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# **THE IMPACT OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CRIME**

AUTHORED BY - IFRA SHAIKH

## **I. ABSTRACT**

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of crime, often distorting reality through selective reporting, sensationalism, and biased coverage. News outlets, entertainment media, and digital platforms influence societal attitudes, legal proceedings, and policy decisions by exaggerating crime prevalence, reinforcing stereotypes, and fostering public fear. High-profile cases highlight the media's ability to interfere with judicial processes, sometimes leading to a "trial by media" that compromises fairness and objectivity. Additionally, algorithm-driven social media platforms contribute to misinformation and echo chambers, further shaping crime discourse in ways that may not reflect actual crime statistics.

The findings indicate that crime reporting frequently prioritizes engagement over accuracy, fuelling moral panics and influencing legislative responses that may not align with real crime trends. Sensationalized narratives often reinforce biases related to race, class, and social status, impacting law enforcement practices and public trust in the justice system. The growing impact of digital media exacerbates these issues, making it essential to promote ethical journalism, media literacy, and regulatory oversight.

The key questions arise that How does media representation of crime influence public perception and attitudes toward crime?, What types of crimes are overrepresented or underrepresented in the media, and why?, How does exposure to crime-related media content influence individuals' perceptions of safety in their communities?, How do media outlets frame crime stories, and what impact does this framing have on public opinion?, What biases exist in media coverage of crime, particularly regarding race, ethnicity, and social class?, What ethical responsibilities do media outlets have in reporting crime to avoid distorting public perception? Addressing these concerns requires a multi-faceted approach, including responsible crime reporting, public awareness initiatives, and stricter regulations to prevent misinformation. By fostering critical engagement with media and promoting fact-based crime discourse, society can work toward a more balanced, informed, and just representation of crime and criminal

justice.

**Key words:** Media Influence, Crime Perception, Sensationalism, Trial by Media, Misinformation, Media Literacy, Judicial Fairness.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

In contemporary media coverage, social media, major news outlets, and television entertainment all play important roles in moulding public opinions of crime. Such media representations can have a considerable impact on public perceptions of the prevalence, nature, and severity of crime in their areas and throughout the nation. These portrayals can also influence attitudes towards the fairness of the criminal justice system and the need for reform. Modern criminal justice curricula increasingly contain media literacy components to help future practitioners recognise and overcome the biased portrayals of crime in various media venues. Each media reference has a particular function in the public's view of crime. However, when taken together, they likely strengthen the public sense that criminal activity poses a greater and more immediate threat to the United States than publicly available crime data would suggest<sup>1</sup>.

The Impact of Media Representation on Public Perception of Crime is a key topic in Criminology which can arise some key questions that How does media representation of crime influence public perception and attitudes toward crime?, What types of crimes are overrepresented or underrepresented in the media, and why?, How does exposure to crimelated media content influence individuals' perceptions of safety in their communities?, How do media outlets frame crime stories, and what impact does this framing have on public opinion?, What biases exist in media coverage of crime, particularly regarding race, ethnicity, and social class?, What ethical responsibilities do media outlets have in reporting crime to avoid distorting public perception? These questions will guide the research process, helping to explore the complex relationship between media representation and public perception of crime from multiple angles.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.northwestcareercollege.edu/blog/the-influence-of-media-on-public-perception-of-crime/#:~:text=In%20modern%20media%20coverage%2C%20social,and%20at%20a%20national%20level.>

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. MEDIA AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OF REALITY:

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's "The Social Construction of Reality" (1966) provides a framework for understanding how social realities are created. They argue that reality is socially produced through a dialectical process of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. Media plays a crucial role in this process by externalizing societal standards, objectifying them through distribution, and internalizing them as shared ideas and values. Erving Goffman's media framing theory, further advanced by Robert Entman, investigates how media impacts perceptions by emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. Frames are interpretive structures that organize information and aid the audience's understanding of events. Editors, journalists, and producers play critical roles in shaping media content, deciding which news stories to cover, how to display them, and which viewpoints to include or exclude. Media representation refers to the portrayal of social groupings, identities, and issues in media output, which can perpetuate stereotypes, strengthen power relations, and influence public attitudes<sup>2</sup>.

