



THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN INVESTIGATION: THE MOST PROMINENT CASES

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Abstract

The function of the media in criminal investigations has been the subject of both influence and controversy. It has played a significant role in moulding public opinion, directing the course of investigations, and even affecting the outcomes of judicial proceedings at times. Through newspapers, television, and now digital platforms, the mass media has frequently served as a rival investigation force, drawing attention to gaps in official enquiries, mobilising public awareness, and exerting pressure on law enforcement agencies to take prompt action. Prominent cases from around the world, such as the trial of O.J. Simpson in the United States, the murder case of Jessica Lal and the Nirbhaya case in India, and the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in the United Kingdom, are examples of how media coverage has not only brought victims and suspects to the forefront of public attention, but it has also sparked waves of social and political accountability. On the other hand, this engagement creates significant problems, such as the possibility of a trial by media, an invasion of privacy, prejudice in reporting, and the potential for due process to be derailed. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the dual nature of the function that the mass media plays in investigations. Additionally, this paper will analyse historic situations in which the participation of the media played a significant part in guaranteeing justice, as well as instances in which excessive coverage put fairness at risk. The research highlights the necessity for a balanced strategy as a result of its examination of these major instances. This approach would involve the media's influence being used in a responsible manner in order to complement the criminal justice system rather than damage it.

Keywords: mass media, investigation, most prominent

Introduction

People's perceptions of crime, justice, and law enforcement are shaped by the mass media, which has become one of the most influential institutions in contemporary society that has developed as a strong institution. The dissemination of information, the drawing of public attention to specific instances, and even the influencing of the path of investigations via prolonged coverage are all examples of the significant role that the media frequently plays in the process of criminal investigations. It is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between the processes of inquiry, public opinion, and the court system as a result of the proliferation of social media platforms, online journalism, and news channels that are available around the clock. In the past, the responsibility of conducting investigations was given only to the authorities of the police, forensic specialists, and judicial agencies. On the other hand, the media, which is sometimes referred to as the "fourth pillar of democracy," has expanded its mission beyond that of reporting by aggressively challenging official narratives, unearthing truths that have been concealed, and generating pressure for accountability. However, there are situations in which the

participation of the media has shown to be absolutely necessary. One such instance is the murder case of Jessica Lal in India, where persistent media efforts brought about justice after the perpetrator was first found not guilty. In a similar vein, the extensive coverage of the Nirbhaya gang rape case by the media not only sped up the inquiry but also resulted in substantial legislation amendments pertaining to crimes committed against women. On the international scale, the coverage of the trial of O.J. Simpson and the disappearance of Madeleine McCann demonstrate how the reporting of the media can both enlighten and polarise public opinion. Nevertheless, the participation of the mass media in enquiries is not without of difficulties. It is possible for there to be a "trial by media," which is when suspects are judged in the court of public opinion before the judiciary issues its decision. This can occur when there is excessive or biased reporting. On account of this, there are significant issues over the preservation of individual rights, as well as justice and impartiality. Scholars, journalists, and legal practitioners continue to engage in debate over the difficult balance that exists between the public's right to know and the accused's right to a fair trial. Through an examination of some of the most notable cases in which media coverage had a critical role, the purpose of this research is to investigate the dynamic function that mass media plays in investigations. In doing so, it seeks to bring attention to both the positive contributions that the media has made to the advancement of justice as well as the possible dangers that pose a threat to the integrity of the legal processes.

The Role and Significance of Mass Media in Investigations

The public and the various law enforcement authorities are brought together through the medium of mass media. As a result of its reach, it guarantees openness and accountability, particularly in situations in which investigative institutions give the impression of being inert, biased, or subject to political interference. The media generates pressure that frequently speeds up government investigations by keeping a matter in the public eye and bringing it to the attention of the public.

Information Dissemination:

When it comes to raising awareness about current investigations, the role that media outlets play is quite important. Through the dissemination of information on crimes, the dissemination of pictures of suspects, and the publicising of requests for witnesses, they provide assistance for the work of investigators. For instance, incidents involving missing persons frequently gather pace as media coverage reaches a longer and more extensive audience.

Public Mobilization:

Communities can be mobilised to seek justice when they are exposed to high-profile media coverage. Protests and policy reforms were carried out across the whole country of India in response to the Nirbhaya case in 2012. These events were primarily fuelled by persistent coverage across television networks and social media platforms.

Checks and Balances:

The media frequently takes on the role of a watchdog in situations where investigative bodies fail to deliver. An excellent illustration of this is the murder case of Jessica Lal, in which media activity brought to light deficiencies in the first investigation and resulted in the need for a retrial.

