

2.1.8 The media

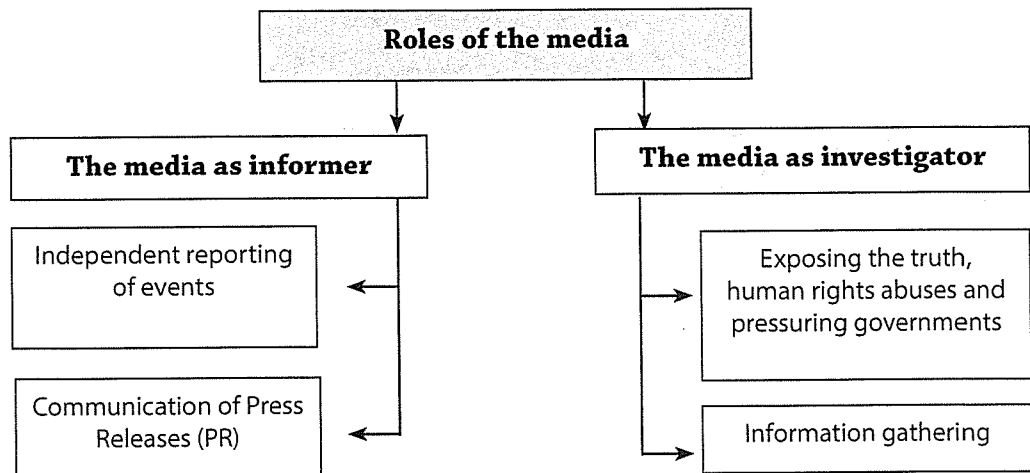


Figure 8 : A summary of the roles of the media in respect of world order

Introduction

The media is a reference to the methods by which information is delivered to the public. Often this delivery is termed the 'news'. The media is a very powerful channel for communication and can be persuasive and influential. It is thus used by governments, IGOs, NGOs and others to deliver messages to the public at large.

The media can both help and hinder the development of world order. In a constructive sense the media can assist with raising the awareness of world order issues. This was evident throughout the 'Arab Spring' in 2010–2012 and is evident in examples such as the media images of Tiananmen Square massacre (Beijing, 1989) and of widespread conflict in Darfur, (Sudan, 2004). The media can also enable the widespread dissemination of information on human rights abuses globally and thus place pressure on governments to uphold or negotiate world order agreements.

However, the media can also hinder world order by being seen as a threat to sovereignty and an invasion of State privacy. Thus, the media may be controlled by the State, censored by the State or refused permission to operate. In this way issues may go unseen and thus world order and human rights issues may go unnoticed.

A further complication is that there is also the possibility that the more powerful media outlets may have undue influence on world opinion. For example, US TV presents a very different view of world events than Al Jazeera, BBC and Australia's ABC and each is influential in their region.

The media can be broadly used in one of two capacities: to inform and to investigate.

The media as informer

A significant role of the media is to inform the public about what is happening in the local community, the nation and the world. Informing can arise from journalists attending events and writing about them or through being given Press Releases that are then used as the basis for a story or article.

The media as investigator

Separately, the media can be proactive in regards to investigating matters and raising them into public awareness. It can do this through gathering information about an issue and then exposing that issue to the public. This action almost inevitably brings greater attention to an issue and generates the disclosure of further issues.

Alternatively, reporters can thoroughly (and sometimes secretly) investigate a matter, such as a breach of human rights, and then bring that to the attention of an NGO or the public through widespread dissemination of information. Undercover reporting can achieve this aim, but so too can requests for information under legislation such as 'Freedom of Information (FOI)' laws.

World in Wonder 7 Freedom of the media or propaganda...?

Al Jazeera television appears to breach the Geneva Convention when it shows video footage sent to it by militants threatening to behead hostages that they have kidnapped from the roads of Iraq. Militant groups such as those led by Muslim Cleric Muktada El Sadr go further by posting graphic scenes of violence on the Internet.

Alternatively, in the Iraq war, the USA only allows 'embedded' journalists to cover the conflict. Embedded journalists are war correspondents who cover a conflict from the side of the forces with whom they are appointed. Independent journalists are concerned that there may be a pro-American bias on coverage – yet without being 'embedded' the media cannot get footage.

**Are these situations examples of
freedom of the press or propaganda...?**

World in Wonder 9 Wikileaks – a breach of sovereignty or acts of sedition...?

WikiLeaks is a multi-jurisdictional public service designed to protect whistleblowers, journalists and activists who have sensitive materials to communicate to the public. Since July 2007, we have worked across the globe to obtain, publish and defend such materials, and, also, to fight in the legal and political spheres for the broader principles on which our work is based: the integrity of our common historical record and the rights of all peoples to create new history. We believe that transparency in government activities leads to reduced corruption, better government and stronger democracies. All governments can benefit from increased scrutiny by the world community, as well as their own people. We believe this scrutiny requires information. Historically that information has been costly - in terms of human life and human rights. But with technological advances – the internet, and cryptography – the risks of conveying important information can be lowered. In its landmark ruling on the *Pentagon Papers*, the US Supreme Court ruled that “only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government.” We agree. We believe that it is not only the people of one country that keep their government honest, but also the people of other countries who are watching that government. That is why the time has come for an anonymous global avenue for disseminating documents the public should see.

Source: <http://wikileaks.org/>

Should all information be freely available...?

Should governments be allowed to have secrets

– even when such secrets involve allegations of breaching human rights...?

Social media

In recent times the use of mobile devices and social networking media has enabled information to come to the attention of people globally even when governments have censored the internet and mainstream media. This has been seen in the recent conflicts in Libya and Syria.

World In Order 13 The power of the media in upholding human rights

An Iranian woman who was charged with adultery was sentenced to death by stoning. However there was an outcry in the international community which said the practise was barbaric and inhumane. In response, Iran has ordered that she be sentenced to death by hanging. Her confession to the charges is however controversial. The lawyer of the woman, Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani, claims she only confessed after having been beaten and tortured in the jail where she has been held for 4 years. The media has been successful in making her pending death more humane but have been unable to have the sentence commuted.

Reference: http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/World/Story/STISStory_565356.html;
accessed 14.08.2010

Review Activities – The Media

1. Define the term media.
2. Identify TWO (2) alternative roles of the media.
3. Outline how the media can encourage and also hinder world order.
4. Outline the power of the media in shaping global and national opinion.
5. Should anonymous leaks be allowed of secure and confidential government information?
6. Argue whether there is ever a moral right to leak information when a government classifies it as confidential.

Research Activity

You are to research and investigate the role of Reuters, BBC World Service, Al Jazeera or other major media source and assess its role in terms of:

- Informing the public
- Investigating world order issues including human rights issues