#### B. THEORIES OF MEDIA INFLUENCE ON CRIME PERCEPTION

**a. Cultivation Theory:** The cultivation theory, proposed by George Gerbner and his colleagues, suggests that mass media, particularly television, significantly influences people's cultural and social values. They argue that mainstream media "cultivates" these values over time, leading to the development of the "Violence Profile" to connect images generated by television to cultural perceptions of reality. Gerbner and his colleagues' research primarily focuses on the impacts of violent television programs and the potential impact of excessive viewing on people's perceptions of the "real world." However, critics argue that the theory has theoretical and methodological weaknesses, such as the need for more accurate exposure metrics and a confrontation with the nonlinear nature of the relationship between exposure and worldview. James Potter recommends better description and justification of cultivation indicators and acknowledging that the relationship between exposure and behavior is not causal. One key flaw of the cultivation model is its failure to emphasize the "bigger picture" of media production and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://easysociology.com/sociology-of-media/the-social-constructionist-view-of-media-understanding-its-significance-in-sociology/>



consumption processes, which may lose the richness and distinctiveness of any group or subculture studied. The cultivation hypothesis is not the only strategy to operationalize research into mass media consumption and its relevance to cultural formation and transmission<sup>3</sup>.

**b. Agenda-Setting Theory:** Media's influence significantly impacts the presentation of news and issues, influencing public perception and influence. The media prioritizes news based on how people think and how much influence it will have on the audience. Agenda setting is achieved through cognitive processes known as "accessibility," where media delivers relevant information, portrays key societal issues, and represents people's thinking. There are two levels of agenda setting theory: first level, which studies media uses and objectives, and second level, which focuses on how people perceive challenges. The media aims to grab attention and implant thoughts about serious issues, turning certain subjects viral.

Agenda setting theory is used in political ads, campaigns, business news, and public relations. The primary concept associated with this theory is gatekeeping, which controls the selection of media content. It is assumed that the public cares most about the product of media gatekeeping. Editors are the principal gatekeepers of media, as they select events to broadcast and show through media 'gates' based on their 'newsworthiness'. News comes from various sources, and editors decide what should and should not appear, making them gatekeepers<sup>4</sup>.

**c. Framing Theory:** Framing theory is a research approach that focuses on the essence of issues rather than a specific topic. It suggests that media presents information to the audience, known as "the frame," which influences their interpretation of that information. Frames are abstractions that help organize and structure message meaning. The most common application of frames is when news or media places a frame around the facts they communicate, influencing the audience's perception of the news.

Goffman introduced the idea under the term Frame Analysis, proposing that people interpret reality using their primary framework, which is considered primary. Basic

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/cultivation-theory#:~:text=Cultivation%20Theory%20is%20a%20social,the%20dominant%20culture%20in%20socie ty.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.communicationtheory.org/agenda-setting-theory/>

frameworks include two components: natural and social. Nature frameworks recognize events as physical happenings, interpreting nature quotes literally, and not attributing social forces to event causation. Social frameworks, on the other hand, see events as socially driven occurrences caused by the whims, goals, and manipulations of other social players.

These frameworks and frames produced in communications have a significant impact on how data is interpreted, processed, and transmitted. Goffman's underlying assumption is that people are capable of using these frameworks on a daily basis, whether they are aware of it or not<sup>5</sup>.

**d. Moral Panic Theory:** Moral panic is a phenomenon where the media portrays a person or situation as a threat to societal values and interests. Stanley Cohen, the primary moral panic theorist, proposed that a moral panic occurs when a condition, episode, person, or group becomes defined as a threat to societal values and interests. Cohen believes that the media overreacts or sensationalises aspects of behavior that contradict social standards, leading to outsiders adopting and monitoring the behavior based on the model they see in the media. The moral panic depicted in the media encourages even more immoral behavior. In extreme cases, moral panic causes widespread hysteria across society, leading to widespread hysteria. Cohen identified five stages of moral panic:

- determining the threat,
- presenting the threat in a clearly identifiable form,
- causing a dramatic increase in public concern, • responding from authorities or opinion leaders, and
- subsiding or resulting in social adjustments.

