

Die Rolle der Massenmedien in der Gesellschaft / The Functions of Mass Media

PLEASE READ THIS TEXT INDEPENDENTLY AND VERY CAREFULLY. USE A BILINGUAL DICTIONARY WHILE READING THE TEXT. HIGHLIGHT, UNDERLINE, AND PUT NOTES AT THE MARGINS. YOU CAN PUT TRANSLATIONS WITH A PENCIL ABOVE NEW AND IMPORTANT WORDS.

The Functions of Mass Media

Almost everyone gets his or her information about world, national, and local affairs from the mass media. This fact gives both print and broadcast journalism important functions that include influencing public opinion, determining the political agenda, providing a link between the government and the people, acting as a government watchdog, and affecting socialization¹.

PUBLIC OPINION

The mass media not only report the results of public opinion surveys¹ [...]. More important, newspapers and television help shape public opinion as well. Research has shown that the positions Americans take on critical issues are influenced by the media, especially when the media air² divergent views and provide in-depth analysis.

POLITICAL AGENDA

The term political agenda is broader in scope³ than the term public opinion, and it refers to the issues Americans think are the most important and that government needs to address. A person's perception of such matters as crime, civil rights, the economy, immigration, and welfare are affected by the manner and extent of media coverage. Studies indicate⁴ that a correlation⁵ exists between the significance people assign a problem and the frequency and amount of space or time newspapers, magazines, and television give to it.

LINK BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE

The mass media is the vehicle⁶ through which the government informs, explains, and tries to win support for its programs and policies. [...] Today, the major networks do not always give the president desired airtime if they believe the purpose is essentially political. If they do grant the time, the opposition party usually has the opportunity to rebut what the president says or present its own views on a topic immediately after the president speaks.

GOVERNMENT WATCHDOG

From muckraking⁷ early in the century to today's investigative reporting⁸, an important function of the mass media is to bring to the attention of the American people evidence of corruption, abuse of power, and ineffective policies and programs. [...] Although the media are often accused of having a "liberal bias"⁹ (and, indeed, surveys show most journalists to be liberal Democrats), all presidential administrations face close scrutiny from print and broadcast journalists.

SOCIALIZATION

The mass media, most significantly through its news, reporting, and analysis, affects what and how we learn about politics and our own political views. Along with family, schools, and religious organizations, television also becomes part of the process by which people learn society's values and come to understand what society expects from them. In this regard, the impact comes primarily from entertainment programming. Television's portrayal¹⁰ of minorities and women, family relations, and the place of religion in American life is considered to be a powerful influence on our attitudes.

Some people believe that Americans, especially children, imitate behavior observed in media communications. They are, therefore, concerned about the quantity of sex and violence on TV. This theory of behavior may be naive, and certainly it lacks consistent or weighty scientific evidence¹¹. Nevertheless, the perspective is a significant political force, because it links social conservatives who disapprove of sexual promiscuity¹² with social liberals who find America's gun culture distasteful. Both the legislative and executive branches have pressured networks to clean up what former [US] Vice President Al Gore called the "cultural wasteland."

Source: CliffsNotes, <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/american-government/the-mass-media/the-functions-of-the-mass-media> [accessed: 05.07.18]

Word Cloud

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1. public opinion surveys – Meinungsumfragen
2. to air – ausstrahlen/senden (im Fernsehen oder Radio)
3. broader in scope – weiter im Umfang
4. to indicate – hier: darauf hinweisen
5. correlation – ein gegenseitiger Zusammenhang
6. vehicle – Fahrzeug (hier: das Medium)
7. muckraking – Schlammschlacht
8. investigative reporting – investigativer (aufklärender bzw. ermittelnder) Journalismus
9. liberal bias – "linkslastig" (d. h. Journalisten befinden sich mehrheitlich eher im politisch linken Spektrum)
10. television's portrayal (of) ... – die Darstellung im Fernsehen (von) ...
11. it lacks consistent or weighty scientific evidence – es fehlt an aussagekräftigen wissenschaftlichen Belegen
12. to disapprove of sexual promiscuity – sexuelle Freizügigkeit ablehnen

Tasks:

- 1.) For the paragraphs following each of the five subtitles, write a short definition *in German* with a pencil next to it.
- 2.) Please create a bilingual mind map, in which you note the functions of mass media in today's society. Go beyond the information from the text above, should you have prior knowledge.
- 3.) In accordance with your mind map, write a short definition for an encyclopedia, which could be used for younger students at your school (either select Grade 6 or 8 as your target audience). Write the definition *in English and in German*.
- 4.) Explain both the merits and the dangers of mass media for society. Make a list for both categories beforehand!
- 5.) Choose either of the two topics to write an open essay. *You have the choice of language for your answer.*
 - a) Some people say that a democratic and equal society cannot work without a free press. Explain!
 - b) Some people call the media the 4th power in a state – in addition to the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. Explain what this means!