

Publicity & Gatekeeping in the Media



A presentation by the Mucktracker Team

Objective



Analyze how news coverage
influences publicity and public
persuasion.

Connect

"There is no such thing as bad publicity." -P.T. Barnum

Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not?



Gatekeeping & Journalism



Regardless of whether you think there is such a thing as bad press, the value of press exposure is clear. While journalists often attempt to present a neutral or even contrarian report of those they profile, mere exposure is often enough to bias an audience toward a subject.

Media organizations are often called *gatekeepers* because they are constantly engaged in making decisions about which activities and voices to place in the public spotlight.

- In politics, this can mean highlighting the voice of one politician, organization, or interest group over another.
- In business, this can mean boosting an audience's awareness of one company over its competitors.

Forbes Example

WORKING REMOTE | 5,855 views | Aug 9, 2020, 07:00am EDT

How 7 Business Leaders Are Redefining Collaboration During COVID-19



Rhett Power Contributor @

Entrepreneurs

I ask entrepreneurs how they overcome their biggest challenges.

NBC News Example

A screenshot of a NBC News article. The header reads "A business spends \$800 a week to test staff for COVID-19. Could rapid, cheap tests help?". Below the headline is a subtext: "Experts say antigen tests could be used by businesses and universities where there is a demand for frequent, rapid testing." The NBC News logo is in the top left corner, and social media sharing icons are in the top right.

News Outlets as PR Machines

Let's look at two examples of news articles that provide publicity for businesses.

How does each headline approach the relationship between COVID-19 and business?





The first is an online article from *Forbes*, one of the highest-circulating business magazines, famous for its lists of “top” companies and wealthiest people.

The second is an article on the website of *NBC News*, one of the major nationwide U.S. broadcast networks.

Although media coverage can bring recognition to a business, it can also bring unwanted attention if the coverage is negative, or even if it deviates too much from the way a company wishes to be viewed by the public.

Therefore, virtually all companies use *public relations* to cultivate a consistent image. Public relations refers to activities that are used to influence public perception.

How should journalists profile businesses?



When profiling businesses, journalists have to weigh the positive or negative publicity they provide the business against their own brand commitment to fairness as well as the news value of the business's story.

Balancing these factors can be challenging because editors use newsworthiness standards to determine which stories to cover. One frequently used standard is human interest—a personal kind of story that puts a human face on a broader topic. This inevitably provides good publicity to the individuals, which can diminish a newspaper's appearance of fairness.



When a business actively seeks positive media portrayals in the press, this strategy is called *media-as-ally*. They may simply solicit media coverage or work closely with a media outlet to craft a story.

It is also essential for news media to maintain a positive public reputation in order to have credibility. Media outlets that wish to be respected for providing news are more likely to maintain a standard of impartiality, whereas some news providers' standing in the public may be based on various other benefits they provide to their audiences.

Now, let's see if we can find examples of publicity and media-as-ally strategy in recent news stories.

Launch Mucktracker, go to Explore, and search for a well-known business. Try to find a business that has been prevalent in the news recently.

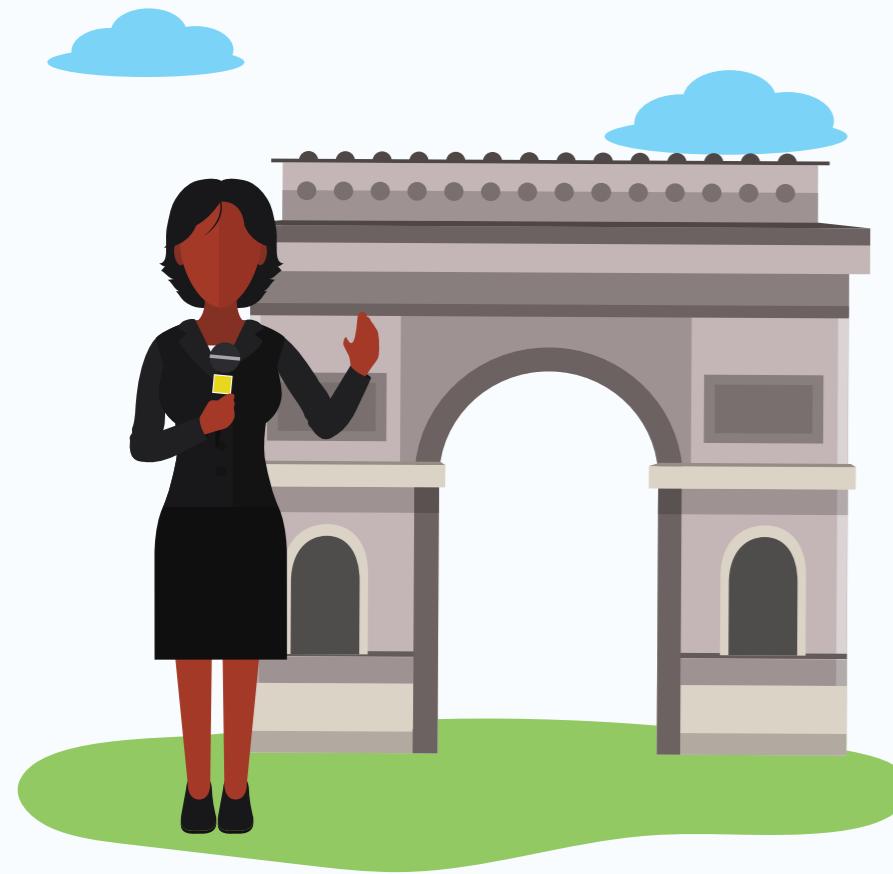
Choose the three-column organizer, and write the following labels: "neutral," "favorable" and "unfavorable." Then, identify how favorable the reporting is to the company by dragging the articles to the appropriate columns.

Take notes on the articles to give more specific examples. Do any of the stories seem to reveal media-as-ally?

You can also compare this coverage with recent PR materials you can find about the subject. (You can find recent press releases on sites such as PR Newswire.) To what extent does the favorable reporting reinforce the PR provided by the source?



Wrap-Up



Gatekeeping is the power to privilege some activities and voices over others. This can be done unintentionally or deliberately.

Public relations (PR) describes activities designed to favorably influence an audience's attitude toward an individual, group, organization, or government.

Media-as-ally is a strategy in which the press is viewed as a potential means of positive coverage, or even a tool to be manipulated.

Based on what you saw in the reporting of your example, do you think the media should act more carefully when reporting about businesses? Why or why not?