Challenges and Criticisms:

The mass media is frequently being criticised for sensationalising incidents, despite the fact that it plays a good role. The practice of "trial by media" weakens the independence of the judiciary, and reporting that is false or speculative may be detrimental to reputations and distort public opinion. The case of O.J. Simpson in the United States exemplified how an excessive amount of media attention may transform a trial into a spectacle, so obscuring the procedures of the judicial system.

Prominent Cases and Media Influence

In order to have a better understanding of the role that the media plays in investigations, it is helpful to look at prominent incidents in which the participation of the media greatly influenced the results:

Jessica Lal Murder Case (India, 1999):

At first, the accused was found not guilty because there was insufficient evidence. Nevertheless, widespread media campaigns that called into question the conviction resulted in a retrial, which finally resulted in the accused being found guilty.

Nirbhaya Case (India, 2012):

Media reporting of the brutal gang rape in Delhi sparked nationwide outrage, accelerating investigation, fast-track trials, and reforms in laws on sexual crimes.

Aarushi Talwar Murder Case (India, 2008):

While media attention kept the case alive, sensationalist reporting often distorted facts, leading to questions about journalistic ethics.

O.J. Simpson Trial (USA, 1994–95):

A worldwide spectacle was created as a result of the trial, which was referred to as the "trial of the century." This trial demonstrated how widespread media coverage might impact the perceptions of jurors and public opinion.

Madeleine McCann Disappearance (UK, 2007):

Media involvement kept the case in the international spotlight for years, though speculative reporting often misled the investigation.

Critics Of Mass Media As A Tool Of Investigation

People are still hesitant to embrace mass media as a mainstream platform for the investigation of crimes, despite the fact that it is widely utilised for investigations in many nations, such as India, Germany, Australia, and other similar countries. Due to the fact that, in their opinion, mass media is always subjective and biased towards the elitists who control the information that is published on such devices, critics of mass media also criticise the fact that it has become an important element of the criminal justice system. It is also criticised due to the fact that not everything that is provided to us is the truth. In actuality, there are instances when it may be the subjective truth, or it could be nothing more than a narrative that

a specific gadget intends to implant in the brain of the viewer or reader. Taking into consideration the current state of affairs, the mass media is facing a significant challenge in terms of the dependability of false news, which is also the primary basis for the criticism that is directed at it. A significant number of instances include the mass media generating its own ideas, meanings, and pictures in order to build a specific kind of narrative. These narratives are evaluated by a variety of persons, which assists them in establishing their thought process. When the very story is crooked, the notion may sometimes become warped, which can have a significant impact on the societal constructions as a whole. When these facts are taken into consideration, it is possible to reach the conclusion that it is extremely challenging to combine mass media with the appropriate investigative aims. Despite all of this, the fear of crime has now become a big aspect of media research; hence, it is important to preserve a harmonic link between the study of crimes and the utilisation of media.

Mass Media As A Tool Of Investigation In The 21st Century

Mass media in the 21st century has given individuals great access to the world around them. It has significantly minimized the distance between the people scattered all around the globe. Through Mass Media interaction between Police and Public is also facilitated and the smoke of hesitation has also dissipated. Through rights like the right to free speech, an individual can impart his or her perspectives to various issues and may likewise look for the significance of any political issue. Mass media has an important role to play in contemporary times because it helps us understand and make regulations to placate criminality thereby aiding the Justice Delivery System. Mass media is the need of this hour and for this, we have to consider fresh possibilities which are goal-oriented and are advantageous in decreasing Criminality thereby placating Crime. It is also to be noted here that as our dependence on Mass Media increases new problems will arise, like that of subjectivity and biasness. To prevent such problems from creeping into this source of investigation we need to change our mentality and forget about the power-lust and simply show the truth. It is only through these ways that mass media would be helpful in the investigation and would help us get to know the truth.

Mass Media And Media trials

With regard to information and news, the mass media is the most effective source overall. The term "mass media" refers to all of the different channels via which people in society obtain information. Some examples of mass media include periodicals, newspapers, television, the internet, and other forms of media such as the internet. These sources are useful because they contribute to the examination of instances or occurrences, which makes them efficient. Not only does it investigate the adverse effects that any occurrence may have, but it also sheds light on the favourable effects that have been brought about by any incident. On the other side, when we talk about media trials, we are referring to situations in which the media takes a case into its own hands, regardless of the decision that the court makes. It provides an account of the influence that the coverage of the accused individual in the mainstream media, such as television or newspapers, has had on their reputation. To put it another way, it is the overall consensus that the accused individual is guilty across the whole world. The media is responsible for the formation of an opinion, which then becomes a shared impression of guilt. In the event if the media declares the accused to be guilty prior to any judgement being handed down by the court, the trial might become extremely shady. Trials in the media have a significant impact on shaping the opinions of the general public, and they may also have an effect on the judicial system. In light of this, the term "media

trial" refers to the process of announcing an accused person to be convicted regardless of the decision that the court has reached. The murder case of Jessica Lal (2010), the murder case of Aarushi Talwar (2008), and the suicide case of Sushant Singh Rajput (2020) are some of the most notorious instances that have been the subject of media trials. When cases receive a lot of media attention, a media trial takes place. As a result of this, it is extremely difficult for the trial of the case to be conducted in a fair manner. For instance, a media trial may take place when the case involves a celebrity or when the case is so gory that the media considers it necessary to sensationalise the case. Both of these scenarios are examples of situations in which the media take action.

