



MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF HEINOUS OFFENCE: IMPACT ON COMMUNITY INSIGHT AND FEAR OF CRIME IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how media representation of heinous offence impact public insight and lead to fear of crime in urban communities. This article also explores the role of news outlets and virtual media in shaping perception of crime, often creating fear and a sense of insecurity among people. It also examines the insensitivity of the community by repeated exposure to representation of offence in the media and the effects of insensitivity by the community. It highlights how sensationalized portrayal of crime can influence attitude toward safety, law enforcement and urban life. Additionally, the article emphasizes the need for balanced reporting to mitigate fear and foster informed discourse.

Keywords: Media Portrayal, Violent Crime, Public Perception, Sensationalism, Urban Life.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years the coverage of violent crimes in media outlets become increasingly prevalent. Media outlets are of two types customary and virtual outlets.

customary media outlets such as TV, newspapers whereas virtual outlets such as online news, web platforms, entertainment media and blogs.

The increase in the media coverage is driven by various factors including the competitive nature of media, the public's appetite for sensational news and the growing role of digital platforms that allow for real time sharing of crime related information.

Customary media outlets have long been known to highlight violent crime. One reason for this is the media's tendency toward sensationalism. When a crime is sensationalized in news reports it attracts the readers and viewers about the crime.

As a result violent crimes often dominate headlines, making them seem more common and dangerous than they may be in reality¹.

The shift from customary to virtual media has made crime reporting faster and more widespread. With the real time reporting the crime related content is disseminated immediately. The incident spreads often before customary news outlets can verify the information.

¹Dixon and Linz, 2000



This constant coverage leads the public to overestimate the prevalence of crime even when actual crime rates may be declining. As a result people may become more fearful of becoming victims of crime and may alter their behaviours by avoiding certain areas or demanding stronger law enforcement measures even in communities where crime rates are lower.

A. THE FUNCTION OF MEDIA IN FRAMING COMMUNITY INSIGHTS OF OFFENCES:

Media Representation is of three types

- 1)The press
- 2)Entertainment media
- 3)virtual media outlets

1) The Press

Press report sensationalist headlines of violent crimes causing fear and anxiety in the minds of public. The main aim of sensationalism is to attract the viewers and readers. Framing of crimes by media outlets in a sensationalized manner plays an important role in news media reports.

2) Entertainment Media

Entertainment Media includes movies, television shows and crime dramas that portrays crime. TV shows such as crime patrol, crime diary portrays crime related stories and depicts various kinds of offence committed by people. By the influence of these TV shows people start to try those methods for fulfilling their ulterior motives. By this way entertainment media influence people.

3) Virtual Media outlets

These outlets allow users to share stories instantly and easily often without the traditional gatekeeping mechanism of mainstream news outlets. In the virtual media people are free to express their emotions, thoughts of certain offences.

Virtual media for instance helps the Rape victims to share their experiences or mental trauma to others so that other people when they listen to this they may take active measures like informing the concerned authority to take actions. And to eliminate future offences it helps.

Traditional gatekeeping in the essence where the information is collected by the media outlets such as newspapers and news channels it is filtered and then it is depicted through Media.

Virtual media has no such traditional gatekeeping. It is the fastest mode of disseminating news it reaches vast audiences in a fraction of seconds.

Virtual media has a positive impact on real time report. On the other hand it has some challenges too. Virtual media may spread misinformation, fake news and also online harassment are also caused from virtual media platforms. Even though virtual media amplify voices, it does not necessarily guarantee justice to the victim, as police and government responses may be still inadequate or biased.

Media's crime reporting in urban areas have both positive and negative effect.

The positive effect of media's crime reporting is that it creates awareness about public safety leading to increased vigilance and better law enforcement.

The negative impact of Media's crime reporting is that it causes fear by making people feel that they are not safe



even in areas where crime rates may not be rising.

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF MEDIA'S OFFENCE REPORTING ON COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Repeated exposure to violent crimes portrayal in the media shows people to trust the world as more dangerous than it ought to be even though people are actually not experiencing it. This phenomenon is known as 'Mean World Syndrome'².