Martin Barker and Julian Petley expanded on Moral Panic theory in their 1997 book 'Ill Effects: The media/violence argument', arguing that media violence was a moral panic, exaggerating the problem and drawing a parallel between actual and fictitious violence<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/framing-theory/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://revisionworld.com/a2-level-level-revision/media-studies-level-revision/moral-panic-theory>

## IV. TYPES OF MEDIA AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CRIME PERCEPTION

In today's media, social media, major news outlets, and television entertainment all play important roles in moulding public opinions of crime. Such media representations can have a considerable impact on people's perceptions of the prevalence, character, and severity of crime in their areas and across the country. These portrayals can also influence perceptions of the fairness of the criminal justice system and the need for reform. Modern criminal justice curricula increasingly contain media literacy components to help future practitioners comprehend and respond to biased representations of crime in various media venues<sup>7</sup>.

### A. NEWS MEDIA AND CRIME REPORTING

Crime reporting has long been a cornerstone of modern journalism, providing the public with the most up-to-date information about criminal activity, law enforcement, and the societal impact of crime. Crime stories are sometimes viewed through the prism of sensationalism or sorrow, yet they serve a far more important role in moulding society perceptions, pushing changes, and keeping the public informed<sup>8</sup>.

- i. **Sensationalism and Fear-Mongering:** Sensationalism, a term referring to gossip and exploitation of facts, is prevalent in today's media landscape, particularly in journalism. The media often exaggerates facts to make them appear dramatic and thrilling, aiming to improve ratings and generate revenue. The media's desire for violence and thrill is evident in the way headlines are filled with sensationalism, making even routine events appear spectacular. Fearmongering is another technique used by the media to exploit emotions and engage the public, making it difficult to determine what to believe.

Media sensationalism poses a threat to media literacy, which is crucial for understanding messages and media biases. With an abundance of information, the demand for media literacy is higher than ever. However, sensationalism in the media makes it difficult for readers and spectators to distinguish between sources and there is no accountability for media outlets that sensationalise stories. Consumers are disillusioned by the lack of content when forced to watch

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.northwestcareercollege.edu/blog/the-influence-of-media-on-public-perception-of-crime/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://journalism.university/reporting-techniques/crime-reporting-role-modern-journalism/>

sensationalized media, but media outlets are content with the response they receive. As sensationalism is too ingrained in our culture, it is essential to be cautious about which media sources we engage with<sup>9</sup>.

- ii. **Bias in Crime Coverage:** Sensationalism and bias in media reporting on crime can significantly impact people's understanding and knowledge of crime rates, trends, and types. When the media sets their main agendas as breaking and alarming news, it conveys distorted imagery that gives the wrong impression that crime levels are elevated than actual figures. This leads to fear, insecurity, and increased sensitivity to dangers, affecting behaviors and attitudes towards criminal justice. The use of sensationalized and biased media coverage can provoke moral panics, especially when some crimes are highlighted as more heinous or require more attention than others. This can cause readers to over react to issues presented to them, leading to extreme measures such as laws, increased surveillance, and funding for security agencies.

The media also helps maintain stereotypical perceptions and prejudices, especially in relation to the representation of minorities. Broadcasts often cover races or ethnic groups linked to criminal actions, reinforcing existing prejudices and shaping citizens' opinions. This contributes to racism and discrimination in law enforcement and justice, marginalizing these groups and making them vulnerable to police arrest and harsher sentencing when brought to trial. Overall, sensationalism and bias in media coverage can have a significant impact on society's understanding and perception of crime<sup>10</sup>.

## B. SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIRAL CRIME NARRATIVES

Because of the viral nature of social media, crime narratives, both true and false, can spread quickly, affecting public opinion and potentially shaping perceptions of crime and justice.

This can amplify misinformation, propagate anxiety, and even create "moral panics".

- i. **Role of Citizen Journalism:** Citizen journalism, where ordinary individuals act as reporters and share news across multiple platforms, has transformed the media

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<sup>9</sup> <https://ic4ml.org/blogs/sensationalism-in-the-media/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ijlra.com/paper-details.php?isuurl=the-influence-of-media-on-public-perception-of-crime-and-the-criminal-justice-system-by-nishant-bardoshiya>

landscape by allowing communities to express themselves, share stories, and highlight issues that would otherwise go unnoticed by traditional media channels. This shift is particularly significant in India, where citizens are increasingly using digital tools to report on local issues, raise awareness, and offer alternative viewpoints. The digital age has hastened this process, allowing anyone with an internet connection to become a reporter. Citizen journalism has both positive and negative consequences for traditional journalism. It challenges the hierarchical structures of news production, giving voice to communities previously underrepresented or ignored by mainstream outlets. This shift is especially important in democratic societies like India, where freedom of speech and the right to information are enshrined in the constitution. Citizen journalism allows citizens to hold governments and corporations accountable, exposing issues that might otherwise be overlooked. It amplifies the voices of marginalized communities, creating space for underrepresented groups to share their experiences and advocate for change. In India, where the media is often criticized for its lack of representation of marginalized communities, citizen journalism has played a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and promoting diversity<sup>11</sup>.

