

The Role of Media in the Development and Distribution of Knowledge: A Diffusion of Innovation Theory Perspective

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Abstract: In many areas of life, the media has a huge impact on how people think, act, and interact with their surroundings. In light of this understanding, the study was anchored in the Diffusion of Innovations Theory and explored media functions such as socialization, social control, and consciousness formation. The study used the desktop research methodology to collect data from publicly accessible online materials aligned with the study's objectives for a qualitative content analysis. In addition, a thematic analysis was conducted to draw connections between media practices and the study's key areas of focus. The study found that the media plays a key role in the development and dissemination of knowledge as it yields consequential influences in processes such as media-based learning, modeling behaviors, reinforcement of norms, consumerism, identity formation, and informing the populace on important issues relevant to them. On the negative side, it emerged that the media can also lead to adverse socialization tendencies, the reinforcement and normalization of negative norms, sensationalism, the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, and online harassment, particularly in the context of social media. The study recommended the need for both professional and citizen journalists to follow the set ethical standards as well as the need for enhanced media literacy in order to equip individuals with the skills to engage with media critically, safely navigate digital environments, and resist negative social influences.

Keywords: Consciousness Formation, Media, Social Control, Socialization.

1. Introduction

Media plays a key role in communication by helping in the circulation of knowledge, teaching ideas and skills, and facilitating a meaningful discussion on issues (Choudhury, 2011). From a Diffusion of Innovation Theory perspective, the media functions as both a channel and a catalyst for the adoption of new ideas and practices. The theory provides a framework for understanding the manner in which new ideas, technologies, and practices spread through cultures over long periods (Halton, 2023). The media plays an essential role in the diffusion process by determining the rate and manner ideas and innovations are adopted within the social system.

Sharma (2022) observes that communication has become the axis of human life in the contemporary hypermediated world, noting that the media not only alters but also creates a distinct

social reality. Further, Salvin and Maheema (2021) contend that the media plays a catalytic role in a globalized world, arguing that in recent years, the world has undergone rapid changes in all spheres due to the impact of the media.

The media serves as a channel for conveying important information about what happens in the world, and journalists are key to effectively sharing such information (James, 2017), especially in areas where audiences do not have direct experience or knowledge of what is happening. The mass media typically set agendas and focus public interest on certain subjects, thus setting parameters under which an informed public debate can emanate (Happer & Philo, 2013). However, Philo (2008) argues that this does not imply that the media tells us what to think about, as media users do not consume media messages uncritically.

2. Problem Statement

The media serves a key role in people's understanding of the world around them (Sharma, 2022; Mangrui & Li, 2019). Since its inception in the 20th Century, information has become a key necessity among the populace (Salemgareeva, 2013). As technology continues to advance, television, radio, print media, and digital platforms have become essential in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and influencing social change (Ugo et al., 2023). Around the world, these platforms help connect individuals with institutions and play an essential role in communication during emergencies, social movements, and governance. This shows just how important mass media have become in today's society (Linus et al., 2024). Despite these contributions, there exists a considerable scholarly gap on how the media contributes to knowledge development and dissemination, especially in relation to how it shapes social norms and values, controls behavior, and forms consciousness, thus necessitating this study.

3. Study Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine how the media functions as an agent of socialization.
2. To evaluate how the media functions as an agent of

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social control.

3. To assess how the media functions as an agent of consciousness formation.

4. Theoretical Framework

A. Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory was developed by Everett M. Rogers in 1962. The theory is said to be one of the oldest theories in the field of social science. DOI theory stems from communication to explain how an idea or innovation spreads through a specific population or social system over time. The outcome of the diffusion of innovation is that individuals, as part of the social system, adopt a new idea, practice, or behavior. In the context of this theory, adoption means that an individual does something in a different way as opposed to how they did previously. Central to adoption is that an individual has to perceive the idea, practice, or behavior as new or innovative, and this is what makes diffusion possible (LaMorte, 2022).

According to Rogers (2003, as cited in García-Avilés, 2020), diffusion is “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.” Thus, diffusion is perceived to be a special type of communication in which participants share information among themselves in order to reach a mutual understanding. It is imperative to note that the newness of the idea or innovation comes with some level of uncertainty. Therefore, Rodgers (2003) describes diffusion of innovation as an “uncertainty reduction process.”

