INFLUENCE OF MODERN MEDIA ON FOREIGN POLICY IN THE GAMBIA

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Abstract

The study investigates the influence of modern media on the Gambia government's foreign policy. The media, often referred to as the fourth estate, has become an important tool in the public sphere due to its impacts on government and especially on foreign policy. This owes in part to the fact that it tailor-makes its stories in such a way that it can present and analyse an event thus in effect mobilising the general population by creating a political clamour to respond to such an event. The study seeks to examine whether the media's role in foreign policy formulation across the developing spectrum is either pro-active or reactionary. It is against this background that this study sought to examine the influence of the media on a state's foreign policy through an analysis of Gambia (a developing country). The SPSS statistical package was used in analyzing the data. The findings indicate that the media plays a significant role in shaping foreign policy, with social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp being key tools. The study recommends that social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are great tools for informing the public, entertaining audiences and communicating information and thoughts on important issues such as business, therefore, appropriate use of these will promote descent foreign policy of a nation.

Key Words: Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, Media, Modern Media

1. Introduction

Globalization connects people globally, promoting neutrality, objectivity, impartiality, and balancing in media ethics in foreign policy matters. In the same way, media also have a great impact on the practice of diplomatic relation among the nations. International media echo is considered as the primary tools for maintaining international relations. Media helps to construct the reality of international politics. In other words, media is one of the determining factors of foreign policy in many countries.

Foreign policy is heavily attached to domestic qualities, such as identity, language and view of self, but also the international and regional geostrategic location of the state. The major issue of concern in the study is that the media, often referred to as the fourth estate, has become an important tool in the public sphere due to its impacts on government and especially on foreign policy. The study investigates the media's pro-active or reactionary influence on foreign policy in developing countries, specifically analyzing Gambia's foreign policy. The media is a powerful tool for influencing people's thoughts and perceptions of issues. Today, the media have become society's voice (Singh & Pandey, 2017). Its mission is to disseminate accurate and objective information about specific events and programs. His mission also includes entertainment, education, and sensitizing people to current affairs.

The media can have a significant impact on how people think about and perceive certain situations. People receive information through a variety of media, including print, electronic, and

online. This owes in part to the fact that it tailor-makes its stories in such a way that it can present and analyse an event thus in effect mobilising the general population by creating a political clamour to respond to such an event. Such attention and the broad effects the media brought force policy makers to respond to such attention. To this end, therefore, it has been argued out to be a potent force for shaping public policy (O'Heffernan, 1999). These policies are commonly referred to as foreign policy and concern the regulation and conduct of a nation's diplomatic relations with other nations in an international scenario. Foreign policy is a strategy for coordinating a nation's actions toward other nations. As with domestic territories, states must pay particular attention to the careful formulation and effective implementation of foreign policy. Only by adopting a sound foreign policy and implementing it effectively can national sovereignty be preserved, international dignity strengthened and national interests promoted (Tapa, 2014). Globalisation has made nations interdependent, and influencing global processes. State policies, known as foreign policy, regulate diplomatic relations and coordinate actions. Sound foreign policy is crucial for maintaining national sovereignty, strengthening international dignity, and advancing interests. This study aims to investigate the media's role in shaping foreign policy in the Gambia government, focusing on its impact on the development and industrial sectors.

The media plays a crucial role in the foreign policy decision-making process, setting the agenda, bringing policy experts' opinions, and influencing political leaders. They influence national and international aspects, incorporating the views of the general mass and foreign policy experts. The media's influence is complex and multifaceted, influencing the policy formulation process. Mass media and foreign policy are gradually integrating, as media showcases a country's image and facilitates open debate on significant international issues within the international community. Media has important influence on public opinion and foreign policy. The relationship among public opinion, media and foreign policy can be integrated with major two schools of thought that are realism and liberalism. Media plays as a channel for delivering messages among international community. While the role of media in establishing peace is important, media organizations themselves are usually restrained in their operations during conflict situations. Media is taken as the foreign policy environment creator. Therefore, in the modern democratic societies, mass media has emerged as an important contributing factor of foreign policy.