- ii. **Spread of Misinformation and Fake News:** Misinformation is a widespread social phenomenon that lacks factual basis and confirmation, causing significant harm to the public. With the development of internet technology and social media platforms, misinformation spreads rapidly, with characteristics such as fission diffusion, fast propagation speed, wide influence, and deep impact. The “information epidemic” refers to the physical and psychological reactions people face when faced with misinformation. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the World Health Organization recognized the importance of fighting against the “information epidemic.” The harm caused by misinformation spread on social media is more serious due to its fast propagation speed, wide influence, and deep impact. Therefore, understanding the propagation process of misinformation on social media and governing it is crucial. Social media serves as an important communication channel for two-way information exchange due to its convenience and timeliness. However, the interaction between true information and

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<sup>11</sup> <https://journalism.university/reporting-techniques/rise-citizen-journalism-platform-unheard-voices/>

misinformation on social media platforms can lead to emotional fluctuations and the spread of public opinions or emotions. Misinformation can cause confusion, wrong decisions, economic and material losses, and damage to health, medical, and other fields. Unconstrained misinformation can lead to social disorder and negative emotions, causing a significant impact on society<sup>12</sup>.

### **C. ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA AND CRIME DRAMATIZATION**

Mass media entertainment, including comic books and the Internet, has been linked to criminal behavior throughout the twentieth century. Research has shown a consistent, moderate causal relationship between exposure to televised violence and aggressive behavior in the real world. Theories for this link include social learning, excitation transfer, and disinhibition or desensitization. Three main subjects of research attention are the effects of violent media on children, the cultivation of beliefs about crime and the criminal justice system from viewing television, and the effects of pornography on adults. By the time a child reaches adolescence, they are likely to have seen thousands of crime depicted on television.

Cultivation theory hypothesizes that television's depiction of the world leads heavy viewers to believe that the real world resembles the television world in key respects, including the likelihood of crime and the proportion of people involved in the criminal justice system. Shrum and Mares have attempted to explain the psychological processes by which cultivation occurs, pointing to the accessibility of heuristics and "source confusion" as factors contributing to this tendency.

Concerns about adults' exposure to pornography also include the impact of such exposure on jury verdicts in rape trials and acceptance of "rape myths," such as women only pretending to resist rape. If exposure to pornography can affect jurors' decisions, voir dire in rape cases might benefit from questions about such exposure<sup>13</sup>.

Entertainment media has been criticized for its influence on public perceptions of the criminal justice system. Movies, OTT platforms, and serials often portray lawyers, police officers, and other judiciary bodies negatively, leading to mockery of court

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<sup>12</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1155/2021/7999760>

<sup>13</sup> <https://law.jrank.org/pages/1579/Mass-Media-Crime-Entertainment.html>

proceedings and altered filming. Digital media, despite being unqualified or educated, often provides misleading legal information, highlighting the non-universal interpretation of court interpretations. Bail is not a matter of right, but rather emphasized as a right. The growth of reality programming has blurred the lines between news and entertainment, fact and fiction. Today, sensational crime and justice events are webcast, high-profile celebrity trials are tweeted live, and riots and revolutions are orchestrated through social media. Just as law enforcement can use social media to track criminals, criminals can use it to track potential targets. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of the limitations of digital media in shaping public perceptions and ensuring fairness in the criminal justice system<sup>14</sup>.

#### **D. DIGITAL ALGORITHMS AND CRIME VISIBILITY ON ECHO CHAMBERS AND CONFIRMATION BIAS**

The echo chamber, a digital bubble in the media world, is a phenomenon where our beliefs and opinions are constantly reinforced, leading to a lack of alternative viewpoints. This echo chamber is driven by algorithms and personalization, which reinforces our existing viewpoints and filters through confirmation bias. This bias is deeply ingrained in human psychology and is what makes social media platforms addictive. Platforms like X and Meta thrive by delivering content that aligns with our preconceived notions, keeping us engaged and generating revenue.

