

BENEFITS OF THE MEDIA

The Benefits of the Media

SGM Roger Bynoe

United States Sergeant Major Academy

SMC Class 58

SGM Gibbons

November 1, 2007

Abstract

When Americans are asked to identify what causes public support for war to change over time, news coverage about the war almost always comes up as a likely suspect. Despite the lack of “live” television coverage of wars past, today, new technology has allowed families to sit in their own front rooms to have a closer look of the realities of war. The role of the media is critical in promoting good governance and controlling dishonesty. It not only raises public awareness about the realities of war, its causes, consequences and possible remedies but also investigates and reports incidences of human rights violations. The effectiveness of the media, in turn, depends on access to information and freedom of expression, while finding the balance of respecting the duty of the military and satisfying the public’s need to know.

THE BENEFITS OF THE MEDIA

The media is definitely an important benefit of war. All through the history of the United States, media has been the source in which the public receives information over all aspects of life. Weighting the scale between pleasing the public's quest for knowledge and respecting the liability of the armed forces is an ongoing concern for the military. From World War II, Vietnam and Iraq, success has been defined in public view and opinion.

World War II

During World War II, the media played an important part in reporting conflict information to the American audiences. Prior to the war's start, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was on the radio rallying the American people, preparing them for victory. After the start of the war, families were glued to their radios. Such news gave families back home a sense of the progress that was being made on the battlefield. Citizens were engaged in conversations pertaining to the war. The radio became the life-line between the soldier's and their love-ones. Loved-ones at home listened fervently to the radio broadcast to learn how the operations were playing out, the media, given a "live and detailed" synopsis of the war; ordinary citizens became a part of the war. Second World War had the most reporting of all battles in history. According to Morris (2006), transistor communication gave the public their first reports of the war (p. 46). At war's end, clearly, it was this form of communication that had an impact on the way the public viewed the war. At a time of uncertainty, Americans depended heavily on journalist reports on the war. Sweeney (2001) insists that the war helped to decisively introduce transistor communication as one of the main forces of delivering information (p. 9).

Vietnam

The United States first "on air conflict," was the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War restructured the affiliation of news by linking the reporters and the armed forces, together. This new found relationship gave reporters access to some of the most horrific live images of the conflict. The news stations broadcasted imagery of fatalities; the American people felt as if they, too, were in the jungles of Vietnam. Furthermore, extreme images helped explain the multifaceted environment of war to Americans; there were even interpreters to explain to the general public the armed force's jargon. Commentators and correspondents promptly became friends and honorary family members because the community turned to them daily for additional briefings on the wars progress. Although the media reports had a lag time of more than a day before it could be transmitted for broadcast on the American network stations, the delayed images did not deter the American public from their television sets; they all tuned in for America's first "live battle conflict", which was televised across the globe.

Many of Americans assumed that the war exposure was mainly propaganda and not detailing the whole truth about the casualties. Public support began to diminish and the American people became impatient with the conflict. A number of Americans have asserted that the media was a factor in the U.S. losing the war, because the media was some how in opposition to the war. Although many critics stated that the media had a negative impact on the hearts of the American people, the media provided an unscripted reality of the war that gave the American public a first-hand account of the war; and the tools for the people to make their own conclusions. Media coverage and the universal attitudes about the media on the whole, and how sections of the general public construed the actions of Vietnam are both motivating and significant to future war coverage.

The Gulf War

As President Bush declared war on Iraq, the media was eager to go. Cable news reporting of the Gulf War significantly changed the nature of media war coverage. The media used live TV broadcast and on the spot global connections to literally “bring the public to the war.” Live coverage also reinforced informational aspects of how the war was carried out. Kjeilen (1996) explains that the media war was primarily staged by Iraq and Kuwait; while Kuwait employed paramount media consultants to present its stance, in order to sustain the confidence of a global arena, together in terms of common folks and the elected officials, Iraq depended on its own archaic media people.

Iraq's staging of Saddam Hussein comforting frightened Iraqi infants will everlastingly be recorded as one of the most comical moments in the history of global affairs. At the beginning of Desert Storm, the Iraq government created “made-up” media images for propaganda purposes. In short, media coverage was an active instrument of war. Taylor (1998) declares that following the eruption of the war, news stations in Britain and in America initially had non-stop coverage of the war (the American stations even taking the unparalleled step of delaying all commercial). The news reports on "Crisis in the Gulf" covered by CNN, were positive military images meant to build support for the armed solution to the crisis. Pictures of the military fight power showed the world that the US military was in control. Interviews with soldiers and military spokespersons gave an increasingly humanized outlook of American soldiers who were serving their country. Although, some of the images were not “pleasant”, however, it gave viewers a glimpse into the true revelations of war.

Conclusion

Public's opinion is crucial to military success, particularly during armed conflicts. The media is the American public spokesperson in modern military operations. As America military becomes increasingly involved in operations other than war around the globe, public support will become more important. Powerful media coverage of such military operations can have a significant impact on the mission success. Captivating the media during wartime is crucially important to war-planners, and increasingly complicated methods for doing so have been developed, everyone wants to be informed, even though the images might not be appealing.

References

- Denton, R. (1993). The Media and the Persian Gulf War. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Hallin, D. (1989). The “Uncensored War”; The Media and Vietnam. California: University of California Press.
- Jeffords, S., & Rabinovitz, L. (1994). Seeing Through the Media: The Persian Gulf War (Communication, Media, and Culture). New Jersey: Rutgers University Press
- Just, W. (Moderator). (1972). Vietnam. New York: Washington Post
- Morris, R. (2006). Untold Valor: Forgotten Stories of American Bomber Crews over Europe in World War II. Virginia: Potomac Books, Inc.
- Sweeney, M. (2001). Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Taylor, P. (1998). War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Kjeilen, T. (1996). The Gulf War literature online. Available: <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/gulfwar.htm> 10 April 1996.