LaMorte (2022) posits that the adoption of new ideas, practices, or behaviors in a social system does not happen at the same time; rather, it's a process where some people are more likely to adopt the new idea earlier than others. He notes that there is a difference in characteristics between people who adopt the innovation early and those who adopt the innovation later. He further emphasizes the need to understand the features of the target population when promoting an innovation or idea, as this will enable one to identify factors that will hinder or help the adoption of the idea.

Furthermore, an existing body of diffusion of innovation research indicates that there exist differences between earlier and later adopters of ideas or innovations in personality variables, communication behaviors, and socioeconomic status (Rogers, 2003, as cited in García-Avilés, 2020). Earlier adopters of ideas or innovation are likely to be literate individuals, have a higher social status in society, and also people with a commercial orientation rather than a subsistence economic orientation (García-Avilés, 2020).

1) Adopter Categories

According to Halton (2023) and LaMorte (2022), there are five adopter categories. The latter notes that the majority of adopters fall in the middle categories. He notes that numerous strategies can be utilized to appeal to different adopter categories when promoting an idea or innovation. As put forth by the two scholars, the adopter categories are: the innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

The first category is the innovators. They are said to be individuals who want to be the pioneers or the first to try out an innovation. They are always ready to take risks without fear and are normally the first to come up with new ideas. Very little, if necessary, needs to be done in order to appeal to individuals in this category.

The second category is the early adopters. Typically, these are individuals who are opinion leaders. They enjoy leadership-related roles and are often flexible and open to change and opportunities. These people are eager to try out new ideas and establish their utility in the community. They are more conscious of the need to change, and they do not need information that has been tailored to convince them to that effect.

The third category is the early majority. This group consists of individuals who are rarely leaders, yet they tend to adopt new ideas earlier than the average person. These individuals only need to see some evidence that the said innovation has been tested and proven workable before they are willing to consider it for adoption. The only strategies needed to appeal to this group include the efficacy of the innovation and the success stories.

The fourth category is the late majority. This group consists of individuals who are skeptical of change and will adopt an idea or innovation after it has been tried by a larger majority. Among the strategies that can resonate and appeal to this category is to provide information on how many other individuals have tried the innovation or idea and have successfully adopted it.

Lastly, the fifth category is the laggards. This demographic consists of individuals who are tied to tradition and are very conservative. Typically, these people are the hardest to bring on board as they are very skeptical of change. In order to appeal to them, some strategies like fear appeals, statistics, and some pressure from individuals from other adopter groups must come into play.

2) Stages of the Adoption Process

Diffusion of an innovation is usually said to occur through a five-step process. The five stages in the adoption process are knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. The first is the knowledge stage. It is at this stage that the media introduces new information to the members of the public through news reports, feature stories, documentaries, articles, and social media posts about important issues, like pandemics, drug abuse, climate change, and bad governance, to create awareness and inform the public about the urgency of the issues.

Secondly is the persuasion stage. At this stage, the content produced by the media is centered on the goal of influencing the attitudes and opinions of the audience. At this stage, various communication strategies come into play in order to shape public perceptions; they include expert testimonials, repeated exposure, and emotional appeals. The media uses various persuasive techniques to persuade people to adopt new ideas through advertisements, opinion pieces, and social media campaigns.

Thirdly is the decision stage. It is at this stage that people get

to compare the advantages and disadvantages of adopting an idea or innovation. The media, through different forms like print, broadcast, and digital platforms, provide relevant information and details for this evaluation. This includes the benefits, risks, and social acceptance. Some of the media content that helps in the decision-making process includes user testimonials, reviews, tutorials, etc.

The fourth stage is implementation. At this stage, the individual determines the usefulness of the innovation. The individual might then decide to put the idea or innovation into practice by integrating it into their daily lives. Another contributor to the implementation decisions is the media coverage of the success stories of early adopters. This might influence those individuals who are still considering the adoption of the innovation.

The fifth and last stage is confirmation. Individuals at this stage tend to seek validation and reinforcement of their decisions. The media's role at this stage is to provide validation through curating follow-up stories. The positive reinforcement individuals get from the media helps solidify the adoption, thus leading to the integration of the new ideas provided by the media into an individual's daily life.

In light of the foregoing, it becomes apparent that DOI enhances understanding of how new knowledge or ideas are presented by the media through aired or published information, leading to their adoption by audiences. It offers insight into the adoption process across different demographics and lays essential groundwork for understanding the media's role in socialization, social control, and the formation of consciousness.