However, echo chambers also serve as a double-edged sword for tech giants like X and Meta. These digital bubbles not only keep users engaged but also enable companies to sell more advertising. This financial allure creates a complex dilemma, as while user engagement is at the heart of business models, there is little financial incentive for these platforms to use their influence wisely.

At the end, it is essential to choose interactions and engagements wisely when navigating these digital spaces, as the echo chamber is designed to ensure platforms profit more than their users. It is crucial to challenge our own biases and actively seek diverse perspectives to break free from the confines of the echo chamber and promote intellectual growth<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.campaignasia.com/article/the-echo-chamber-effect-how-algorithms-shape-ourworldview/491762>

Algorithms play a crucial role in social media feeds, but they also create echo chambers that perpetuate issues like online hatred and misinformation. These echo chambers are created by algorithms learning from user engagement with content, such as likes, comments, and shares. They keep users interested by displaying relevant and entertaining content, similar to how websites use cookies to offer relevant ads.

Echo chambers are situations where people only see information that reinforces their existing thoughts and attitudes. These echo chambers work by hiding irrelevant content, which can contribute to a more balanced understanding of the world. However, not viewing this content may lead to confirmation bias, where people see content that validates their opinions while providing alternative points of view.

Algorithms generate echo chambers by providing content similar to what users are already engaging with, often promoting hateful content. This can lead to exposure to dangerous content, conspiracy theories, and radicalism. Children, particularly those with limited critical thinking and digital literacy abilities, are more likely to accept radical or controversial ideas due to their brain development stage.

Exposure to online hatred, such as racism and misogyny, can negatively impact children's well-being and development. Frequent exposure to unsuitable, violent, or nasty information can lead to desensitization, making individuals unaware of the harmful content they see and unable to determine when it is appropriate to take action. To address these issues, it is essential to teach children and young people how to manage content suggestions and take action on their own<sup>15</sup>.

## **V. MEDIA'S ROLE IN SHAPING CRIME-RELATED FEAR AND STEREOTYPES**

The mass media plays an essential effect in shaping attitudes towards crime and the criminal justice system. The media's portrayal of victims, criminals, deviant behaviour, and law enforcement officers has a significant impact on public perception<sup>17</sup>. Stereotypes are

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/news-blogs/what-are-algorithms-how-to-prevent-echochambers/> <sup>17</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381980977\\_The\\_Influence\\_of\\_Mass\\_Media\\_on\\_Public\\_Perception\\_of\\_Criminal\\_Cases\\_A\\_Qualitative\\_Approach#:~:text=The%20mass%20media%20have%20an,their%20representation%20in%20the%20media.](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381980977_The_Influence_of_Mass_Media_on_Public_Perception_of_Criminal_Cases_A_Qualitative_Approach#:~:text=The%20mass%20media%20have%20an,their%20representation%20in%20the%20media.)



frequently used in media portrayals to simplify tales, connecting specific demographic groupings with criminal behaviour. Impact: These images exacerbate societal biases, stigmatising minority communities and shaping public opinions towards race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position<sup>16</sup>.

**i. Fear of Crime and Public Anxiety:** Fear of crime refers to the emotional reaction, rather than the cognitive one, that people have when they consider becoming a victim of crime. It is a typical occurrence that might cause stress and behavioural precautions, reducing overall quality of life<sup>17</sup>. Public perception of crime is on the rise, and halting it has been a priority for government spending. Studies show an inverse association between fear of crime and subjective measures of physical, general, and mental health. The direction of causality and linking pathways remain unclear. Fear of crime could lead to poorer health, but it is also plausible that physical health limitations and poor mental health could increase a person's sense of vulnerability and fear of the effect of crime. Longitudinal studies that control for the effect of physical or mental frailty on fear are needed to assess whether fear of crime contributes to the development of ill health.

Fear of crime may lead to avoidance, mistrust of others, restrictions in outdoor activities, and increased car use. This lifestyle increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, poor mental health, and poorer physical and cognitive functioning. Fear of crime may also have direct effects on psychological well-being. Finally, fear of crime may be a stressor with direct physiological and behavioral consequences for health, increasing vulnerability to pathogens, stimulating repeated physiological responses, and increasing the likelihood of heavy drinking<sup>20</sup>.

