

# *The Influence of the Mass Media on the Formulation of Public Policies*

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**Abstract:** As the most common information aggregator, disseminator, and communicator in modern society, mass media affects all aspects of people's political, economic, social, and cultural life. With the rapid development of modern communication technology, mass media has become one of the main influencing factors in public policy formulation. Mass media has broken through the traditional public policy behavior mode and realized the two-way interaction between policy formulation and the public, which can break through the bounded rationality of decision-makers to a certain extent and guarantees the publicity of public policies. This article will briefly introduce the mass media, talk about the influence of the mass media on the formulation of public policies, and point out the issues that the mass media should pay attention to in the process of public policy formulation.

## 1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, the world has entered the information age, and the mass media using the Internet as the carrier has rapidly occupied a pivotal position in people's daily life. It has generated influence on many aspects of society, politics, economy, culture, daily life, and interpersonal communication.

### 1.1 The Nature of Mass Media

The most basic nature of modern mass media is its social attributes, because the media's service targets, report content, spread scope, and activity purposes all have a wide range of social characteristics. The communication of the media has penetrated into all areas of modern social life. It has a wide audience and great appeal. People living in modern society are dealing with the media all the time, so it has become an important part of people's daily life. The media also guides the social trend and has a subtle influence on people's ideas and social value judgments.

The other nature of mass media is its political nature. From the history of the development of the media industry, it can be seen that after the emergence of the media industry as a social enterprise, it soon became a public opinion tool for political parties and social groups to develop economic production and engage in political struggles. Becoming a public opinion tool that serves the economic and political system of a certain society. This is the political nature of the media. Its characteristic is that the media, as a tool of political propaganda, is always attached to politics. The content and form

of reports have a distinct political orientation. The media, as an integrator of social interests, can also be used to supervise the government.

In addition, Mass media also has public attributes. Because of its wide audience, mass media has become the main bridge and link between all parties in public life. In a highly developed information society, the masses are increasingly dependent on communication activities. In other words, the current mass media has penetrated into every part of people's social life and public life, so it has been inevitably involved in public life.

## **1.2 The Function of Mass Media**

Mass media can give people, events, and social activities a certain social status. American sociologists P.F. Lazarsfeld and R.K. Merton believe that mass communication can legitimize social events and people, establish prestige, and gain a prominent position. On the contrary, it can also make them lose prestige.

Mass media can play an intermediary role in social control. Mass communication is an intermediary field between upper social control and the majority of members. It can publicize and clarify certain public morals and social norms, gain extensive knowledge and social recognition, and can also make corruption condemned by public opinion.

Mass media can monitor the environment and protect the society. The mass media has very advanced scientific and technological means. It should serve the interests of the most people, collect news materials and carry out news reports, focusing on new facts, problems, changes and trends.

## **1.3 The Relationship between Mass Media and Public Policy**

As a carrier of information dissemination and public opinion, mass media can provide many convenient conditions for the social development of the public, and at the same time provide a strong guarantee for the scientific and rationality of public policy formulation.

The mass media generally report or not report on a certain topic, highlight certain topics, and report on topics to varying degrees in accordance with a certain priority order, which will affect the public's judgment on these topics. In fact, decision makers will also be affected by the mass media when determining policy issues. These phenomena are mainly due to the fact that in modern society, people generally regard the facts highlighted by the media as the focus of the real society and represent public opinion. The mass media can make certain public issues quickly recognized by the public. The strong public opinion made public policy issues quickly enter the government's agenda.

## **2. The Role of the Mass Media in Making Public Policies**

The mass media has three main functions in the formulation of public policies, and these three functions also present a progressive trend in the process of public policy formulation.

### **2.1 Raising Public Issues and Promoting Problem Identification**

The formulation of a public policy must first have policy issues raised. The mass media can use its social control intermediary role to collect information and create public opinion, raise public issues, and influence policy makers' consideration of public issues.

The mass media can monitor environmental changes and promptly discover and raise public issues. In real life, social problems emerge in an endless stream. For the public, an unsatisfactory state of social reality is inevitable. The mass media can usually use their acumen to discover social problems at first, and then the attention of social issues has gradually developed into public social issues, and

then into public policy issues. On the one hand, since the mass media in modern society has the greatest possible exposure to information and the public, the first to respond strongly to social problems in society, especially emergencies that have a certain impact, is the mass media. On the other hand, due to the openness, directness, and rapidity of the information transmission of the mass media, it can quickly spread the social problems discovered and raised by a few people and their expectations for policies in the society. The large-scale continuous reporting of emergencies often arouses widespread public concern.

