



The Role of Media in Amplifying Crime Narratives: A Study of Public Opinion and Misinformation

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Abstract: This article talks about how the media plays an important role in shaping how people view crime and the criminal justice system. Even though crime rates are generally going down, the media often focuses on shocking and violent cases, which can create fear and lead to distorted views among people. This study looks at how exposure to media influences people's views on crime, law enforcement, and community safety, especially for marginalized groups. We look at various studies that indicate that extended exposure to crime-related media can lead to a "mean world syndrome," where individuals perceive their surroundings as more perilous than they truly are. This trend affects different racial and socioeconomic groups in a significant way, complicating how media consumption relates to fear of crime. Additionally, the article discusses how media coverage influences policy decisions, highlighting that public concerns, often amplified by media portrayals, can pressure policymakers to implement stricter laws and penalties that might not tackle the root causes of crime. The findings show that it's important for media to report responsibly, providing balanced and trustworthy information to promote informed discussions about crime and justice. This analysis suggests that more research is needed on how media, public perception, and policy interact. It's important to ensure that society's reactions to crime are informed by accurate information instead of fear.

Keywords: Crime Reporting, Fear of Crime, Criminal Justice System, Media Influence, Public Perception.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The term "media" denotes the diverse communication channels that convey information and cultural narratives to the public, while "crime" signifies actions that contravene legal regulations and societal norms, often resulting in penalties or legal repercussions. The interplay between media and crime has historically been a subject of scholarly discourse, with media significantly influencing public perceptions of criminality. The media, being a significant social institution, functions as a channel for crime news and influences public discourse, often affecting societal perceptions of offenders, victims, and the justice system. The relationship between media and criminology is significant as media portrayal can shape societal anxieties, political priorities, and legislative modifications. Criminology, the empirical examination of crime and its origins, manifestations, and repercussions, has historically focused on analyzing crime trends, victimology, and societal reactions. Nonetheless, the media's function in advancing crime narratives has garnered heightened scrutiny. Research regularly demonstrates that media representations of crime reflect societal biases, notably the overrepresentation of violent crimes and the underrepresentation of corporate and white-collar offenses (Jewkes, 2015). This selective representation can modify the public's perception of crime prevalence and seriousness, leading to moral panics, as established by Stanley Cohen (1972). Such panics may encompass heightened dread of crime, an amplified inclination towards punitive measures, and the stigmatization of particular demographics. The media's role in criminology has gotten increasingly intricate in the digital era due to the swift proliferation of social media platforms and continuous news cycles. Social media facilitates instantaneous criminal reporting; nevertheless, it also contributes to the dissemination of misinformation, sensationalism, and the rise of the "trial by media" phenomena. The depiction of crime in various media raises questions regarding journalistic ethics, the right to fair trials and the public's involvement in the legal system (Greer & McLaughlin, 2012). Moreover, the media's emphasis on prominent



occurrences sometimes results in a neglect of systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, and the criminogenic factors that contribute to criminal behavior. This study aims to examine the multifaceted role of media in criminology, including its effects on public perceptions, its influence on criminal justice policy, and its contribution to societal understanding (or misunderstanding) of crime and justice. This study seeks to examine the interdependent relationship between media and criminology to ascertain the consequences of media representations for scholarly crime research and their tangible impact on legal and social systems. This research aims to investigate the influence of media coverage on public perceptions of crime and justice, and how these perceptions affect governmental policies and society reactions to crime.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: Investigating the relationship between crime and the media reveals a complex and developing connection that has a significant impact on public perceptions and society reactions to criminal behavior. Chris Greer has stated that we are in a transitional phase in which advances in information and communication technologies have revolutionized the depiction and understanding of crime. The media not only creates narratives about crime, but it also reflects and magnifies society worries, resulting in misconceptions and moral panic. Diverse media sources, including conventional channels and internet platforms, give varied views of crime, which can influence public opinion and inform government choices. The globalization of media complicates these images, necessitating a critical examination of how crime emerges across many cultural contexts. Scholars must continue to investigate the impact of developing media technologies and how they affect crime narratives. Approaches such as text analysis can provide substantial insights into the biases and patterns inherent in crime reporting. Finally, understanding the complicated link between crime and the media is critical for both criminology and media studies, as it increases our understanding of the mechanics of societal values, fear and social control in an increasingly networked and mediated society (Greer, 2013).

According to the authors, notwithstanding the reduction in crime rates, crime continues to pose a substantial problem to society. It is regarded as sensible behavior, impacted by the costs and advantages of numerous options. They emphasize that crime affects all individuals, especially marginalized groups such as youth, blacks, the poor, and the unemployed. To address this issue, the authors recommend some strategies such as reducing unemployment to make legal work more attractive than illegal activities, increasing education to tackle income disparities and improve job prospects, and addressing substance abuse by reducing the demand for illegal drugs and controlling alcohol consumption. They stress the importance of adapting laws to meet contemporary needs, ensuring that they are effective in preventing crime (Fadaei-Tehrani & Green, 2002).