5. Literature Review

Mass communication is now the definition of "mass media" in the 21st century. For a long time now, communication scholars have been keen on the issue of the media's influence on audiences. The concept of mass manipulation in society was made possible with the establishment of the mass media at the start of the 20th century. The world is now better informed because of the development of broadcast, print, and digital media. Information has turned into a daily necessity, not just for minority groups, but for a broad audience as well (Salemgarieva, 2013).

The media has been acknowledged as a powerful socialization agent capable of shaping people's socialization process. Genner and Süß (2017) define socialization as a long-lasting process in which people learn and interact with the values, rules, and social standards of a particular society and culture. In addition, they suggest that the media shapes people's values and norms regarding acceptable behavior, their interactions with others, and their view of their community, country, and the world at large.

The media facilitates observational learning, which is characterized by encoding lasting behaviors and cognitions through observing others. As such, individuals implicitly learn and cultivate their behaviors through media socialization (Genner & Süß, 2017). However, Genner and Süß (2017) argue that it is difficult to quantify the media's role in

socialization as it relies upon a nexus of other influences like family, peers, content, personality, context, motivation, education, and cultural background. For a thorough understanding of the media as a socialization agent, they suggest it is essential to consider how these other agents interact with the media. They further note that individual media use is shaped by how media is promoted in one's environment, the media practices of peers, and family habits.

The media holds a powerful influence as a tool of social control, shaping how people think, behave, and relate to the world around them. Adorno and Horkheimer (1992, as cited in Mangrui and Li, 2019) note that the media consumer culture monopoly can be likened to Hitler's totalitarianism, where the people have to follow the media for them to be accepted by other society members. Mangrui and Li (2019) argue that, typically, human beings attempt to fit into their environment, and it is the media that shows them how to do it. The scholars further posit that a magazine, for instance, can say that a certain product is a 'must buy' that everyone in society must have, and soon after, the product may be found in people's homes simply because they don't want to be the odd ones out if they lack it. As such, the media tends to have the power to dictate what people do.

As a consciousness formation agent, the media shapes how people see the world and understand themselves. It plays a key role in molding a good society by enhancing its way of life and ensuring that it is on the correct course, as it always strives to side with the truth and relevant factors. It is the best tool for creating awareness in society on issues such as political, economic, and social, and also updates people on what is happening globally. It makes people aware of their rights, amplifies the evils happening in society, and makes people aware of what is happening around them (Pradeep & Ingita, 2013).

6. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, utilizing a desktop research methodology to collect data from publicly accessible online materials aligned with the study's objectives. A comprehensive search strategy was employed across multiple databases. Keywords included "social learning and media," "media and childhood socialization," "media and identity formation," "media framing and control," "media agenda setting," "media and social control," "media and civic engagement," "media and consciousness," and "public discourse and media."

Philosophically, the study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena through the analysis of meaning, patterns, and context (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). This approach was well-suited to the desktop methodology, as it allowed for an in-depth examination of existing literature and media content. A content analysis was performed on relevant sources, which included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, media reports, and foundational theoretical literature related to media and communication studies.

In addition, a thematic analysis was conducted to draw

connections between media practices and the study's key areas of focus: social control, socialization, and consciousness formation. This analytical strategy enabled a structured interpretation of how media function within these domains. The desktop review method proved efficient for the researchers, as it is known to be cost-effective and less time-consuming compared to empirical fieldwork (Gupta, 2024).

7. Findings

This section presents the key findings derived from the analysis of secondary sources reviewed during the study. Using a desktop research methodology, the study examined materials relevant to the role of media in the development and distribution of knowledge. Through content analysis and thematic analysis, the data were organized around the study's focus areas: media and socialization, media and social control, and media and consciousness formation.

A. Media and Socialization

Key socialization aspects are formed in childhood and youth stages (Genner & Süß, 2017). Statistics indicate that young people dedicate an average of two hours and twenty minutes daily to mass media (Anckle, 2011). The media has offered a platform that has numerous learning opportunities for the young demographic, which can go a long way in broadening the range of events they experience. It is worth noting, in the current dispensation, socialization is not curtailed to the influences of family, peers, and the surrounding environment (Prot et al., 2014), as media influence plays a key role in the process.

