



**THE ROLES OF AMERICAN TELEVISION NEWS IN INFLUENCING
AMERICAN PEOPLE'S OPINION AND BEHAVIOR DEPICTED IN BEN
AFFLECK'S *ARGO***

A FINAL PROJECT

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Sarjana Degree Majoring
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**Submitted by
ACHMAD GEOFANT THEO DE FANY
13020115120041**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY
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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly confirms that he compiles this thesis by himself and without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3 and diploma degree of any university. The writer ascertains also that he did not quote any material from other publications except for the references mentioned in the bibliography.

Semarang, 4th July 2019

Achmad Geofant Theo De Fany

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

Terbentur, terbentur, terbentur, terbentuk!.

Tan Malaka

People are capable at any time in their lives, of doing what they dream of.

The Alchemist

This paper is dedicated to

My beloved family and

To everyone who helped me accomplished this paper.

APPROVAL

THE ROLES OF AMERICAN TELEVISION NEWS IN INFLUENCING AMERICAN PEOPLE'S OPINION AND BEHAVIOR DEPICTED IN BEN AFFLECK'S *ARGO*

Written by

Achmad Geofant Theo De Fany

NIM: 13020115120041

is approved by the project advisor

On 4th July, 2019

Project Advisor

Rifka Pratama, S.Hum., M.A.
NPPU. H.7. 199004282018071001

The Head of the English Department

Dr. Agus Subiyanto, M.A.
NIP. 196408141990011001

VALIDATION

Approved by

Strata 1 Project Examination Committee

Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University

On 5th August 2019

Chair Person

First Member,

Retno Wulandari, S.S., M.A.

Ariya Jati, S.S., M.A.

NIP. 19750525 2005012002

NIP. 19780228 2005021001

Second Member

Third Member

Arido Laksono, S.S., M.Hum.

Drs. Catur Kepirianto, M.Hum.

NIP.197507111999031002

NIP.196509221992031002

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Semarang, 4th July 2019

Achmad Geofant Theo De Fany

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ABSTRACT

Television news could deliver not only information, but also false judgment of certain situation or people. These kinds of information can be directly consumed by people without any further study or analysis. People can often be agitated by the idea conveyed by the television, disregarding the positivity or the negativity of the information. *Argo* utilizes television to broadcast the information about what happens to American workers in Iran who are being kept as hostages. This news is being consumed by American people in United States. Therefore, the writer would like to acquire the knowledge of the role of media in promoting violence to the people of America and how the media can have so much significance in American people's lives. Close viewing and library research that consist of Cultivation Theory by Gerbner and Gross will be used to analyze the data from the film. The findings of the analysis will be presented by taking screenshots of certain scenes from the film and relating it with the Cultivation Theory. By showing the results of the analysis, this paper is going to highlight the effect of watching television news.

Keywords: *Television, Cultivation Theory, Argo, America, News*

1

INTRODUCTION**1.1 Background of the Study**

Studies regarding communication and media started to grow in the United States of America around 1940s, mainly focusing on the requirements to expand a society, which includes the positioning of ‘the critical pragmatism and sociology of the Chicago School which the political and economic interest were based upon’ (Hardt, 1992: 9). The development of the media effects tradition started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when many social upheavals were being experienced by many countries and the media was viewed to be engaged in social control by “moulding behaviour in line with the will of those who controlled the media”. Then, due to mass media serves as some individuals’ only source of information, the media’s content was viewed as having “direct effects” upon those individuals. (Newbold, 1995:7). Then, he notes that this gave rise to the “hypodermic needle theory” or “magic bullet theory” which implied that mass media had a direct, immediate and powerful effect on their audiences.

In the present time, media has improved greatly in terms of variety and it helps everyone to gather information from every corner of the world. American people, similar to any other society in this world, have their own perception of the information they receive and this is responsible for influencing their opinion. What media—in this case television broadcasts to the people basically influences their opinion and action. It is related to mass media theory by Hanson. According

to Hanson(2014: 296), the process of surveillance was expanded by the mass media, where media provides more ways to interpret information from the whole world and influence people's cognitive, affectivity, and behavior. The major driver of dissemination of a myriad of information is media, which serves to educate, communicate, and interact with global society.

