments continue to play a significant role, they also face a rising number of competitors seeking to influence the media agenda. To rephrase, governments nowadays must contend with a shifting political agenda that they cannot control (Barberá et al. 2019, Gilardi et al. 2022). The impact this has on the news and policy agendas remains an open subject for further study. However, it might exacerbate problems for governments by shining a brighter light on their acts and policymaking and priming their shortcomings more effectively and systematically than ever before. On the other hand, "more dispersed but weaker public scrutiny" (Mancini 2013, p. 56) might be beneficial to governments. Last but not least, governments may be inclined to turn to more divisive or audience-fragmenting tactics, likely further reducing the impact of public discourse on policy development. This tendency is being aided by the election of populist parties to power in an increasing number of nations (Engesser et al., 2017).

The limitations of internet : While the network and other mass media have had significant impacts on public policy, they are not without their flaws. To begin, the media, and the internet in particular, are vulnerable to the sudden changes that occur in the market. The truth is that the market has hampered the development of China's media. The media sector is able to function by relying on advertising income to offset the cost of resources used in production. Thus, commercialism impacts the message as well. However, audience rating competition has resulted in more utilitarian advertising and programming, and it is becoming more difficult to evaluate the reliability and depth of news accounts. The Baidu search engine, for instance, has been shown to manipulate search results via sponsored placement.

To begin, the internet's unrefined legal infrastructure prevents it from serving as a fully functional media. As early as 1969, the internet was solely used for military purposes. It wasn't until the 1990s that the internet was used widely.

Since the creation of the World Wide Web, no one has predicted how the internet will evolve. There has been a breakdown in the stability and orderliness of the news networks of different press units due to the fact that the old norms of conventional journalism are unable to keep up with the growth of internet technology and the network medium.

Second, the public's political fervour and media diversity limit the internet's potential. People's desire to become involved in politics is considerably stoked by the internet because of its anonymity, accessibility, and freedom. However, widespread opposition to moderation undermines efforts to enhance society as a whole. For instance, the internet and public opinion helped spark the Chinese mainland's patriotic rallies directed towards Japan, which eventually devolved into mad nationalistic violence.

Third, the media influence and undermine the power of the government, causing the friction between the government and the media, which may lead to incorrect evaluation and selection of social topics within the social system, as well as unforeseen challenges for policymaking.

Finally, the media have an impact on the impartiality and accuracy of public policymaking. Generally speaking, the right to independent decision-making conflicts with the right of media engagement. While the fairness of decisions is essential to administrative legitimacy, the independence of decision-makers determines how closely they adhere to the law, and a stable environment is necessary for receiving feedback and evaluating past decisions. Media coverage, including interviews and news stories, may influence public opinion, but increased bias might stymie efforts to implement legislative changes. Finding a middle ground between administrative autonomy and media reporting is something that has yet to be fully explored in the information age.

The Perspectives of Integrating Political Science and Communication : It's difficult to assess the impact of the shifting media environment on the media-policy nexus. In light of the foregoing, I sketch out a few potential avenues for future study into the aftereffects of the evolving media ecosystem. The proliferation of new forms of digital communication has implications for how political conflict is framed and fought.

As this article and other research have shown, there are several ways of looking at the connection between public policy and the media in the disciplines of political communication, public policy, and political behaviour. However, there is little communication across these areas (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018, Wolfe et al. 2013), hence many promising avenues of inquiry remain uncharted. Better coordination across those several lines of inquiry is more important than ever now, because to the proliferation of social media.

Understanding the rising knowledge gap and its effects on policy-related mobilisations may be aided by analysing shifts in media coverage of policy formation. Some of the less politically engaged population may be less likely to take action because of a lack of information. Meanwhile, research into the structures of social movements generally reveals that mobilisation is easier and cheaper than ever before. Although several anecdotes attest to the impact of social media on large-scale demonstrations, we still know very little about the typical impact of this kind of organising on certain policies. It would be fascinating to find out whether particular concerns, like the environment or gender equality, benefit more from the new opportunities. Long-standing concerns, like wage negotiating, may not benefit as much from social media mobilisation since they are less likely to become viral.

Conclusion

What impact do continuous shifts have on the elite's ability to set the agenda in the media? In other words, if media outsiders' opportunities and tactics have been altered by the shifting media ecosystem, how have media insiders responded? It stands to reason that it will become more challenging for incumbent governments and political leaders to maintain control of the media flow if conflict is more readily socialised and the scope of conflict is more easily increased. However, government officials continue to have preferential media access, and it is reasonable to assume that governments and other political players will make significant investments in overcoming the challenge posed by social media. Authoritarian regimes' use of social media to influence public opinion and discourse has received some attention in recent years (Gunitsky 2015). Manipulation efforts are not exclusive to authoritarian regimes, although this is often the case. There is a need for further in-depth research on

the evolution of government policies, including whether or not governments are more interested in a wide range of issues and players, or if they are inclined to use social media to discredit the claims of other parties.

When may the media have the most impact on the decision-making process? This relatively old issue calls for further investigation and theoretical consideration. As discussed in the section under "Governing, Policy Making, and the Rise of Social Media," this area might benefit from more communication between media researchers and policy experts. While conflicts over attention and focus remain crucial, the basic meanings of these terms must be reexamined in light of the rapidly evolving media environment. Not only were these processes poorly understood to begin with, but the meteoric expansion of social media is raising even more perplexing concerns and mysteries.

Finally, future research will need to settle on a strategy for investigating the complex web of relationships that includes the media, politics, policymaking groups, publics, and other stakeholders. The increasing accessibility of all political utterances online, along with developments in text mining and machine learning, has opened up a wealth of new prospects for more nuanced and longitudinal analysis. But it's also crucial that researchers keep digging into specific cases to figure out how shifting media-policy connections are governed.

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