The media has become a major social influencer among the audience as they are exposed to high volumes of audio-visual messages in their day-to-day consumption (Mwangi et al., 2019). The media is one of the main socialization agents, and the young demographic is said to be highly vulnerable to its effects. The media consists of digital platforms, television, radio, and print. Studies in first-world countries indicate that the media has a greater influence on the behaviors of the young population (Castro, 2017; Baferani, 2015; Crisogen, 2015). Further to that, Mwangi et al. (2019) add that the media helps young people in the development of their social and communication skills. This element of the media transcends the young demographic; as such, it can also impact other demographics, as the media has the potential to model behaviors and impart skills and values among the mature population.

1) Media-Based Social Learning

The acknowledgment of the media's role as a behavior influencer has shaped the development of educational programs such as TV lessons, radio lessons, and educational web pages (Mwangi et al., 2019). In Kenya, the media has been utilized for educational purposes through platforms such as EDU Channel, Dawati, Kenya Education Network, Kytabu Africa, Mymlango E-Learning, and Kenya Education Cloud, among others.

Providing information to the audience is one of the most important roles of the media as a socializing agent. They play the informational role by curating important messages targeted at various audiences in different formats like drama,

documentaries, news, magazines, and current affairs programs, among others. Mwangi et al. (2019) note that the information provided by the media can be applied by people to construct an image on which they can base reality. The scholars further reckon that the reality created can go a long way in helping people model and exhibit the behaviors needed.

The media has found utility in times of crisis, such as Covid-19. The health communication role of the media facilitated the transmission of crucial information about the intervention measures that were geared towards containing the disease (Mwangale, 2021). The media, as a socializing agent, helped in educating the masses on the measures to be taken, such as observing social distancing, wearing masks, and washing hands. Amidst the widespread Covid-19 vaccine apathy, the media was at the forefront of informing the masses about the importance of the jab by debunking the misconceptions surrounding inoculation. Some people took time to adopt the message of vaccination due to skepticism, but eventually, a substantial number exhibited confidence due to the continued flow of information from the media.

Media campaigns have long been extensively used in substance use interventions, often targeting specific audiences to raise public awareness about the associated risks. These campaigns commonly focus on youth, as research indicates that drug use typically begins in adolescence when young people are more inclined to experiment with substances like alcohol, cigarettes, and illegal drugs (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2013). Various media platforms, such as digital media, radio, and TV, are often employed to educate both youth and the general public on how to overcome addiction and the importance of avoiding drug use. This is often framed as a way of aligning with societal norms and values, as well as promoting personal self-improvement.

However, alcohol advertisements that do not show the negative repercussions of its consumption are common in the media, as commercials are one of the main revenue-generating tools for media enterprises (Nyamamu, 2014; Ellickson et al., 2005, as cited in Prot et al., 2014). Such advertisements may encourage alcohol use among youth, who may be curious to try it due to alcohol's positive and glamorous portrayal in the media. Similarly, studies have shown that viewing media content with a positive portrayal of alcohol drinking leads to expectations among consumers that alcohol consumption results in positive outcomes, such as forming friendships (Prot et al., 2014).

2) Modeling Behaviors and Creation of Social Norms

In Kenya, television programs have proven useful in modeling behaviors among both young and adult demographics. The programs have the power to instill early cognitive skills and social values among young viewers. According to Raygor (2006), television programs on pro-social behaviors provide a good experience to the viewers by encouraging values like altruism, empathy, and kindness, which are associated with positive personality modeling and development among the young demographic.

Frequent exposure to the media can contribute to the formation of social norms within society, with product

advertisements and promotions being a prime example. According to Shearer (2019), studies have established that people's perceptions of what is considered "acceptable" or normal regarding body weight are influenced by what they see in TV advertisements. In a similar vein, Clark et al. (2021) affirm that indeed the media has been on record for exacerbating weight-related stigma for a long time now. Arias (2019) recognizes the power of the media in both creating and challenging the existing social norms. He notes that the media can serve as an intervention mechanism to combat misleading and negative societal norms.

The media shapes behaviors by making propositions to people, influencing them through the provision of relevant information (Enikolopov & Petrova, 2017). These propositions help shape mental models in people's minds, which are then reinforced persuasively, influencing how individuals respond to and perceive various events, situations, and issues. Typically, these propositions are presented in an emotional and dramatic manner, which serves to inhibit critical judgment (Esteve, 2018). As a result, individuals can adopt values and norms that resonate with them. However, the media can also lead to the adoption of inappropriate values and worldviews, such as stereotypes about minority groups (Genner & Süss, 2017). For instance, it may contribute to racial discrimination against blacks and the labeling of Muslims as terrorists, as seen in the United States.