Argo follows the story of Tony Mendez who is recruited by CIA to save American people working in Iran. These American people have to be rescued because the Iranian government demands America to hand over their former leader, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, or threaten to use American workers as hostages. *Argo*, apart from its story, actually depicts how American people consume the content of the television. It can be seen that media informs people about the situation that happens in Iran where American workers are being held hostage. American people depend on media to be informed with this news. Even though the only one who knows about the rescue operation is The United States government, people in United States feels empathy for what is happening to their fellow countrymen in Iran.

Television is one of mass media's platforms, covers a wide range of information within society, groups, and individuals. In *Argo*, media, specifically electronic media such as television, is the only way American people at that time can see the situation of the hostages in Iran. This sparks some of questions: what are the roles of Television depicted in Ben Affleck's *Argo*, how media influences American people's opinion and behavior in this film, and what effects of these informations on them.

In order to have a more focused discussion, the writer will set a scope as to make this paper precise and prevent it from covering too wide of a matter. There are two sides which are consumed and affected by media in this film but this project will only observe how the media affects the lives of American people. This is because *Argo* is based on American's perspective and choosing to observe Iranian people and its media will only be a source of probable misunderstanding. By answering the questions above within the mentioned scope, the writer would like to examine how television news can influence American people's lives and the effects on people's minds.

2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The writer will develop the theoretical framework in this chapter to analyze the film which consists of the correlation between television news and media, and its roles in our society depicted in Ben Affleck's *Argo*.

2.1 The Correlation between Television and Media

Today, media is the most effective instrument to extend thoughts and make culture in societies. Television plays a very important role in the building of a society. Television has changed the societies of world so much that we can not ignore its importance. First of all the readers have to know what the media is. One main source of information or communication is television, and also media has a very large role in people's lives, according to Essays, UK. (2018).

Television, as a part of media, plays a prominent role in supporting social norms. In the former, media serves to inform and persuade people of new norms, and to accept those norms (Della Vigna and Gentzkow, 2010; Bandura, 1986). In the latter, for a coordination device, the information that was provided could be used. Coordination is crucial because one could visualize norms as a matter of coordination, that is, a situation where a person would only participate if others were to participate as well (Mackie, 1996; Chwe, 1998). As such, the provision of public information can enhance coordination on that norm through the creation of common knowledge. It provides access to information that may have been limited in the past and, more importantly, an eye into other societies. This puts the

validity of our own norms into question, which can both be a positive or negative consequence.

Television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of an otherwise heterogeneous population. The repetitive pattern of television's mass-produced messages and images form the mainstream of a common symbolic environment. However, the image of this television is captured within the Ben Affleck's *Argo*, so it is necessary to include the brief review of the film.

2.2 The Roles of Television

Since the birth of communication, media has been used to convey information to those willing to absorb it. Publications and simple spoken words were the precursors. Soaring to new heights in the twentieth century with radio, television, and the internet. Media have been made accessible to people in every aspect of their daily lives. According to UK Essays (2018), television also has a critical role in the formation of society, in which it serves to entertain, educate, inform, and also television have the ability to influence people's opinion, due to having a huge hold on society. It is related to McQuail's theory (1983; 1987), in which there are five major categories as social functions of social media: *continuity, information, mobilization, correlations and entertainment*. *Information* concerns with world events, power relations, progress and innovation. *Correlations* refers to elaborating events, and consensus building. *Continuity* is related with expressing culture and national identity. *Entertainment* focuses on relaxing and reducing social tension of

the consumer. Finally, *mobilization* includes social objectives, politics, war, and the like.

Television has correlation of parts of society because it relates to how media's selection of certain news and its interpretation affects how society understands and responds to it. How the media pictures the issue at hand towards the consumer could affect, to a certain extent, people's stance on public policy, political issues, events, etc. (McQuail 1984; 1987).