**ii. Racial and Socio-Economic Stereotyping in Crime Reports:** Sociological explanations of crime often suggest that economic deprivation is a motivational factor in crime manifestation. Poverty in a stratified society weakens institutional legitimacy and undermines social bonds between institutions and the impoverished. Economic hardship is particularly critical in understanding the disparity between crime rates of Blacks and Whites, as Blacks typically live in more economically

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-media-shaping-public-fear-crime-ishaan-d-joshi-cfpse-btiwf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/fear-of-crime#:~:text=Fear%20of%20crime%20is%20an,%2C%201995;%20Warr%2C%201985>  
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2040373/>

barren conditions than Whites. J.R. Blau and Blau (1982) argued that economic inequality, or the unequal distribution of wealth, money, and other economic resources between racial groups, has greater salience in explaining crime rates than the absolute level of socioeconomic conditions for a given racial group. Economic inequality is believed to engender resentment, hostility, frustration, and be a precipitating factor in the impetus of criminal behavior.

However, research to date has not provided unwavering support for the thesis that economic inequality between racial groups, or interracial economic inequality, accounted for racial differences in crime rates. While some early research studies supported the interracial economic inequality thesis, more contemporary research efforts failed to adduce convincing evidence of a relationship between economic inequality and crime.

Recent scholarship has shifted away from examining the possible utility of economic inequality as a predictor of Black crime rates specifically and as a predictor of racial differences in crime rates generally. The major limiting aspect of prior research in this area was the lack of data that allow one to fully address the economic inequality-crime thesis. Most early research studies had only examined the association between global economic inequality and global crime rates, failing to directly address whether racial differences in crime rates were attributable to racial economic inequality<sup>18</sup>.

## **VI. EFFECTS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES**

The media's influence on criminal trials is crucial in determining the fairness of trials, especially those that attract public attention. The media can prejudice potential jurors by providing false information about the crime, suspect, and alleged proofs, which can deny the defendant a fair trial. This influences legal professionals, such as judges and attorneys, who must follow public sentiments without necessarily following legal procedures and evidence. Pre-trial publicity also plays a major role in prejudicing a case and affecting the fairness of the trial. Even basic information about the crime, suspect, and alleged proofs can create prejudice and negatively influence the principle of the benefit of the doubt, which is a foundation of any legal system. Once a story is set in the media, it is difficult to persuade jurors to ignore this

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047235206000250>

information and make judgments based on the evidence given during the trial. The phenomenon of ‘trial by media’ shows how publicity can take place during a trial, as the media acts as a prosecuting body, and when the verdict is out, the public will have already found the culprit guilty. This media influence can affect jurors when they feel compelled to make decisions based on media discourse, fearing rejection or criticism. Sensational cases often make it to the media, with much focus on every stage of the trial, turning the trial into a show rather than a serious one. This can lead to negative assessments of the legal process and lower people’s confidence in the legal system. The media has a duty to portray justice and the law to society. Through these cases, the media plays the role of disseminating information that can sometimes be wrong to the public, balancing the fairness of trials. The error commitment through reporting or commentary can lead to wrong impressions that take effort to dismiss, even with court efforts. It can become a daunting task to ensure that both jurors and the general public appreciate the true nature of the facts involved in a case, affecting the overall fairness of the trial and the entire legal system’s credibility<sup>19</sup>.

## VII. CASE STUDIES AND EMPIRICAL DATA

### i. High-Profile Crime Cases and Media Influence:

High-profile cases, which frequently involve celebrities or contentious events, capture the public’s interest. These cases can have a considerable impact on public image of the legal system, influencing attitudes towards guilt, innocence, and broader societal issues. In high-profile cases, media coverage is critical since it serves as the public’s primary source of information. While media influence might increase transparency, it can also lead to a “trial by media” situation, thus jeopardising the impartiality of court procedures<sup>20</sup>.