B. Media and Social Control

1) Agenda Setting

The media have the power to set the public agenda by determining what should be perceived as important. According to McCombs (2011), newspapers utilize various cues to place importance on different topics in their daily news coverage. This can be done by having the lead story on the first page, highlighting additional articles on the front page in an attention-grabbing way, and having large and conspicuous headlines. He adds that TV does the same by having the stories that should be considered important open the newscast and having a longer duration devoted to them as compared to other news items. As such, the media a social control agent, can grab the public attention by setting an agenda on various issues, which eventually leads to the formation of public opinion and discussion.

According to Valenzuela & McCombs (2019), the daily repetition of messages concerning public issues, coupled with the widespread use of the media in the current dispensation, makes journalism influential to the audiences in different forms of media. They assert that the repetitiveness nature of news coverage makes it easier for the audience to get information on important issues without actively seeking it out. The scholars further refer to this as 'incidental learning' where people passively consume information simply by being exposed to it repeatedly. Therefore, the issues covered become important to the public, thus moving from the media agenda to the public agenda.

The media, as a social control agent through its agenda-setting function, has consequences on individuals' attitudes and

behaviors. Valenzuela & McCombs (2019) posit that the consequences include: priming opinions, forming opinions through the emphasis laid on issues, and shaping opinions through emphasizing particular attributes. They note that this has a huge effect on individuals' observable behaviors. For instance, during Kenyan elections, the media focuses its attention on the most popular candidates, thus making the general public form opinions about them.

2) Normalization and Reinforcement of Norms

Norms are unwritten social rules that constrain and guide individuals' actions based on acceptable behaviors of others (Reno & Cialdini, 2000, as cited in Borg, 2021). According to Rettie et al. (2014), "conceptions of whether behaviors are normal are not based on accurate information about what most people do but on ideas and images shaped in childhood and by the media, word of mouth, and advertising" (p. 14). In a similar vein, Mead et al. (2014) reckon that norms are influenced by exposure to social, physical, and symbolic environments; they note that the symbolic environment in this context includes the media and marketing in the form of advertisements.

The media also goes a long way in reinforcing societal norms and values by portraying them as natural and desirable. Siapera (2010) observes that the media highlights different values and norms and the possible consequences of failing to adhere to them. Further, he notes that the media plays a crucial role as society members can learn how to conduct themselves in accordance with their role and status. The media also portrays models of behavior that are supposed to be followed by the members of society. This helps maintain social order by encouraging conformity to accepted standards.

The media, for a long time now, has been associated with stereotypical gender representations. The norms displayed through the media portrayals result in societal pressures to conform to what is considered normal and acceptable, as shown by the media, like the media's definition of gender roles. The media is fond of associating the male gender with technical careers like engineering, and the female gender with lighter duties like teaching and caregiving.

Faulting the media's role in reinforcing and normalizing norms surrounding gender roles, Bentley-Mila (2015) in her article notes that children's heavy consumption of media content has significant ramifications on their understanding of gender roles. She notes that after her two young daughters were exposed to a 30-minute TV program by a friend, their views on gender roles changed. The article reads in part:

According to my two little girls, who love their dad and can't wait for him to come home from work, dads are only good at one thing. Messing up. Dads don't know how to take care of babies; they might even put the baby in the clothesbasket if they can't find a diaper, and some of them change the baby's diaper on the cutting board in the kitchen. Dads also make the kids do their chores, and then he tells the mom that he did them (Bentley-Mila, 2015, para. 5).

A lot of stereotypes about men and masculinity have been created by the media. In television shows and films, men are portrayed as fearless and emotionless, while women are portrayed as fearful and emotive. The idea of a real man in

society is shaped by the media to be someone aggressive and financially stable. Children are raised with the impression that women are housekeepers.

The media has also constructed a new definition of beauty, and it continues to be influential to women and even young girls worldwide. Due to the pervasive perception by the media that being slim is beautiful, a lot of women and young girls have developed a strong interest in controlling their weight and have even been persuaded to alter their diet (Siapera, 2010).

3) *Consumerism and Advertising*

The media, as an agent of social control, has the power to influence consumer behaviors and choices through its persuasive advertising strategies. Advertising has an impact on consumer behavior by influencing their interest, attitudes, awareness, and purchase decisions. Media platforms like the internet, TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines have been found to hold a significant influence on consumer behavior by providing information and engaging consumers, thus leading to behavioral change and loyalty to products (Bo, 2022; Khanam, 2023).