2. Empirical Review

2.1 Foreign Policy

A nation's security and economic well-being are frequently supported, protected, and advanced by its foreign policy. Bojang (2018) describes how Padelford and Lincoln assert that "foreign policy is a vital element in the process by which a nation translates its general goals and interests into specific courses of action to achieve those goals and safeguard its national interests (Masava, 2019). Foreign policy is the strategic planning and execution of principles that influence the actions of other nations to safeguard and advance their essential interests. In contrast to domestic policy, foreign policy, according to Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen (2013), is the management of a nation's external relations and activities, measures, methods, policies, guidelines, agreements, understandings, to mention but a few. Overall, foreign policy is a tool for advancing national interests. It is the policy that states adopt in dealing with the international community. DW TV (2022) highlights the impact of new information and communication technologies on foreign policy, highlighting how media influences international relations. Udeala (2016) reveals media influences and collaborates with the outside world to achieve national interests. Cohen (2004) suggests journalists who trust government officials are more likely to be instruments of the government, while those who question them are more likely to impact foreign policy.

2.2 Journalists and International Negotiations

The ends of the Cold War and advancements in communication technology have increased media influence on foreign policy. Scholars suggest that media often mirror elite dialogue, lacking independent coverage. However, the cascading activation model emphasizes increased media

independence. Policy-media effects in this new environment include media accelerating policy decision-making by pushing officials for instantaneous responses.

The media can significantly influence a government's foreign policy agenda, especially in international negotiations. Officials use media to transmit messages and communicate their objectives to other governments, as seen in the Six-Party Dialogue on North Korea's nuclear aspirations. Media diplomacy helps government elites shape public opinion, manage information access, and assess the significance of issues in domestic politics. Limiting access to information allows governments to better control their constituents. Cohen (2001) argued that media can influence public opinion, but it may not always accurately represent public opinion. He compared Israel's crackdown on Hamas to the Syrian civil war, highlighting how media weight can impact foreign policy, despite their short lifespan.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Agency-Setting Theory

The study adopts the Agency-Setting Theory as the theoretical framework to provide explanatory theory to explain the role of the media in influencing foreign policy is liberal pluralism, which deals with `media as courses' (Gitlin 1980). The role of the mass media, especially the journalist, is treated as that of an objective observer. The literature presents other important theoretical paradigms regarding the role of modern media in shaping foreign policy. Therefore, the mass media are considered to have a strong influence on behavioural change. Agenda Setting Theory, as proposed by Poudel (2019), posits that mass media organizations determine newsworthiness by determining the attention a story receives, a concept known as salience transfer, which significantly influences media audiences. In this theory, the study found out that the theory posits that media controls reality by shaping it, similar to agenda-setting theory. It suggests that media's focus on certain issues increases public perception of them as important, leading to increased demand for action.

Consequently, Agenda setting theory, encompassing awareness, priorities, and salience models, posits media's agenda setting influences public agenda, policy agenda building, and has three theorized levels over time. Agenda-setting theory suggests that the media, through their ability to identify and publicize issues, significantly influences public opinion. It suggests that the media determines which issues receive the most attention, and that the media's influence on news stories and topics can influence the importance of certain issues. Media agenda-setting is influenced by biases in politics, economy, and culture, with issue saliency determining significance. Consistent journalistic coverage of issues like immigration can make them perceived as pressing. This research is important in investigating the influence of the media on the foreign policy. Frizis (2013) says two of the main elements that will guide us through the examination of the media’s effect on a state’s relative level of prestige are: institutional interdependence and the liberal school of thought’s approach to foreign policy making.

3. Methodology

The research employs a survey methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, with 200 respondents. It focuses on print and electronic media outlets in the Greater Banjul Area (GBA) and the Information and Foreign Affairs Ministries. Data analysis and interpretation are carried out systematically, based on the results of the questionnaire, using a quantitative style to analyse the data. The questionnaire was given to journalists and media practitioners. They willingly participated in the study by completing the questionnaire. Out of the total 133 questionnaires distributed, 126 completed questionnaires were the base for computing the results. Two (2) non-responses and five (5) with a lot of missing data were subtracted from the total sample size. This means that 7 questionnaires, out of 133 questionnaires distributed, were completely discarded from the analysis. The rest, (126 questionnaires) were used to interpret the results.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Table 1: Demographic representation of respondents

	Media Institutions	Number of participants
1	GRTS	45
2	Paradise Radio/TV	5
3	The Point Newspaper	5
4	FOROYA Newspaper	5
5	West Coast Radio	5
6	QTV	7
7	The Standard Newspaper	5
8	School of Journalism and Digital Media UTG	20
9	Women Journalist Association Gambia (WoJAG)	6
10	Media Academy for Journalism and Communication (MAJaC)	15
11	Gambia Press Union (GPU)	5
12	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	5
13	Ministry of Information	5
14	**TOTAL**	**133**