The mass media can create a “focus effect” and give birth to hot public issues. The mass media can use the media's information diffusion and repeated reports, as well as the exaggeration of interest groups and professional researchers, so that specific issues can be recognized by the policy system and ordinary people as much as possible. On this basis, wide-ranging information dissemination can also expand the group of policy appeals, so as to win a wider range of public support, which will present the “focus effect” of social public opinion, and the “focus effect” often creates strong public opinion pressure. It will prompt the government to accept the wishes and demands from the public, and then make corresponding adjustments to public policies.

## **2.2 Effectively Influence the Setting of the Policy Agenda**

The influence of the mass media on the establishment of the public policy agenda is mainly realized through the following three stages.

The first is to promote the transformation of the public agenda into a policy agenda as soon as possible. The mass media take the initiative to discover and raise issues and promote the transformation of public agendas into policy agendas. There are two main ways: one is to open up as much space as possible for the expression of public opinion through reports and comments in various media such as newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. The second is to express opinions on specific social or public issues, and strive to attract public participation, comment and support, and put pressure on decision makers, thereby promoting the public agenda to be a policy agenda. After private issues become public issues through media propaganda, relevant people and interests are expressed through the media, forming a common tendency of public opinion on such incidents, and the pressure of public opinion forces the government to respond to policy formulation.

The second is to lead the value orientation and benefit orientation. In the process of making public policies, policy makers must take into account the requirements of various interests, integrate their interests to maximize public interests, thereby optimizing policy programs, and making public policies scientific and democratized. There are many channels for expressing interests. As an effective bridge between the people and the government, the mass media provides a window for many people who are unable to contact the decision-making system to express their problems and opinions, and become the spokesperson of the disadvantaged groups, thereby expanding the scope of policy issues. It effectively overcomes the limitations of blind spots in government decision-making, and objectively opens up a broad path for citizens' extensive, in-depth and universal administrative participation. Regardless of the environment, the information transmitted by the mass media is the result of selecting, sorting out, eliminating and processing the collected information. This process of layer-by-layer processing and screening often acts as a “guide” for the public in terms of value orientation and benefit orientation.

The last is to construct a “second reality”. The so-called “second reality” refers to the fact that the mass media use their “keen sense of smell” to frequently report and discuss a certain issue, which affects the audience's perception and attitude of the content and nature of the issue, thereby influencing the establishment of a policy agenda. The mass media's attention to special issues has always been an important way for social or public issues to enter the policy agenda by constructing a second reality to make the issue enter the vision of policy makers.

## 2.3 Decisions Affecting Public Policy

In the entire policy decision process, the participation of the mass media as a public space is very important. First, before the decision is formed, the mass media as a public space can bring together people of different cultural backgrounds, life ambitions, ideological characters, and abilities. Through open and fair discussions, people's individuality and creativity can be brought into full play, provide information and reference for policy decisions, and promote policy decisions. The second is that in the process of policy making, mass media as a public space can provide a broad social network platform for social discussion and decision-making. Here, individuals, social organizations and groups analyze and demonstrate the government's decision-making issues, exchange opinions, and make suggestions. Their respective political opinions are for the reference of policy makers. Through discussions, the mass media can fully reflect the opinions of all sectors of society and pool their ideas, which can inspire and urge makers to consider issues from different angles and make policies more in line with the wishes and interests of the people.

## 3. Issues That the Mass Media Should Pay Attention to in Making Public Policies

When some major public issues occur, the public particularly needs the mass media to provide relevant information or answer questions in a timely manner. However, if the mass media “does not act” at this time, it is a taboo. Because the longer this “inaction” lasts, the public's suspicion and confusion will become more and more serious, and the more likely it is to cause local or overall social turmoil. Therefore, the mass media should avoid “inaction” as much as possible, and should always use keen insight and rapid response to discover bits and pieces of information, and select newsworthy ones for follow-up reports. At the same time, within the scope permitted by the policy, obtain information from the government and relevant departments as soon as possible, and pass it to the audience, so as to prevent major public issues from expanding and becoming difficult to suppress.

The mass media must consider not only social benefits, but also economic benefits. Naturally, there are various interest relationships that need to be balanced. Especially when social public problems occur, the mass media should take the public's response and interests into consideration in an attitude of being responsible to the public and guiding public opinion. However, along with it, the mass media will also place this issue under the major premise of the party and government's policies and the general environment of social development, and make overall considerations for the stable development of society and the coordination of various government tasks.

In short, with the gradual acceleration of the process of political democratization, the mass media can certainly play a constructive role in this process. As a “public space” in the social field, the mass media will give full play to its various functions, have a subtle impact on social politics, economy, and culture, and further promote the country's democratic process and the construction of political civilization.

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