Businesses across the globe have always utilized mass media to spread information about their products to a wider audience. In the process, the mass media facilitates the sharing and exchange of ideas among people about different products. As time progresses, the advertising strategies and tactics have advanced, thus becoming more enticing to the audiences and even creating consumerism and needs where none existed before. As a result, luxuries have turned into necessities (Shah, 2012).

On the negative side, advertising has been characterized by an exaggeration of reality that sometimes may end up misleading the audience. Sharma and Chander (2011) assert that advertising has always been met with a lot of criticism regarding both the role it plays in selling a product and the way it influences the larger society through its strategies and tactics. They note that, in this highly competitive era, advertisers resort to unethical practices like deception and exaggeration. Through hyperbolic advertisements, the media as a social control agent succeeds in luring the audience into buying products and services, thus increasing consumerism by shaping society's norms, values, and attitudes towards products.

4) *Identity Formation and Development*

Identity formation is the process by which individuals get to understand who they are (Jeyanthi, 2022). The media, as an agent of social control, plays a significant role in the construction of people's identities. It shapes the informational environment in which people exist through TV, radio, social media, newspapers, and magazines. This form of exposure enables people to be aware of a variety of social groups in society and may choose to identify with or reject certain identities based on the information they get from the media. It controls individuals by telling them how they should look and behave; therefore, the media becomes a strong source of identity formation (Mangrui & Li, 2019).

With the pervasive digital technologies in the contemporary society, identity formation typically happens through online spaces more than in shared traditional media like television and

radio. It has been noted that the time spent on personalized media consumption through mobile devices and laptops has exponentially risen among the youth. They utilize the platforms for social interaction and self-expression, thus influencing how they explore and construct their identities to conform with the values portrayed in the media (Lenhart, 2012).

Gender and sexual identity development among the youth is significantly influenced by digital media portrayals, as individuals, mostly youth, actively utilize the platforms to present themselves in ways they feel will appeal to their friends or the larger public. They use photos and videos to display their identities to portray socially desirable forms of masculinity, femininity, and sex appeal that they often mimic in commercial media (Manago et al., 2008; Ringrose, 2010).

Social media gives young people more power over how they can express themselves physically. They can curate and change the way they are portrayed online by selecting camera angles, different poses, adding filters to the pictures, and positioning themselves with others. Social media also empowers them to socially construct new meanings of gender and sexuality that challenge the dominant paradigms and societal norms (Van Doorn, 2010).

However, as the youth, especially females, continue to express their sexuality online, their bodies end up becoming part of the digital landscape, consumed alongside advertisements and commercially produced entertainment programs. This trend, especially on Instagram and Facebook, leads to signs of self-objectification, meaning they start to experience their bodies less for their functions and more for how they appear to others (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010).

C. *Media and Consciousness Formation*

The media plays a key role in molding a good society by enhancing its way of life and ensuring that it is on the correct course, as it always strives to side with the truth and relevant factors. It is the best tool for creating awareness in the current society on issues such as political, economic, and social, and also updates people on what is happening globally. It makes people aware of their rights, amplifies the evils happening in society, and makes people aware of what is happening around them (Pradeep & Ingita, 2013).

In this contemporary world, the media has permeated almost every aspect of our lives, and its usage is on an exponential rise. Media technologies play an essential role in satisfying the audience's informational and entertainment needs. In consciousness formation, the media shapes how we think and understand the world. It provides individuals with a wide array of information through TV, digital media, newspapers, and radio. It can shape our views and attitudes by choosing which stories to tell and how to tell them. It also influences how we see political issues and social norms, thus guiding public discussions and affecting how we respond to different events.

Various forms of media have their unique strengths in the process of consciousness formation. The suitability of each media form depends on several factors, like dominance, resonance with the target audience and depth of information to be shared, and to some extent, they complement each other.

1) Newspapers

Newspapers have been useful in relaying information and creating awareness of critical issues by providing in-depth coverage of matters of national importance, such as political, social, and economic issues. The depth of coverage that comes with newspaper journalism gives it a competitive advantage over other forms of media, which is why individuals will still purchase newspapers even when receiving the same information on other forms of media like TV, radio, and digital platforms.

