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Media Influence on Society

About one hundred years ago the media was known as newspapers and magazines along with word of mouth. A short time after that the radio became popular, and only about sixty years later mass media was born. The original role of media in society was to present the public with important information and to report the truth. However, over the recent years the media has become more than just news. Today the media’s role in society is to keep everyone informed with breaking news, weather, sports, fame, and anything else found entertaining. With the media being a large presence in everyone’s life, it is understandable how it can influence everyone in some way or another. The three main areas that are influenced most by the media today are consumers, politics, and the ever impressionable teenagers.

Consumers are heavily influenced by the media and marketing. There are ads everywhere today; TV commercials, magazine ads, and billboards can be found anywhere for something. The media has a way of beautifying any product to make it seem more appealing. For example, having Hollywood’s top A-lister holding a bottle of the world’s best water is one way a company can reach out and portray “a certain product as more desirable than others”(Olney) because a celebrity is drinking it. This influences the average consumer into thinking they should drink that water because one should treat themselves and live glamorously like a celebrity does. Another popular way to advertise in the media is to place a product name in the background of a movie or TV shot. For example if boxes of Coca-Cola are seen in the background of a scene from Two and a Half Men, viewers of the show will have the thought in their heads that the Coke can in the fridge is calling their name. Without coming out with an obvious advertisement the company has now persuaded people to buy Coca-Cola. Some companies are taking this approach more often now because of the availability to record programs, and when this is done “two-thirds to 80% of ads are skipped” and it also makes the product seem more “realistic and relatable” than coming out with a thirty second ad about why Coca-Cola is so delicious (Shah). It is the new sly approach the media has taken to help make consumer decisions. However, in the media there are also many examples of companies coming out and stating directly ‘buy with this company’ or other examples of things the consumer is doing wrong, with providing a way the problem can be fixed. It’s the media’s way of “providing instructions on how to be a consumer” (Olney) and controlling the buyer and making him or her feeling like they need to buy what is being said, and unfortunately in our society today too many people are falling for it.

American politics are easily influenced when it comes to the media. Whether it is an event as important as an election, or if it is something regarding a political scandal, Americans can count on the media to document every detail there is to know about the topic. Whenever there is a large scale election in the running, Americans count on the media to help them decide what decision to make. Without the media, no one would know who to vote for; however the media today has a tendency to go out and report too much. For example, during an election candidates will use different media forms to expose the other candidate and to try to convince the public who not to vote for. While many organizations will call these actions “campaign contributions” (“Mass Media”) for the public interest, it all comes down to a competition between the organizations with the most money to back a party. While the real reason is to inform the public, “the media can give importance to things that in reality have little significance” (“Influence”) causing trouble for political parties trying to win an election. Unfortunately, the profit making media empires will present the public with any information they can get their hands on to “corrupt American politics” (“Mass Media”) and make a dollar. At the end of the day, any cooperation will do anything to have a public say because the media will always hold power in politics.

In today’s society teenagers are influenced most by the media and its surroundings. The media is constantly telling young adults to wear this, or eat that, which has a major downside to the way children are growing up. Because the media is everywhere, being influenced to look or act a certain way can never be 100% avoided. One study showed that 69% of girls said that magazine models influence their idea of a perfect body shape, which leads millions of girls into eating disorders and other unhealthy habits to be just like every image in the media (“Media”). The same goes for young boys; if a 15 year old doesn’t look like a male model, then why shouldn’t he start using supplements? The media doesn’t only influence body image; it has power over what teenagers think about sex. When the majority of TV shows and movies today show teenagers practicing sex it makes teens feel like it is more “normal and accepted” to be having sex at a young age (“Media”). Also, a survey published by the Journal of Adolescent Health claims that the media acts as a “sexual super peer” for adolescents seeking information about sex if they cannot access it anywhere else (Jones). Due to how unreliable to media can be today, many teens are growing up with the wrong ideas in their heads about body image, sexuality, and more. It’s an unfortunate problem that teenagers today are so easily influenced by the media, and with mass media growing even larger, it’s bound to become an even larger problem in the future.

Mass media is an extremely powerful business today, much more than it was even twenty years ago. While the media is essential to everyone’s everyday lives, it can also have many negative effects on our society. With everything being said out there and no real ways to monitor it, people are being influenced by any information they can get their hands on. The three most substantial areas where the media holds the most influence are consumers, politics, and teenagers, because the media is such a large presence in everyone’s daily life.

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