Jonathan Intravia's research examines the correlation between social media consumption and individuals' fear of crime, emphasizing that fear has long been recognized as a social issue associated with environmental cues. Jay Glascock's study shows that much of society's understanding of crime and the criminal justice system is shaped by exposure to the media, which often promotes negative attitudes towards the police. Vivian Carly discussed the role of media in crime prevention considering its importance in disseminating information and shaping public perceptions about crime trends and safety. Sarah Sun Beale investigates how market forces influence media coverage of crime and violence, ultimately affecting public opinion and informing criminal justice policies. Erin M. Kearns investigates the impact of entertainment media on public perception, specifically in terms of counterterrorism measures. Collectively, these studies highlight the complex relationship between media portrayals and public perceptions, exposing a considerable study vacuum regarding media misuse and misinterpretation in molding social perspectives on crime. It emphasizes the importance of increasing media literacy and vigilance among the general people when reading crime-related news (Anand & Ms. Mohini Taneja, 2024).

The media's involvement in the Indian criminal justice system is both essential and intricate, serving as a potent instrument for public awareness while also threatening the integrity of judicial proceedings. The media, considered the "fourth pillar of democracy," is responsible for informing the people about legal rights, societal issues, and the functioning of the judicial system. Its ability to improve comprehension of essential topics promotes constructive social change and responsibility among law enforcement officials. The concept of "trial by media" has considerable ethical challenges, since sensationalist journalism may provoke public frenzy and prejudice against individuals before they have a fair trial. The advent of technology and social media has intensified these challenges, enabling the rapid spread of information that may at times be inaccurate or exaggerated. Prominent examples, such as the homicides of Jessica Lal and Aarushi Talwar, exemplify how media coverage may shape public opinion and influence judicial outcomes, often compromising justice. Media firms must adhere to ethical standards and maintain responsible journalistic practices to address these difficulties. This involves ensuring accuracy, fairness, and respect for the rights of everyone involved



in judicial procedures. Maintaining a balance between the media's role in public education and its capacity to disrupt the court process is essential for upholding the integrity of the criminal justice system (Singh & Gupta, 2023).

The field of media criminology investigates how the public's perceptions of crime and justice are greatly influenced by media representation. The media actively molds societal opinions in addition to reflecting them. What impact does this have on people's perceptions of crime rates and the characteristics of criminal behavior? Sensationalized portrayals frequently contribute to heightened anxieties about crime, particularly when it comes to violent crimes, while omitting the frequency and consequences of corporate and white-collar crimes. Given that legislative agendas and law enforcement tactics are often shaped by media framing, this misperception may have major policy ramifications. The rapid development of technology and the rise of social media have changed the landscape of crime reporting, presenting both challenges and opportunities for media criminology. These changes require new methodologies to study the complex interactions between media, crime and society. Ethical considerations are paramount in this area; Media practitioners have a responsibility to provide accurate and equitable representations of crime to avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes and stigma (Santos, 2024).

The article describes the role of media as a powerful force in shaping perceptions of gender and sexuality in the context of the New Delhi gang rape incident. It highlights how American news media coverage invoked archetypes of the Third World, portraying it as a primitive and undisciplined place. Which was characterized by cruel men and subordinate women. This structure shows that women's mobility is impeded and the state authority is involved in making women vulnerable to sexual assault due to its incompetence in governance. The analysis emphasizes that the initial coverage of the event set the tone for later interpretations, effectively defining the event and limiting the range of meanings associated with it. Media attention to violence against women in India, while ignoring similar issues in the global north, reinforced the social geography of power in terms of gender and sex. This racial lens obscured the global nature of sexual violence, erasing the possibility of cross-national solidarity and collective action against this pervasive issue. The author contends that the media's portrayal of the New Delhi incident influenced public perceptions of gender and sexuality, while also reinforcing hierarchical power structures that affect feminist activism and the global discourse on sexual violence (Durham, 2014).