From the responses which was shown in the scene, there are three stages that the writer will elaborate, such as non verbal behavior, verbal behavior and violent behavior. The first stage is non verbal behavior. Speech and communication human acts are two wildly different subjects. Essentially, communication human acts covers a myriad of phenomena: "everything from facial expression and gesture to fashion and status symbol, from dance drama to music and mine, from flow of effect to flow of traffic, form the territoriality of animals to the protocol of diplomats, form extra-sensory of violence to the rhetoric of topless dancers" (Harrison, 1973). The second stage is verbal behavior. B. F. Skinner (1992) mentions that the behavior of an individual that accomplish its effect upon the world through someone else's behavior is defined as verbal behavior. Then, the final stage is violent behavior. According to article entitled *Violent Behaviour* by Healthwise Staff (2017), any behavior that puts a threat or cause harm upon an individual or others or wrecks properties, is called a violent behavior. Violent behavior often perpetrated with verbal threats, but as time goes on, it could intensify the point of physical harm.

3

RESEARCH METHOD

To comprehend the materials, the writer structurally uses library research in collecting the data. It is related because the form of the subject is motion capture or film, so the writer uses library research methods to obtain specific object that can answer the writer's hypothesis. According to Elmer E. Rasmuson Library (2014), in order to gather information to write a paper, make a presentation, or complete a project, a library research which involves step-by-step process is utilized. It is imperative to create a back up, make revisions, give more material or even completely change the topic. The research process itself involves identifying and locating relevant information, analyzing what you found, and then developing and expressing your ideas. *Argo*, however, is a feature-length film that consists of many idea and story to tell about. It is imperative that the writer utilize library research, so the findings about media and its effect on American people's mind can be delivered thoroughly.

The close analysis technique is used as an act of interpreting the motion capture or film. The writer structurally analyzes this study by viewing and reviewing the effect of media especially television on American people's mind. The writer would like to present the findings by taking a screenshot every time a scene that relates to the topic show up. In order to choose the exact scene that supports the main idea of this project, close viewing is indeed required. Those are used to focus on our understanding of the film, such as what is the meaning of

the visuals, the conversations, the messages and also to take a deep dive into the details and get an excellent understanding of the filmmaker's decisions.

The writer uses a sociological approach to discuss the conflict in the film. Stryker (1980) concludes that an approach from a sociological standpoint is to understand one's self and its parts (identities) means that it is imperative for one to understand the society in which one is acting, because one must remember that he/she always acts in a social setting, where other people exist. A sociological approach is used because the issue discussed in the film is an issue that happens in the society and revolves around the roles of television news in influencing American people's opinions depicted in Ben Affleck's *Argo*.

4

DISCUSSION

4.1 The Synopsis of Ben Affleck's *Argo*

Argo is 2012 drama action film which is based on true story, the story of Tony Mendez, a CIA agent who is hired to rescue American people from Iran. The setting of time in this film is around 1979, when the Iranian revolution occurred. Iran's former leader, Rizky Pahlavi, is demanded by the Iranians to be returned to his home country. He has fled the country and is given a hiding place in America. One day, the embassy of United States in Iran is being attacked by the mass and many people in that office has to be kept as hostages to be used a ransom, so that America would hand over their former leader to be punished.

Ben Affleck's *Argo* often features television news which is broadcasted to the people of America. By using this, the film tries to put the audience in the position of worried people in America who watch the news about what happens to the hostages in Iran. There are evidences in the scene where the American people are angry to the point of starting an anti-Iran riot in the Embassy of Iran consulate. This act was viewed as a form of the American people's sympathy toward the hostages and to force the government to free the hostages.