Usher (2010) notes that even though newspapers may not compete with other media forms in terms of speed, they stand out in their unique way by providing depth of information, analysis, and coverage that is not published elsewhere. Franklin (2008) adds that they are becoming like magazines by offering lengthy and detailed analyses of evolving events. In the Kenyan context, they make a significant contribution to consciousness formation, as they are known for in-depth exposés of governance ills and for advocating societal reforms.

2) Television

TV is a powerful medium of consciousness formation as it plays an integral role in informing the public on critical issues happening in the country. In Kenya, TV stations like Citizen, KTN, NTV, and K24 often offer important information to the public through hard and soft news. Typically, TV stations curate news programs, documentaries, and feature stories on issues related to governance, social justice, and human rights, thus making the public aware of the parameters within which they can co-exist. Highlighting the importance of TV in consciousness formation on climate change matters, Feldman (2016) asserts that they have the potential to influence public understanding and perception of issues at hand through their visual immediacy and authoritative presentation, coupled with processes such as agenda setting and framing.

3) Radio

Radio remains one of the most dominant and accessible media forms in Kenya (Media Council of Kenya [MCK], 2024). It broadcasts in different local languages, thus making the information understood by people from all walks of life, including the illiterate and those who reside in rural areas. The radio plays a key role in consciousness formation by educating the public on critical issues like governance, civic rights, health, and agriculture, among others. It also facilitates a platform for debate and participation through talk shows and call-in programs. Emphasizing the dominance and power of radio in information dissemination in developing countries, Woodward (2014) notes that at least 75 percent of households own a radio set, with nearly 95 percent of the people globally having access to it.

4) Digital Media

The advent of digital news platforms and social media, like X, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Citizen Digital, Nation Digital, etc., in Kenya has completely changed how information is produced and shared. They have democratized information sharing by allowing the audiences to participate in news production and also share their opinions on contentious issues in the country. Deuze et al. (2007) posit that the audience in the

present society is active and no longer passive, as they act as key players in the processing and dissemination of news. However, Newman et al. (2020) note that there is a growing concern about false and misleading information on social media platforms.

It is imperative to note that social media led to a greater public engagement in Kenya, especially among Gen Z, on issues of national importance like opposing the contentious Finance Bill 2024, and gave rise to movements like #OccupyParliament on the X platform. Evidence shows that the informational and psychological impact of high social media and internet usage influences the consciousness and worldview of Generation Z (Shamrin & Koshel, 2023). This influence partly explains why they spearheaded Kenya's most disruptive movement, which led to key changes in the country's leadership and political environment.

Blogs and online news outlets have proven to be important mediums of consciousness formation as they offer in-depth reporting and analysis on various issues. Digital news platforms in Kenya, such as Tuko, Mpasho, The Elephant, and Kenyans.co.ke, always strive to cover topics that are often overlooked by the legacy media. Newman et al. (2021) observe that social and digital media are viable sources of news that the audience can benefit from, noting that they curate information in a manner that cannot be found in legacy media, as they seek to inform entertainingly.

The substantive role of social media in consciousness formation notwithstanding, Dyson et al. (2013) reckon that the advent of the internet and social interaction via online communication has posed new challenges for our moral understanding. In line with this, Ott et al. (2022) observe that new ethical issues like internet trolls, cyberbullying, and online shaming have emerged. It is also worth noting that online media journalists sometimes deviate from the prescribed ethical standards that guide journalistic practice, as they often sensationalize facts to provoke public interest and excitement at the expense of accuracy. It is within such a news environment that misinformation and disinformation spread.

8. Discussion

The study established that socialization is not curtailed to the conventionally recognized influences such as family, peers, and the surrounding environment, since in the current dispensation, the media also plays a key role in the process (Prot et al., 2014). The media has emerged as a major social influence due to the audience's daily exposure to large volumes of audiovisual content (Mwangi et al., 2019). Studies in the Global North have shown that the media has a greater influence on the behaviors of the young population (Castro, 2017; Baferani, 2015; Crisogen, 2015). Socialization aspects as a result of the media are formed in childhood and youthful stages, as this demographic usually dedicates at least two hours and twenty minutes daily engaging with mass media (Genner & Süß, 2017; Ankle, 2011), which can aid in developing their social and communication skills (Mwangi et al., 2019). However, positive portrayals of substances like alcohol in advertisements can contribute to negative socialization outcomes (Prot et al., 2014).