The location of living markedly affected individuals' perceptions of media content in several ways. Rural inhabitants mostly relied on conventional media, such as television and radio, for news, while urban inhabitants had a stronger inclination towards social media and internet platforms. The divergence in media consumption habits led to rural inhabitants experiencing limited exposure to diverse viewpoints and sensational material, so shaping their views of crime and security. Rural participants often saw their neighborhoods as secure and exhibited considerable confidence in their neighbors, influencing their perception of crime reports. Acquaintance with the victim or perpetrator intensified terror, making the event more intimate. Conversely, urban inhabitants seeing a greater frequency of crime reports may develop a more apathetic or critical viewpoint towards media portrayals. Moreover, citizens in rural regions often saw media coverage as sensationalist and questioned its veracity, voicing worries about privacy invasion and the exaggeration of criminal portrayals. The skepticism was less evident among urban dwellers, who were acquainted with varied media narratives. In rural areas, strong social connections shaped the perception of media material, especially crime narratives, which were often linked to individuals within their own social circles. This link engendered a sense of uneasiness when individuals could directly identify with victims or offenders. The residential location affected both the media consumption and the perception and reaction to crime-related news, with rural inhabitants exhibiting a more profound personal connection to media narratives than their urban counterparts (Silva & Guedes, 2022).

The influence of crime-based reality shows and television news on public views of fear and crime is greater than that of crime dramas and newspapers, indicating the crucial role that media plays in influencing public opinion. Additionally, the perceived realism of media content is an important factor influencing fear of crime, as television news is often seen as more realistic than crime dramas, possibly contributing to increased fear among viewers. A significant portion of television news is devoted to crime-related content, especially violent and unusual crimes, which increases the prominence of crime in the minds of viewers and can lead to a distorted perception of the risk of crime. In addition, the study notes that the practices of news consulting firms have led to the simplification of news content, which potentially disrupts complex thinking about crime and at the same time increases fear (Callanan, 2012).

Greg Barak links media representation to public perceptions of crime, arguing that mass media plays an important role in shaping and reinforcing social discussions about crime and justice. He points out that the media often construct conceptual images of crime that influence how the public perceives and interprets criminal behavior and justice



responses. Barak observes that criminologists and social scientists have predominantly delegated the formulation of these media narratives to journalists and entertainment producers, leading to a constrained and frequently distorted representation of crime. They contend that crime news generally emerges from a restricted range of topics aligned with the interests of law enforcement and political entities, leading to a depiction that may not accurately reflect the complexities of crime and its social context. This circumstance requires Barak criminologists to actively participate in the media to provide a more nuanced and informed perspective on crime, so influencing public perception and promoting a more correct understanding of crime and justice (Barak, 1988).

The writers make the link between how the media portrays crime and political decisions by focusing on how media coverage shapes public opinion and the pressure that this puts on state institutions and politicians. They say that the media doesn't just show reality; it also shapes it by showing problems in ways that might require government institutions to take certain actions. They look at how increased media coverage of crime might make people feel like things need to be done right away, which could put pressure on the government to put quick results ahead of public opinion and due process. This conversation shows how the media act as a go-between for the public and the different crime and justice agencies, affecting how these agencies talk about and do their jobs. The writers also point out that different groups, like interest groups and government agencies, have different levels of access to the media and can have different levels of impact depending on their resources, like money and PR knowledge. This unequal access to the media can shape political goals and policy choices, as shown by the fact that groups have gone after media coverage to push for changes to laws about jail reform (Schlesinger et al., 1991).

Media exposure profoundly influences public perceptions of crime and attitudes toward law enforcement, with variances determined by race and the specific sort of media consumed. It highlights that repeated exposure to crime-related media creates an "average world syndrome," whereby individuals, especially Caucasians, perceive the world as more dangerous and develop a more favorable attitude towards the police. Interestingly, radio was identified as the strongest predictor of fear of crime, suggesting that content formats - especially episodic and sensational reporting - play an important role in shaping perceptions. While fear of crime mediated the relationship between media exposure and attitudes toward police, this effect was not consistent across racial groups, indicating a complex interplay of personal experiences and racial backgrounds. The findings also showed that local news media did not universally promote anti-police sentiments but rather negative attitudes were often specific to particular incidents or officers, especially among people of color. The study calls for further research to explore the nuances of media content and its impact on public opinion, especially in diverse communities, and emphasizes the need for longitudinal studies to understand the sequential effects of media exposure over time (Shin & Watson, 2022).

3. CONCLUSION: This review paper demonstrates how media coverage significantly influences public perceptions of crime and justice. The way crime gets reported really influences how people see safety, criminal behavior, and how well the justice system works. Media stories often focus on sensational and violent crimes, which can make people more afraid and create distorted views of crime rates that don't always match what's actually happening. Laws and how people respond to crime are both affected by how people see things. People who make policy might feel like they need to address public worries, which could lead to stricter rules and punishments that don't really address the reasons behind crime. People may also trust police and the legal system in their neighborhood more or less depending on how the news covers events. So, it's very important for news sites to be careful when they report on crime and make sure they give fair and correct information that keeps people informed. This way of doing things can help us have deeper talks about crime and justice, which could lead to policies that work and are fair. It's very important to keep researching this area so that we can understand how the media affects policy and popular opinion. It's very important that our reactions to crime are based on facts not fear.

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