Picture 1:Anti-Iran riot (20:23)Picture 2:Anti-Iran riot (20:25) Picture 3:Anti-Iran riot (20:26)

4.2 The Roles of Television

4.2.1 Giving Information

Television is a “one way” form of communication. Television is widely consumed by citizens around the world, being considered as a technological advancement, where people could get information quickly. This form of media, as an audio-visual media, does not have any requirement for the consumer to enjoy it, thus ease the citizen a lot. This is based on UK Essay’s theory (2018), in which it states that television plays a very important role in building a society, because of its role as a source of information.

However, the role of mass media (especially television) is basically not just a means of releasing tension or entertainment, but any content and information that is displayed has a big influence on people's lives. Because of what is broadcast by various television programs will influence the cognition of the audience. Subjective reality (Berger, 1966: 13) or as described by Lippman (1992) with the saying “the world outside and the pictures in our head” that has been influenced by the media will be a picture of public reality regarding various social events that happen around it. This reality will then determine one’s stance on certain things.

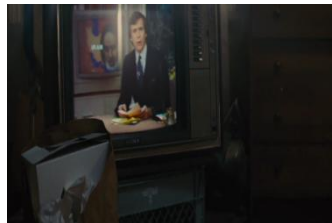
In this case, *Argo* presents a situation in which television is used as a tool to provide information related to the news that shows the presence of American people in Iran which occurred during the Iran Revolution. According to OER Service web (courses.lumenlearning.com), it is stated that The Iran

Revolution, or The Islamic Revolution, transformed Iran from an absolute monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to an Islamic republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who is the founder of the Islamic Republic. It began on January 1979 and ended on December 1979.

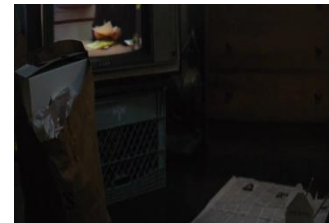
In the 14th minute of the movie, a male news anchor broadcasts the information that day is the 69th day after American people are being held in Iran. Also, after this, there is the news stating that American government will not give up in finding a way to rescue all the hostages and assert the people that their security is the government's number one priority.



Picture 4: Iran's Revolutionary Guard(13:05)



Picture 5: Iran's Revolutionary Guard



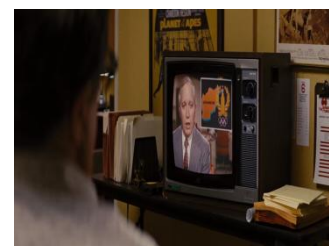
Picture 6: Iran's Revolutionary Guard(13:08)



Picture 7: The effort of the government (1:00:38)



Picture 8: The effort of the government (1:00:39)



Picture 9: The effort of the government (1:00:42)

Newscaster 1

: Iran's Revolutionary Guard has rounded up a gang of terrorist blamed for one murder of half a dozen followers of Ayatollah Khomeini. It says the security at Khomeini's home now has been tightened. This, by the way, is the 69th day that the American hostages have been held in Tehran.

(Argo, 13:05)

News caster 2 : The State Department insisted today that the crisis in Afghanistan will not divert the attention of the United States from the plight of the hostages.

(*Argo*, 1:00:38)

The first news wants us to feel what it is like right now to hear the news about many people being threatened in Iran. With the picture of Ayatollah Khomeini in the background, the audiences are introduced to the notion that one man responsible for this incident is the leader of Iran, thus making American people believe that Iranian people are all evil. However, in the second news, the broadcaster shares the information about the effort of American government to make sure that all those hostages are safe and it is their number one priority. This, however, convince everyone that American are the victims and tries to be the protagonist by trying to rescue the hostages, which is the effect after watching television news as a source of information about the situation of the hostages.

4.2.2 Influencing People's Opinion and Behavior

Media, in this case television, have one function to deliver information that can influence people's opinion and behavior. Regardless of whether or not the facts are true, television, which is one of the platforms often used by the public, has huge influence both positively and negatively. It depends on the way someone interprets the impressions displayed. What often happens is that people tends to interpret raw information they obtain without looking for other sources to confirm the validity of said information. Therefore, wisdom is required in filtering the information.