It also emerged that media socialization has a considerable influence on behavior modeling and the creation of social norms, such as encouraging prosocial behaviors like altruism, empathy, and kindness (Raygor, 2006). It shapes public perceptions of what is considered “acceptable,” for instance, the reinforcement of body weight stigma through TV advertisements (Shearer, 2019; Clark et al., 2021), a long-standing issue in which beauty is often associated with being “slender,” particularly in Western contexts. It is worth noting that the media can also promote inappropriate values and stereotypes about minority groups (Genner & Süss, 2017). However, in such cases, the media can also serve to challenge misleading and negative societal norms (Arias, 2019).

The analysis also established that the media, as a social control agent, has the power to set the agenda on what should be perceived as important (McCombs, 2011; Valenzuela & McCombs, 2019). Its social control function also plays a key role in the normalization and reinforcement of norms. A consensus has emerged that perceptions of normal behavior are often shaped by the media and advertising, rather than by accurate information (Mead et al., 2014; Rettie et al., 2014; Siapera, 2010), as seen in media portrayals of gender roles (Bentley-Mila, 2015). The media also holds the power to influence consumer behavior through persuasive advertising strategies, leading to behavioral change and loyalty to advertised products (Bo, 2022; Umma et al., 2023). In such contexts, the media often turns luxuries into perceived necessities (Shah, 2012).

The social control function of the media is also consequential in the identity formation process, as it controls individuals by telling them how they should look and behave (Mangrui & Li, 2019), thus influencing how they explore and construct their identities to align with the values portrayed in the media (Lenhart, 2012). Youth, in particular, explore their identities through social media platforms by using photos and videos to present themselves in ways that reflect socially desirable forms of masculinity, femininity, and sex appeal, often mimicking what they see in commercial media (Manago et al., 2008; Ringrose, 2010). At the same time, social media empowers them to socially construct new meanings of gender and sexuality that challenge dominant paradigms and societal norms (Van Doorn, 2010). However, this often leads to self-objectification, where individuals begin to experience their bodies less for their function and more for how they appear to others (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010).

As an agent of consciousness formation, it emerged that the media makes people aware of their rights, amplifies the evils happening in society, and informs them about what is happening around them (Pradeep & Ingita, 2013). Various forms of media play a key role in this process, with the preference for each form based on features unique to that medium. For instance, while newspapers struggle to stay relevant in the current fast-paced media environment, they are still preferred by some audiences for their lengthy and in-depth analysis and coverage of issues (Usher, 2010; Franklin, 2008). Television also plays a key role in the consciousness formation process by addressing a wide range of issues relevant to the

audience. It has the potential to influence public understanding and perception of issues through its visual immediacy and authoritative presentation (Feldman, 2016), coupled with processes such as agenda setting and framing. Radio, being the most dominant medium both in Kenya and globally (MCK, 2024; Woodward, 2014), serves as a key source of information, particularly in rural areas where other forms of media may be unavailable. It also stands out due to its availability in various vernacular languages. Digital media, encompassing both digital news platforms and social media, have emerged as key sources of information sharing, as they empower the audience to be both creators and consumers of content (Deuze et al., 2007). However, misinformation and disinformation continue to pose serious concerns regarding this medium (Newman et al., 2020). Moreover, challenges such as internet trolls, cyberbullying, and online shaming also hinder its noble role in the consciousness formation process (Dyson et al., 2013; Ott et al., 2022).

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Conclusions

In light of the foregoing, the study concluded that the media plays a key role in the development and distribution of knowledge. As an agent of socialization, the media helps people to learn and adopt new ideas and behaviors. In terms of social control, it influences how people think and act by promoting certain norms and values. Furthermore, the media plays a key role in consciousness formation by raising awareness of important societal issues. It is, however, imperative to note that it also contributes to several negative outcomes, including harmful socialization patterns, reinforcement and normalization of negative norms, sensationalism, spread of misinformation and disinformation, and online harassment, particularly with regard to social media. This, therefore, brings to attention the dual nature of media as both a powerful tool for spreading new knowledge and a potential source of social challenges.

B. Recommendation

The study recommended the need for adherence to ethical standards by both professional and citizen journalists as a means of curbing the spread of harmful content that might contribute to negative socialization and reinforcement of negative norms. It also emphasized the need to strengthen media literacy initiatives in order to enable individuals to critically engage with media, navigate digital spaces responsibly, and guard against issues such as self-objectification.

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