Making a Murderer: How Media Influences the Legitimacy of the Legal System

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If media influences perceived legitimacy of the legal system, then it is important to further research how this can be used to enact change or stop corruption.

Hypothesis: Commonly used organization and language used by media to represent legal cases alters how people view the legal system and most often lead to a negative perception.

Legitimacy of the law
when there are two forms of power conflicting in a situation the legitimacy of one being doubted begins to limit the authority that this power has in the situation. (Weber, 1978).

The construction of media
Media have to rush to release a story after the crime has happened and only have a small amount of space or time to discuss it in. This means they must pick and choose what they view as the most important facts of the case. (Sacco, 1995).

Media and framing
When it comes to the legal system, most of the public are not informed through direct legal sources and get their information from the media (Roberts, 1992).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How media influences the public’s perceptions</th>
<th>Theory</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public perception coding</td>
<td>Framing Theory frames organize how information is presented to create meaning. Framing theory argues that the manner in which an event is presented to a group or individual influences their perception of it. (Goffman, 1974) (Entman, 1993). frames are presented to assist the reader in understanding a meaning in a certain setting. (Bateson, 1972).</td>
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<td>Generalized about the legal system</td>
<td>Media Frames Through these frames, online news media have the power to control the direction of the reaction. This power stems from mass media defining what is newsworthy, because they make this decision they become one of the main interpreters of events. (Semmel, 1983). Structures of expectation (Tannen, 1993)</td>
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<td>Generalized about the media</td>
<td>Influence on the Public the lack of knowledge about political issues leads framing to be even more influential on public perception because individuals are less likely to have previous background, experience, or knowledge on the issue (Iyengar, 1991).</td>
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<td>Avery innocent</td>
<td>Methods Content analysis of Making a Murderer, 30 online news articles, and 197 reactions to the case. I coded for language (positive, negative, and neutral), evidence cited, and who was interviewed or quoted, and the overall implied verdict (guilty, innocent, or neither).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avery guilty</td>
<td>Older articles (Dec. 2015-March 2016) n = 15 Newer Articles (April 2016-Feb. 2017) n = 15</td>
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<td>Dassey innocent</td>
<td>Guilty 33.33% (n = 2) 28.00% (n = 3)</td>
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<td>Discussed other theories</td>
<td>Innocent 55.33% (n = 8) 46.67% (n = 7)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither 33.33% (n = 5) 33.33% (n = 5)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Implied verdict in both categories of online news articles

Results/Discussion

Making a Murderer mostly negative language, directly interviewed only defense and overall implied Avery was innocent.

Online news articles the framing of an article implied its perceived verdict of the case, discussed as a form of entertainment, and the older categories of articles differed that the newer category in presentation of theories and language.

Public perceptions generalized about the legal system, generalized about media, claimed Avery was guilty or innocent, claimed Dassey was innocent, and theorized about other suspects.

Overall The public applied their opinion of this case to the wider legal system. Patterns of opinion in the way media framed the case were also seen in public discussion.

Limitations

Sense of identity online may have impacted how people presented their opinions through twitter.

media bias in online news articles may have been present because they were all after the release of the documentary.

Selected References