According to McQuail (1984), there is one major category of social functions of mass media, which is mobilization which includes social objectives, politics, war, and the like. From this function, it can be seen that the role of media, in this case television, can affect one's thinking and action and trigger a social movement that can cause positive or negative effects depending on the perspective of the person who saw the show.

As a matter of fact, in Ben Affleck's *Argo*, America is actually blamed by Iran for providing Rizal Pahlavi a hiding place, the main reason behind the attack of the United States embassy. By analyzing the scenes above, it is known that the media wants to influence the perception of American people that, in fact, Iranians are the bad people, and taking American workers as hostages is a crime, hence punishable. From this case, the writer concludes that television influence people's opinion.

After watching the television news, the writer began to find some effects which are observable from the American people's behavior. These changes in behavior come from their shaped opinion towards Iran. There are three stages that the writer will elaborate, such as non verbal behavior, verbal behavior and violent behavior.

4.2.2.1 Non Verbal Behavior

Later in the film, there are some scenes in the form of non verbal behavior. There are two scenes that can be shown as the responses from American people after watching the hostage situation that was carried out by the Iranian people, which

was broadcasted on television. As a form of their concern for the incident, they made a paper containing a hope that the hostages could return to America safely.



Picture10: An empathy given by American people (12:52) Picture 11: An empathy given by American people (12:55) Picture 12: An empathy given by American people (12:56)



Picture13: A worried outcome (12:59) Picture 14: A worried outcome (13:00) Picture 15: A worried outcome (13:01)

Some instances in this film can be used to prove the effect of the influenced mind of American people. In the 13th minute, there is a sign which reads, "Come home safely" with a yellow ribbon next to it. There is also an announcement board in front of a house which says, "PRAY FOR OUR HOSTAGES". This is a palpable outcome of the worried American who consumes the content of the media.

These two examples of non-verbal behavior is the first stage of the effect in the form of empathy given by American people. The empathy emerges as the result of people watching news on television. The next stage of this effect is verbal behavior that will emerge from watching the news.

4.2.2.2 Verbal Behavior

Later in the film, there are two people who are interviewed and asked about their opinion towards this problem. Every single one of them has a different thing to say but it is similar in the way that they think Iranian people are the ones to blame and they should be punished.



Picture16: Unforgivable moment(21:50) Picture17: Unforgivable moment (21:52)Picture18: Unforgivable moment (21:56)



Picture 19:The way themedia portrayed (21:59) Picture 20: The way themedia portrayed (22:00) Picture 21: The way themedia portrayed (22:02)

Jack Stroup :Men who served in Vietnam for what they believed was right are angry.

Jack Stroup :I'm mad as hell.

(*Argo*, 22:02)

From the scene, it can be seen from his appearance and his words, that he is a former US soldier who served in Vietnam, fighting for American people's freedom, and what happens to his fellow countrymen is unforgivable. He also states that he is "mad as hell", showing that the way themedia portrays the hostage's situation has made him angry.



Picture 22: The student's opinion (21:53) Picture 23: The student's opinion (21:53) Picture 24: The student's opinion (21:53)

The student : Just shoot a couple of them, show them we mean business.
(*Argo*, 21:53)

There is also a student who is interviewed regarding these issues. His reaction is more straightforward than the first man. He suggests that American government should shoot some of Iranian people to show them that they cannot mess with America. It is a fact that what he mentions is a threat. He believes that it is a crime and it has to be paid off, even with death.

The second stage of the effect of how television can influence the audience's mind can be shown from these scenes. *Argo* depicts verbal behavior in the form of threats from the Americans who criticize the Iranian's act of taking hostage. This triggers the American to resort to violent behavior.

4.2.2.3 Violent Behavior

Violent behavior is the last stage of television's effect upon people's opinion and behavior. The writer found a few evidence that show that there is indeed hostility from the American people towards the Iranian people. The brutal act is a form of the American people's disappointment for the tragedy that occurred on American Embassy in Iran. This is a very unfortunate event, as it caused collateral damage.