Source: Field Data, 2024

As shown below, gender distribution discovered that it represents our entire sample population, as the female respondents were greater in number with 7.4% of the population as opposed to 5.2% counterparts the male respondents. This is seen that females are more involved in the media than males. Regarding marital status, the study's Table 4.1 results revealed that married respondents made up 6.2% of the sample population, followed by single respondents (61%), and media workers (0.3%). The study shows that the working age group of 15-20, which accounts for 1% of the population overall, is followed in dominance by that of 21-30, with 5.0%, while 31-40, with 3.9%, is followed by 41-50, with 2.2%, and above 51, with 0.5%. This analysis reveals that the majority of respondents are young people, and modern media practitioners appear to be aware of foreign policy. According to the study's analysis of the respondents' educational backgrounds, those with a BSc degree make up the majority of the population—6%—while those with a master's degree make up just 2%.

Table 2: Result of the Socio-Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	52	5.2%
	Female	74	7.4%
Marital status			
	Single	61	6.1%
	Married	62	6.2%
	Others	3	0.3%
Age of Respondent			
	15-20yrs	10	1.0%
	21-30yrs	50	5.0%
	31-40yrs	39	3.9%

	41-50yrs	22	2.2%
	51-above	5	0.5%
Education	Certificate/Diploma	48	5%
	BSc	56	6%
	Masters	19	2%
	PhD	3	0%
Work experience			
	1	8	0.8
	2	16	1.6%
	3	33	3.3%
	4	63	6.3%
	5	6	0.6%

Source: Field Data, 2023

Table 3. Influence of modern media on foreign policy in the Gambia

Survey Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Modern media as key communicators continued to expand its coverage of bilateral ties and developments realized under the Gambia's foreign policy	1(0.8)	2(1.6)	10(7.9)	65(51.6)	48(38.0)
Modern media boosts and strengthens bilateral cooperation	2(1.6)	7(5.5)	19(15.1)	56(44.4)	42(33.3)
Modern media's Coverage of irregular migration to Europe also spelled new inroads between the EU and Gambia leading to new policy strategies to enhance foreign policy	2(1.6)	10(7.9)	16(12.7)	59(46.8)	39(30.9)
Media coverage of cooperation platforms has helped a new shift in the country's foreign policy and diplomatic ties.	3(2.4)	6(4.8)	29(23.0)	47(37.3)	41(32.5)
Media contributions to foreign policy include key sectors of national development such as investment in the socio-economic and political sectors which benefits bilateral cooperation.	2(1.6)	8(6.3)	13(10.3)	54(42.8)	49(38.9)
Media coverage of different nations and international organisations visiting the Gambia significantly strengthened relationships,	(0)	7(5.5)	10(7.9)	60(47.6)	49(38.9)

boosting economic, cultural and technical ties in the country's foreign policy.					

Source: Field Survey, 2024

4. Findings and Discussion

A study found that modern media continues to cover bilateral ties and developments under Gambia's foreign policy, with a majority of respondents (56.6%) agreeing. A significant proportion (38.0%) strongly agreed with this, while a small percentage (15.1%) were undecided. The majority (46.8%) believe that modern media's coverage of irregular migration to Europe creates new inroads between the EU and Gambia, leading to new policy strategies to enhance foreign policy. However, only a small percentage (1.6%) strongly disagreed. Furthermore, the study found that only 2.4% of respondents strongly agreed that media coverage of cooperation platforms influenced a new shift in the nation's foreign policy and diplomatic relations, while the majority (37.3%) disagreed.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

A study found that a majority of 54 respondents agreed that media contributions to foreign policy should consider key national development sectors, such as investment in socio-economic and political sectors, which promote bilateral cooperation. Additionally, a majority of 60 respondents agreed that media coverage of foreign nations and international organizations visiting the Gambia significantly strengthens relationships, boosting economic, cultural, and technical ties in the country's foreign policy.

Recommendations

The study recommends that:

1. Social media platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Newspapers, Magazine, Twitter, and WhatsApp are powerful tools for public education, entertainment, and knowledge dissemination on significant topics like business and politics.

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