Role Of Mass Media In Investigation

The mass media provides a trustworthy source of research on specialised issues such as business, government, politics, and other areas that assist investigations. This is accomplished via the use of archives and records gathered from a variety of sources.

Interviews and oral comments that are recorded, shown on television, or published in a variety of mass media channels serve to establish a point and make a fact solid. This, in turn, contributes to the creation of a case and makes the investigation simpler. Since the very beginning of mass media, it has been the most trustworthy source for gathering background information that gives rise to the ability to conduct an in-depth investigation. In a number of significant incidents that have taken place in India, the media has been instrumental in establishing vital links that have been used to bolster the investigation.

The mass media plays a significant role in facilitating the efficient execution of policy. Because of this, it is not only a versatile method of acquiring data but also a helpful instrument in general.

When it comes to exposing the claims, causes, corruptions, and repercussions of illegal conduct, investigative journalism, which is a combination of mass media and inquiry, has become more crucial. This not only helps the individuals involved to deal with tough case results, but it also fosters ethical behaviour elsewhere in society.

In addition to this, it has assisted individuals in acquiring the knowledge that is required to formulate their own ideas regarding a certain circumstance. There has been a significant amount of influence exerted by the media on both the highlighting of a few of the most controversial subjects and the promotion of individuals to establish their own viewpoints.

The role that the media plays in police investigations has become increasingly crucial as a result of the publication of surveillance video and other sources that are pertinent to the inquiry. There has been an improvement in the general amount of openness inside the system in recent years as a result of the broadcasting of criminal trials.

Prominent Cases Under Mass Media Investigation:

1. Sheena Bora Murder Case

In the year 2012, Indrani Mukerjee was arrested for the murder of Sheena Bora. However, the stunning revelation in this case was that Sheena was really the daughter of the deceased, contrary to what Indrani Mukerjee had maintained in the past. Even after she was arrested, the media continued to concentrate on

the matter since it was unusual for Indrani to have children, and she was caught on camera making the accusation that Sheena was her sister. Additionally, the murder brought to light the questionable financial links that Indrani Mukherjee and her spouse, Peter Mukerjee, had on the other hand. They were able to effectively change the documents in such a way that they were not subject to any legal action for a period of around three years. Through the exposure of Indrani Mukerjee's private life to the scrutinising eyes of the media, it made it possible for the accused to engage in open and honest conversation throughout the homicide trial. During the course of the inquiry into Sheena's murder, the media conducted a thorough study into Indrani's personality and private life, as well as any other aspects that were not directly relevant to the investigation. Following the interference that they had with the personal count number of the accused, the ethics of reporting were once again the subject of dispute.

Jessica Lal Murder

Manu Sharma, also known as Siddharth Vashisth, was the son of Vinod Sharma, a former Union Minister for the Congress party. In 1999, Manu Sharma shot Jessica Lal, a version of a barmaid, who was working at the time in an eatery owned by Bona Ramani, a businesswoman, in Mehrauli, South Delhi. This occurred after Jessica refused to serve Manu Sharma and his friends alcohol. This particular case is now receiving attention from the media as a result of the murder and the acquittal of the accused by the judicial system. When the judicial system was compelled to request a re-examination of a case as a result of pressure from the media and the general public, this particular case has emerged as one of the most common examples with this particular circumstance. In spite of the fact that Manu Sharma was ultimately declared not guilty in 2006 as a result of public uproar about the media coverage of the probe, the Delhi Supreme Court nonetheless imprisoned him. This was the case despite the fact that the Delhi police had abandoned the premise upon which they had formed their case.

Delhi Rape Case

The heinous act of gang rape that occurred on the evening of December 16, 2012, against a physiotherapy intern who was 23 years old. The victim was not only assaulted, but she was also harassed and crushed while riding in a private bus with a male acquaintance. Including the person who drove the bus as well as the six individuals who attacked her and severely injured her friend. Despite the fact that she had been hospitalised to the institution, she was transferred to a clinic in Singapore for a medical emergency eleven days later, however she passed dead shortly after that. As a result of the fact that Indian law prohibits the publication of the call of duty victim, the victim has been given the moniker Nirbhaya, which means "fearless." As a consequence of this, the girl's battle against the occurrence and her final death have become a symbol of resistance for women all over the globe. A significant amount of insurance on both the national and international levels was impacted by this calamity. Both locally and internationally, an outpouring of scathing condemnation has been directed against the occurrence. Following that, there were a few protests held in harsh regions of the United States of America against the federal and state governments for their failure to provide proper protection for women. These protests were held in support of the women's rights movement. As a result of enormous outrage in the media, a number of legislative

amendments have been implemented, one of which is the Juvenile Justice Act, which reduced the age of criminal liability for the most serious offences from 18 to 16.