The media has long-term effects on the population, but these effects are indirect, slow, and minor. As the media becomes more involved in the criminal justice system, it may interfere with trial cases, express opinions, critically analyze cases, or follow cases from the time they occur. Examples of media interference include the **Priyadarshini Matto case (2006)**, where the High Court of New Delhi ruled that Santosh Kumar Singh was responsible for the rape and murder, and the **Bhima-**

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ijlra.com/paper-details.php?isuurl=the-influence-of-media-on-public-perception-of-crime-and-the-criminal-justice-system-by-nishant-bardoshiya>

<sup>20</sup><https://library.fiveable.me/courts-society/unit-8/high-profile-cases-media-coverage/studyguide/7lpGu5lReeWWUD6h>

**Koregaon case**, where the investigation was sparked by allegations of a plot against the Prime Minister. The **Noida Double Murder case (20bor08)** is another example of media exceeding its boundaries. The murder of Aarushi Talwar and Hemraj Banjade sparked public interest, and the media used it to their advantage. The investigation was ongoing, and the media declared the accused murderers. The media is using unethical methods for their own profits, revenues, and TRPs in high-profile cases, misleading the public and weakening judicial decision-making. In the end, the media's influence on the criminal justice system is significant and can be indirect, slow, and minor. It is crucial for the media to exercise responsibility and respect for the integrity of the investigation process<sup>21</sup>.

**ii. International Perspectives on Media and Crime Representation:** Today's society is deeply interested in crime and justice, with high crime rates and concerns about crime becoming accepted as normal. The mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of victims, criminals, deviants, and law enforcement officials. Research indicates that the majority of public knowledge about crime and justice is derived from the media, making it essential to examine the effects of mass media on attitudes toward crime and justice.

Technological development has led the public to assume they can afford to let the media shape their opinions, as primary information of crime is infrequent. These forced opinions have a profound effect on our lives and the well-being of the broader society. Media Criminology is defined as the complex and constantly shifting intersections between crime, criminalization, control, and media, mediatisation, and representation. In the hyper-realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the blurring of nonfiction or news and fiction or entertainment, as well as the overlapping worlds of hybrid infotainment and reality TV, make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between these media and separate narratives of crime and justice. Media representations of crime exaggerate both the levels of serious interpersonal crime in society and the risk of becoming a crime victim<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://blog.ipleaders.in/modern-media-and-its-effect-on-high-profile-cases/> 25  
<https://ijrsonline.in/HTMLPaper.aspx?Journal=International%20Journal%20of%20Reviews%20and%20Research%20in%20Social%20Sciences;PID=2014-2-1-17>

## VIII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. **Ethical Journalism and Responsible Crime Reporting:** Crime reporting has long been a cornerstone of modern journalism, providing the public with the most up-to-date information about criminal activity, law enforcement, and the societal impact of crime. Crime stories are sometimes viewed through the prism of sensationalism or sorrow, yet they serve a far more important role in moulding society perceptions, pushing changes, and keeping the public informed.

Crime reporting is a critical aspect of journalism, requiring a balance between public information and the rights of individuals involved in a criminal case. Ethical crime reporting involves respecting privacy, accuracy, fairness, and objectivity. Reporters must exercise caution when exposing sensitive details, such as the identities of victims or suspects, especially when dealing with minors or survivors of crimes. In India, laws protect the identities of victims of sexual violence to prevent further trauma and stigmatization.

Accuracy is paramount in crime reporting, as misinformation or sensationalism can distort public perception and harm the justice process. Journalists must ensure their sources are credible and check all facts before publishing. They must also avoid bias, especially when covering sensitive issues like race, religion, or gender.

Maintaining objectivity is crucial in crime reporting, as reporters should present facts without personal opinions or biases, especially when covering high-profile or controversial cases. This allows readers to form their own opinions based on the information provided without being influenced by the journalist's personal perspective<sup>22</sup>.

- ii. **Media Literacy and Public Awareness Initiatives:** Media literacy is a crucial policy issue addressing communication challenges across various regions, including Africa, Europe, Caucasus, South East Asia, and Latin America. It is essential for enhancing access to information, freedom of expression, gender equality, and a high standard of education in an intercultural framework. Digital Communication Network Global participates in the annual Global Media and Information Literacy Week, led by UNESCO in cooperation with the UNESCO MIL Alliance, the UNESCO-UNAOC MIL. A Global Panel discussion will present

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<sup>22</sup> <https://journalism.university/reporting-techniques/crime-reporting-role-modern-journalism/>

the situation and initiatives of MIL across the world, with speakers from different continents sharing their expertise and ideas. Media literacy promotes critical thinking skills among children and calls for reformation of the educational landscape and school curricula. It aims to raise awareness of disinformation and fake news, which can negatively influence public opinion and society. Teachers must identify students' needs, interpret media texts, apply pedagogical approaches, synthesize results, and communicate results to colleagues and the local community for long-term sustainability. Access to digital and print resources, analysis, deconstruction, and reconstruction of messages, critical thinking, crosschecking, evaluation, purposeful content development, media expert visits, and active participation and citizenship are essential<sup>23</sup>.

