

**МІНІСТЕРСТВО ОСВІТИ І НАУКИ УКРАЇНИ
СУМСЬКИЙ ДЕРЖАВНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ
КАФЕДРА ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ
ЛІНГВІСТИЧНИЙ НАВЧАЛЬНО-МЕТОДИЧНИЙ ЦЕНТР**

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INFORMATION SPACE: THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

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Contemporary life is impossible without mass media, without the possibility to get information in no time. We are dependent on them looking for the news and accurate facts, trying to find solutions for different social problems, seeking for the opinion of public people and politicians. Possessing the most powerful weapon (information), mass media form public opinion, set the framework of social discourses and perform a key role in developing a culture of peace and non-violence being the guarantee of a safe world for everyone.

Until recently mass media were defined as comprising the following: books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio, movies, television and the Internet. In the era of digital technology any medium used to transmit mass communication messages created by people to a large audience or market is mass media.

The ability of the media to reach a wide audience with an influential message has the power to have a great social and cultural impact upon society. Marshall McLuhan uses the phrase "the medium is the message" to stress that message distribution can be even more important than content of the message itself.

In a democratic society the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranties every person the right to get truthful information about every aspect of life as well as express our personal opinion freely. But the question is whether every bit of information we receive through the media can be reliable.

Basic functions of mass communication include: informing, persuading and entertaining. Among them managerial function of mass media must be mentioned as that of performing a vital and crucial role in society. Mass media are called the Fourth Estate, being one of the elements of democracy along with the legislative, executive, and the socioeconomic branches that characterize a society. In this context, it is important for them to be both a

watchdog of the elected officials' public behavior and a gatekeeper of popular viewpoints as they report on the events in the world.

Therefore, mass media are especially relevant to a modern society because without them, we would never know what is happening around us and would be left without the moral guide and ethic values important for uniting a society. The point is like all opinion makers, the mass media has both a duty and a responsibility towards the community and this is the reason it is considered to be a vital part of modern democracies.

Again, there is a threat of media presenting slanted views arising from self-censorship by members of the media in the interests of the owner, or in the interests of their own careers. We should not forget that some of the media are controlled by influential people, companies or political parties, so the information can be biased and serve the interests of the individuals or organizations. In this case the media are used for shaping some particular social opinion and cause the public reaction they need. With the help of distorted or wrong information they try to manipulate people's attitude to the situation, giving its recipients no chance to analyze real facts or form their own ideas and views.

It is very important to get complete and accurate data via the media. We should understand how dangerous information wars can be, when a great number of people deprived of true facts, perceiving the situation through some other's eyes get wrong ideas and are programmed to perform particular actions.

Speaking about the media as the Fourth Estate the main task of them is selecting, conveying and commenting on the most important events helping an average person receive unbiased information and understand the present situation in their own country and learn about other world events. Awareness of the society depends on the criteria the information data are picked and also on the way and emotional level they are presented to public. But still we must be critical consumers of the mass media product and remember that the news is very often exaggerated and contradictory, so it is impossible for an individual to see into the matter without analyzing different sources and studying experts' opinions.