When Media Reports crime in a sensationalized manner it causes anxiety among people and people will believe that they may also become victim of such crimes.

Due to which they may try to avoid community gatherings and social interactions to protect themselves.

It is observed that when media represents offence such as rape it represents the offence in such a way that blames victims. Due to the wearing of inappropriate attire the act was carried out or she was roaming around in the late night. These factors of victim being blamed for the act done by the other person, it psychologically affects the mental health of the victim.

Sometimes media portrays marginalized groups, that they have link with criminal activity. This selective portrayal can stigmatize these groups leading to increased societal fear and discrimination. Such portrayal leads to distrust, social divisions and a distorted view of these community role in society³.

C. INSIGHT ON COMMUNITY BEHAVIOUR AND POLICY

When media represents offence it leads to public pressure on authorities to take more stringent actions by increasing surveillance through fixing of CCTV cameras or other effective measures.

For instance, After the 2012 Delhi gang rape case harsher punishment were introduced even for minors who have committed heinous crime. This happened due to media's portrayal of the crime because of which there was a massive public outrage.

Sometimes introduction of new policies disproportionately affect only marginalized communities as they become targets of media, even though the policies are intended to enhance safety of every people.

Increased media induced fear has led people to often modify their daily routines that is by taking precautionary measures by staying indoor more frequently or avoiding certain neighbourhood when that particular area is targeted and portrayed by media as high crime rate area⁴.

These changes in daily routine reflect the media driven fear on both personal behaviour and broader societal perceptions of safety and law enforcement.

D. BLUNTING OF CRUELTY BY MEDIA

Media plays an important part in impacting the community insight of the offence. When people often visualize certain offences in the media at first it may seem as sensitive issue but as there and when there is a continuous

²Gerbner,1976

³Jhan,2012

⁴Kaur,2013



visualization of heinous offences people may presume that the offences are carried out commonly.

The manner in which media frames these offence affects how the public accept the severity of these incidents it can be through sensational headlines, visual imagery or emotional narratives.

Therefore people may feel less sensitive about the offence. Due to which people may lack empathy towards the victim that is when an offence is represented through the media people will not care about the condition of the victim and they may think that the victim will only overcome those situations. Instead of giving support to the victim people will blame the victim.

Media representation of offence in a repeated manner can affect the minds of the people that, they think those offences are more common and even the most heinous offences like rape and murder becomes acceptable by the people.

E. POSITIVE ROLE OF MEDIA

In India, several media campaigns have been promoted for the community safety, awareness and crime prevention. For instance government has brought up many programmes to use media as a source to spread awareness about the safety and education of girls, in order to prevent crimes like sexual violence and child trafficking⁵.

Through the media's representation existing laws have implemented harsher punishments for the heinous offences so that the society maintains law and order without infringing it.

Additionally, other developments are made to safeguard and encourage women, this project is under Nirbhaya Fund⁶.

These programmes played a positive role of media in developing a sense of collective responsibility for safety and crime reduction.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Media significantly influences public perception of violent crime in India by sensationalizing crimes which heightens fear and shapes negative views about urban life. Through repeated exposure to such crime which include, rape, murder or hate crimes.

Media can lead distorted perceptions by making urban areas appear more dangerous than they are. This leads to increased public anxiety, stress and mental health issues. People also show a fear driven behaviour such as staying indoors or avoiding certain neighbourhood.

Apart from this media portrays crime in a way that the viewers feel that marginalized groups have a link with such violent crimes, which reinforces social divisions.

To eliminate this effects media literacy programmes are important this programmes educate the public to critically evaluate crime related content and narratives.

Further research is required to explore how different demographic groups respond to media's representation of offence and behaviours of community. Additionally studies should examine how media outlets can balance public attention and ethical standards through a responsible reporting without sensationalism.

⁵Ministry of Women and Child Development,2015

⁶Goel, 2020



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