

Jonathan Trevino

Rhetoric 306

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The Daily Caller is a right wing opinion news site founded by former Fox News host Tucker Carlson in Washington D.C. The news website has a target audience that mainly consists of older citizens with ages fifty five and up occupying sixty percent of their site. This is a conservative audience who tends to be more hostile on the subject of media influence with many referring to the left as the main source of the problem. Therefore, the audience will not agree with my argument on how the media universally strives to influence and change American Identity. In order to persuade the audience towards my own opinion, I will reach out to them through social media platforms like Facebook, Reddit, Instagram while also considering the possibility of writing my own article for Daily Caller.

The Influence of Media on American Identity

Every day, millions of Americans tune into their news channels or websites to catch up on information they're interested in. Where it is politics, sports, or crime the media covers almost every subject imaginable so the public can stay informed about events around the world as much as possible. However, while displaying information to their viewers some news genres seem to present more bias than others in order to influence public perception. Additionally as time has gone on, there have been many reports of increased polarization especially in terms of politics. Many news organizations have also accused each other of presenting biased information in order to change opinion. However, I am here to argue that all media strive to influence public opinion

on certain topics which can change the American identity. The motivation to argue this comes from the fact that the media is extremely influential in everyone's daily lives regardless of whether or not a specific person watches the news. This is because the media can change public opinion or influence tradition and cultures in addition to simply providing regular news.

Therefore, I will argue that every form of media can be biased and will influence the public in order to reach their goals so the readers of this essay can make their own opinions and decisions on news they receive.

There are many reasons that the media constantly tries to influence public perception on certain topics. The reasons are explained in great detail by North Carolina's English professor PILAR Garce' S-conejos Blitvich in a book called "Impoliteness and Identity in the American News Media: The "Culture Wars." Blitvich says that in order to gain more views and be more successful, the media uses the concept of "impoliteness" based on the belief that added discourse generates more attention. Additionally, Blitvich states that the media's intentions can be seen through the scope of identity theory. For further explanation, identity theory is the way people associate themselves with a collection of identities in order to fit certain roles. For example, people can associate with each other in relation to religious groups, race, gender, or even sports teams. Furthermore, Identity Theory states that in order to make someone's group be seen in a more distinctive and unique manner, the group must first be put in comparison to another. This is the aspect of Identity Theory that the media takes advantage of. For example, the past Fox News host Tucker Carlson stated "the leaders of today's Democratic Party despise this country... we cannot let them run this nation because they hate it. Imagine what they would do to it." First, the speech is immediately directed toward people who identify with a certain group. Then, aggressive words such as "hate" are placed into the dialogue to invoke emotion. Afterwards, the

audience is left to speculate what the opposing group could do within the context of a negative scene. Unfortunately, these kinds of scenarios are frequently placed within segments of news channels. The quote clearly didn't display any news, but it was but within the context of news that had already been told or will be told immediately afterwards. As stated by Blitvich, the media believes that "if political debate is not passionate and lively political television programs are not successful." (Impoliteness) For example, Carlson's quote could be seen as disrespectful towards the Democratic party because of its accusations that aren't supported by evidence. Or in another scenario, a reporter can ask a question to the respondent that seems to be normal, but provokes a negative reaction from the respondent because of information the audience isn't aware of.

Apart from the "impoliteness" Blitvich discusses there are plenty of other strategies the media uses to influence the public. This is explained through journalist and author Scott London's "How the Media Frames Political Issues". London talks about how the media uses techniques called framing to show that news reports are "less important than the interpretive commentary that attends it." (How the Media) This can be done through episodic framing which shows news in the form of specific events or thematic framing which places events into its general context. The framing technique itself isn't necessarily the problem but the context it's used within is. A news channel can use episodic framing to show specific events that make the subject look bad or could reverse it and use thematic framing to make events look bad because of the subject it's been placed in. For an example of both techniques one can look at the actions of horse race journalism. Reporters rush to show polling data on political candidates during elections which does show public perception but brings focus away from the candidate's policies and agenda.

Although the media is the main factor for this subject they are not the only ones who take part in these kinds of actions. Politicians, for example, use the media in order to influence public perception. In Cohen's "The Influence of Presumed Media Influence in Politics" three college professors conduct research through experiments and surveys to see how much the media affects the actions of politicians. In the end they concluded that the media not only influences the politicians actions but has also become a tool for politicians to use for their own gain. As stated by Cohen, "The more a politician believes that media are powerful and are of key importance to achieving his or her goals—reelection or political survival and policymaking and legislation—the more they are likely to desire news exposure and invest efforts to attain this goal." (The Influence) For example, when Barack Obama became president journalists had initially focused on his policies in a negative light. In response to this, Obama traveled and gave speeches about his economic stimulus package to get media attention away from potential negative coverage in the future (episodic framing).

Although there are ways for the public to lessen their odds of being influenced by the media, a majority of the public does not take the precautions needed. For example, a research study from Pew Research Center found that forty-seven percent of conservatives pay more attention to Fox News which tends to lean more towards the right. In other words, the media has an easier time framing information when a majority of their audience holds the same beliefs and values. This is explained by the concept of hypodermic theory provided by educational website Lumen in an article called "The Impact of the Media". Hypodermic Theory states that that information is readily accepted and received by the audience if they are watching a source that they trust. This theory not only applies to traditional media but to social media as well. Using Barack Obama as an example again, he was the first president to use twitter and other social

media platforms as a means of connecting with the public. Additionally as explained by Boston University researcher Flavia Roscini's "How the American Media Landscape Is Polarizing the Country", she discusses how social media has a two way model allowing anyone to share or "repost" information provided by presidents like Barack Obama, Donald Trump, or any average user. Although this kind of feature has had many positive impacts on globalization and communication overall, there have been plenty of negative effects. Misinformation, for example, has spread considerably because of social media. Roscini also mentioned the algorithms of social media platforms that filter out information the user isn't interested in. These features implemented by social media further capitalizes on the media's influence through the use of hypodermic theory. As affirmed by Roscini, " "filter bubbles" may be formed and society may be more polarized ideologically, as it is less exposed to divergent viewpoints." Put it into perspective this way, as a parent would you want your children constantly hanging out with the same crowd? Or would you hope that they eventually move on to meet different diverse groups that could help them grow as a person?

Polarization increases even more when the media starts to influence the public on the perception of other media outlets. This is shown through "The Biggest Threat to America's Future Is the Media" written by Daily Caller writer Rick Hayes as he talks about the media being the biggest threat America has to face. However, when he refers to the media he meant left leaning media outlets specifically. In other words, Hayes' blames the left as using the media to "serve as the propagandist and protector of the forces that want to change America from a constitutional republic to a socialist state." (The Biggest) Articles like these show how biased the media can get in what information they choose to display on top of showing what effects media outlets have on each other. Therefore, scenarios like these only further the effects of polarization

while also causing the public to distrust the media. A good example of this is the January 6th Insurrection where supporters of a political candidate raided the U.S. capitol because both politicians and the media spread feelings of negativity after the 2020 presidential election. The event increased polarization between political parties, led to many U.S. citizens committing major crimes, and caused distrust in government which therefore changed the American Identity.

In conclusion, the media influences American Identity through their drive to be more successful overall. Additionally, through framing techniques and assisted coverage from influential figures the media changes public opinion on certain topics while increasing their already potent effects through practices like horse race journalism. Furthermore, the public's interaction with social media's algorithms and their tendency to only watch sources that match their own values make it easier for the media's influence to spread. All of these factors can change the culture, traditions, and values of the public which therefore change American Identity.

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