Mass Media Impact On Investigations

There are numerous nations, like India, Germany, Australia, and other countries, that make extensive use of the mass media in their investigations. When it comes to accepting it as a mainstream platform for crime investigation, many are still uneasy about it. Because of the prevalence of false news in today's world, the mainstream media is most concerned about maintaining their credibility, which is also the primary reason why they are to blame. The use of internet search engines and media alerts is one of the most straightforward methods for keeping track on how the media covers instances of corruption. It is essential for law enforcement organisations to keep a close eye not only on key export and investment destinations, but also on the media that they themselves represent. The necessity of doing research in order to collect additional information from the general public will play a role in contributing to the decisions that will be made about the content and timing of contacts with the media. When it comes to the investigation and prosecution of criminal acts, it is generally acknowledged that members of the general public play a significant role as informants. When it comes to effectively reacting to the press, it is necessary to have a comprehensive awareness of the media environment in which the inquiry is taking place. Respondents highlighted a number of factors that have an impact on the context in which severe criminal investigations are reported, as well as factors that can have an impact on reporting styles and contacts with the press. It also demonstrates that several vile rumours have surfaced from a variety of media platforms, the most recent of which has escalated into violent rioting and the damage of public property. One such instance is the rioting that occurred in Bangalore. For the sake of establishing a certain form of narrative, mass media frequently generate their own theories, meanings, and images. These narratives are reviewed by a variety of individuals, which contributes to the formation of mental processes. There are situations in which the notion is twisted, and the resulting ramifications are significant for the entire social system. This occurs when the genuine tale breaks. Taking into consideration these data, we are able to draw the conclusion that it is extremely challenging to align the aims of research with the mass media. Despite this circumstance, the study of media studies has become more focused on criminal terror. As a result, it is imperative that a harmonic link between the investigation of criminal activity and the utilisation of media be preserved. In the course of investigations, the manner in which the media reports news about the family of the criminal is another reason why they are criticised. Through the use of social media, they are subjected to a significant number of trolls and threats, which in some way results in a scary experience for them. The material that is meant for victims should also be scrutinised since it has the potential to influence the degree of cooperation and the key connections that are maintained with the victim's family group. Credibility is the primary worry of the mainstream media in this day and age of fake news, and it is also the primary reason why the media takes responsibility for the situation. The credibility of a piece of media coverage may be assessed based on the fact that it is supported by several news organisations from various nations. The same is true for contributions made by well-known journalists and members of well-established news agencies who are renowned for their reputable reporting. Additionally, the media may publish on domestic cases that involve bribe takers, which may increase the potential that bribe payers in one of the countries that are members of the OECD Anti-Corruption Treaty may be held accountable for foreign bribery charges in their own nation. This is a possibility.

Conclusion

The connection between the mainstream media and the investigations of criminal activity is one that is both powerful and complicated. It is certain that the media, which is sometimes referred to as the "fourth pillar of democracy," has played an essential part in bringing to light shortcomings in investigations, ensuring that the public is held accountable, and maintaining the pursuit of justice in instances that might otherwise have been forgotten. The instances of Jessica Lal and Nirbhaya in India, as well as the trial of O.J. Simpson and the disappearance of Madeleine McCann throughout the world, are prominent examples that demonstrate how persistent and comprehensive coverage may influence public debate, speed up investigations, and even lead to legal or policy reforms. Having said that, the impact of the media does not come without any potential dangers. The practices of sensationalism, biased narratives, and the phenomena known as "trial by media" have the potential to put the integrity of the legal system in jeopardy, do irreparable harm to reputations, and cause societal divides. Unchecked reporting has the potential to skew facts and jeopardise justice, as seen by the case of Aarushi Talwar in India, which serves as a sharp warning today. While the media has the potential to be an essential ally in the search for the truth, it is imperative that it conducts its operations within the bounds of professional and ethical standards. In the end, the function of mass media in investigations ought to be regarded as a double-edged sword. It is capable of furthering justice when it is utilised properly, but it is also capable of weakening due process if it is overused. The difficulty for contemporary society is to find a way to strike a balance between the responsibilities of the legal system to ensure fairness and impartiality and the duty of the media to enlighten the general public. In order to guarantee that the mass media continues to be a positive force in criminal investigations rather than a disruptive one, it is possible to strengthen journalistic ethics, legal protections, and collaborative transparency between law enforcement and the press.

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