

Exercise 40

Read the text and discuss the italicized questions contained in it

News Media and Public Opinion

It is the job of news media not only to provide a window on the world but to interpret what can be seen: to make sense of the view. The world of events and issues that newspapers, radio and TV attempt to report each day is an enormously complicated place. The truth is seldom easy to define or recognize.

It is sometimes said that anything one reads in a newspaper or hears on the radio or sees on TV is likely to be wrong or inaccurate or exaggerated. A question that arises is whether they influence public opinion or merely follow it. *Are, for example, a newspaper's editorial articles, where it puts forward its own opinion of politics and the other issues of the day, really 'leaders' as they are called? Can TV or radio journalists' reporting and comments be trusted?*

News media report news (facts) and comment (opinion and analysis), the former providing the necessary information for us to interpret the world ourselves, the latter offering the point of view of the news media. But newspapers and TV channels are often criticized for being 'biased'. It seems that news and comment get mixed: **newspapers** or certain programmes become propaganda channels. *Can news actually be objective? Is it possible ever to separate fact and opinion?*

However much one may think that bias is a bad thing to have in a **newspaper**, radio or TV, it only becomes an ethical issue if one also believes that they influence people and that a particular bias has an **effect on** public opinion.

Do mass media influence their audience? Some people are worried that more and more mass media are owned by fewer and fewer powerful figures. *Is this also a bad thing?*

(from *The Power to Inform*)

Exercise 41

Below there are some questions to help you form your opinion about whether newspapers, radio or television have an effect on public opinion. Discuss them with the class or with **a partner**.

- Which of the two statements below would you agree with?
 - People buy a newspaper or watch a certain channel because they know⁷ and like the kind of opinion it has.
 - People are given their opinions by the newspaper or programme they read or see.
- Why might someone, e.g. a newspaper or TV owner, want to influence public opinion?
- If a newspaper, for example, strongly believes that it is right and the rest of society is wrong does it not have a duty to try to influence opinion? Why?
- Do mass media also have the right to use bias as a way of getting across a very strongly held bias, against the authorities, for example?
- Do you think that quality as well as popular papers are biased? Why?
- Do you believe that only quality papers can analyze the news well? Why?
- Which do you think has the most influence on public **opinion**?
 - TV news reporting?
 - TV comment?
 - newspaper reporting?
 - newspaper comment?
- How would you define the difference between opinion and analysis?
- Since the arrival of television, the quality papers contain more and more analysis. Why?