**iii. Regulation and Accountability in Media Crime Reporting:** The goal of media accountability is to create a society in which the powerful are held accountable to the rest, information is disseminated honestly, there is room for democratic initiative, and citizens can discuss ideas fairly. This is achieved through an independent and pluralistic media ecosystem, with great journalism that adheres to ethical norms. In many cases, particularly when these prerequisites are not met, media content can do the exact opposite. It has the potential to strengthen the influence of vested interests, exacerbate existing imbalances, and exclude disadvantaged or critical voices. This is a severe problem that must be deliberately avoided while working with media. On a more positive side, this issue can be avoided by working to increase media outlets' independence and the standards they set for their content. This could be a strategy to promote accountability in society as whole<sup>24</sup>. Aside from ensuring that narratives are correct before making them public, reporters must translate the relevance of police versions in a criminal prosecution. Media ethics go beyond simply verifying information. Current media regulation is minimal and inconsistent for print and television media, and enforcement of these restrictions is also delayed. Self-regulation bodies such as the National Broadcasting Standards Authority and the Indian Broadcasting Foundation are membership-based and can be avoided by just withdrawing from the organisation. With a rising push for media regulation, media institutions must

<sup>23</sup> <https://dcnglobal.net/posts/article/media-and-information-literacy-for-the-public-good>

<sup>24</sup> <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/themes/accountability/>

look inward to find an answer to what is basically an ethical issue. A organised and well-designed media policy, including training and enforcement procedures, is needed now<sup>25</sup>.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of crime, influencing societal attitudes, legal proceedings, and policy decisions. Theoretical frameworks such as social constructionism, cultivation theory, and agenda-setting reveal how crime is often misrepresented through selective coverage, sensationalism, and biased reporting. News media, entertainment, and digital platforms amplify crime narratives, sometimes exaggerating the prevalence and severity of crime while reinforcing stereotypes linked to race, class, and socioeconomic conditions. These portrayals not only distort public understanding but also shape legislative responses, often leading to harsher laws and policies that may not align with actual crime statistics.

High-profile cases further highlight the impact of media on judicial processes, where pre-trial publicity and public sentiment influence verdicts, sometimes compromising the presumption of innocence. “Trial by media” can pressure courts and law enforcement, ultimately affecting the fairness and impartiality of the justice system. The rise of digital media and algorithm-driven content consumption has exacerbated this issue, as misinformation spreads rapidly, reinforcing echo chambers and intensifying public fear. In many cases, crime coverage does not serve the purpose of informing but instead fuels moral panic, leading to distorted perceptions of safety and justice.

**Future Research Directions:** Given these concerns, future research should focus on understanding how media narratives shape long-term policy changes, public behavior, and trust in the criminal justice system. Investigating the psychological impact of continuous crime exposure, the role of social media in shaping crime discourse, and the effectiveness of regulatory measures can offer valuable insights into mitigating misinformation. Additionally, exploring how different media ecosystems—mainstream news, independent journalism, and citizen reporting—contribute to crime perceptions will help develop strategies to promote responsible journalism.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.shankariasparliament.com/current-affairs/media-accountability>

To address these challenges, ethical crime reporting, media literacy initiatives, and regulatory frameworks are essential. Journalists must ensure accuracy, fairness, and objectivity in crime reporting while avoiding sensationalism that fuels fear and bias. Media literacy programs should equip the public with critical thinking skills to analyze and interpret crime narratives more effectively. Stronger regulations and accountability measures in journalism can further prevent misinformation, ensuring that media organizations uphold ethical standards.

Ultimately, while media serves as a powerful tool for public awareness, its role in crime reporting must be approached with responsibility and integrity. A more balanced, fact-based portrayal of crime, combined with informed public discourse, can contribute to a more just and effective criminal justice system. By promoting ethical journalism, fostering critical engagement with media, and implementing policies that curb sensationalism, society can work toward a more accurate and fair representation of crime and justice.