Picture 25: American shouts at the Iranian(21:29) Picture 26: American shouts at the Iranian(21:29) Picture 27: American shouts at the Iranian(21:29)

Newscaster : At one point, the mob cornered one of the Iranians.

American people : Just hit him again!

(*Argo*, 21:29)

The third and final effect of how television can affect people's opinion and behavior is captured within the next couple of minutes. There is a live report taken with video camera that shows the violence happening to someone who is allegedly an Iranian. This incident starts with a group of people that shouts at the Iranian. Then, after being shouted at, this man takes several punches until he cannot defend himself from the mass.

The analysis also describes two things. First, American people wants to avenge the attack that happens to the American people who work in Iran. However, this direct violence is the result of continuous reports that broadcasts the situation in Iran. It is safe to say that American people are tired of watching their fellow countrymen being kept as hostages in Iran and results in public violence. The second thing that can be observed from this scene is how media, before this occurrence, has steadily made American people's mind filled with hatred and vengeance.

By giving information that continuously aggravates the situation between United States and Iran, media has taken a part in dictating the people's mind and

action because the media mixes fact and fiction that at first entertaining but eventually influential to the mind of people. Gerbner and Gross have also said in their cultivation theory that says:

“Since TV encompass essential element of art, science, technology, statecraft, and public story telling, it penetrates every home in the land with its seasonal, cynical, and perpetual patterns of organically related fact and fiction”(Gerbner and Gross, 367).

It shows in the film that America seems to avoid the responsibility of returning Rizal Pahlavi, resulting in the rage of Iranian people. American media, on the other hand, also focuses only on the problem in Iran instead of examining the reason behind it. This problem then creates the idea that America is the protagonist and Iranian is the antagonist without taking further analysis.

This proves that media, or television news in this case, can mix fact and fiction to create something that is not only acceptable but also stimulating. This statement also supported by Ashley Dugger (2013), stating that this case is the perception that the media is reporting the news in partial or prejudiced manner. It was called media bias which occurs when the media seems to push a specific viewpoint, rather than reporting the news objectively.

It has been proven that *Argo* uses media, such as television to put people in the situation of American people. The film, however, captures the effect of the media by staging them to three parts. One is non verbal behavior, second is verbal behavior, and the third is violent behavior. These effects amplify the significance of the media in influencing American people's opinion and behavior.

5

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of Ben Affleck's *Argo*, the writer finds some evidence that television news has the important function of informing the society, and it is related with McQuail's theory. As stated above, one of the main functions of Television is giving information. This can be seen from the scene that a male news anchor broadcasts the information about the presence of American people in Iran which occurred during the Iran Revolution. It also informs about the situation after American people are being held in Iran and shared the information that American government will not give up in finding a way to rescue all the hostages.

From the analysis above, the writer can conclude that in *Argo*, media often combine reality and fiction to create something that will be acceptable to certain group of people and it is related with Gerbner and Gross's theory. The problem in Iran, where American workers are being kept as hostages, are distributed directly to United States citizens without giving any explanation that America is providing a hiding place for Iran's former corrupted leader, Reza Pahlavi. Television in America combines fiction and reality so that people in United States will believe that the only one to blame is Iran and America is the protagonist.

This kind of news influences American people's opinion and behavior. The former can be shown by American people's perception towards Iran that is changing, specifically when they think that Iran is evil. Those opinions ignite changes on American people's behavior in the end. There are three stages of

behavioral changes that can be observed. First is non verbal behavior, where people in America give their sympathy by making cards or board that say supportive remarks for those Americans who still struggle to get out of Iran. The second stage is verbal behavior given by American people who are interviewed in the Television news. The people are angry about this problem and give threatening remarks to Iranian people. The third and final stage is violent behavior. This is perpetrated by an angry mob in America that hits someone who is allegedly an Iranian. The reason behind this is that people in America cannot tolerate the problem any longer and release their anger to the innocent man. This paper has argued that mass media have the power to convey not only political information, but also values that can changes people's opinion and behavior.

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