The routledge companion to media and scandal

Howard Tumber, Silvio Waisbord

Scandals, media effects and public opinion

Publication details

Francis L. F. Lee
Published online on: 17 Apr 2019

How to cite :- Francis L. F. Lee. 17 Apr 2019, Scandals, media effects and public opinion from: The routledge companion to media and scandal Routledge Accessed on: 27 Sep 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
44
SCANDALS, MEDIA EFFECTS AND PUBLIC OPINION

Francis L. F. Lee

By definition, political scandals involve the revelation of political or moral transgressions committed by politicians in their public or private lives. The revelation of misconduct is typically followed by public condemnation. Political scandals thus always threaten to undermine the reputation or even derail the careers of the implicated politicians.

However, political scientists have long noted that not all scandals result in the same extent of reputational damage. Numerous factors can shape the impact of scandals on public opinion. In this regard, the media’s role can hardly be overstated. For some scholars (e.g., Esser & Hartung 2004; Thompson 2000), scandal refers to not so much a politician’s misconduct and its revelation than the communicative event following the revelation of misconduct. Hence the public is essentially reacting to the scandal event as it plays out in the media arena. Meanwhile, digital media have provided new platforms for the communication of political information and citizen participation in political events. They thus introduced new possibilities into the interrelationships among media communication, political scandals, and public opinion.

This chapter reviews research on the impact of political scandals on public opinion and the role of the media in shaping such impact. I begin by discussing social psychological and political science research on public reactions to scandals. This provides the broader background against which media impact on public opinion in political scandals can be understood. Review of research on the role of the news media will explicate how media coverage, through agenda-setting, framing, and other means, can significantly shape whether and how a revealed misconduct of a politician would influence public opinion. Extant research and possible research directions of the impact of digital media will then be discussed. This chapter ends with a brief discussion of the possibilities of comparative studies and the use of “digital methods” to address the topic.

Public responses to political scandals

There is no question that, in democratic societies, scandals can have substantial impact on people’s attitudes toward the implicated politicians and thereby the politicians’ careers. Beyond exemplary cases such as Watergate, Basinger (2013) collected information about 173 scandals involving U.S. Congress members between 1990 and 2010. He found that while 88% of incumbent representatives and 70% of incumbent senators not involved in any scandals were reelected, the percentages became 67% and 42%, respectively, for those who were involved in scandals.
Praino, Stockemer and Moscardelli (2013) found similar effects of scandals on incumbents’ margins of victory in U.S. Congressional elections. They added that the scandal effect could linger and persist—though diminished in size—in the second and third elections after a scandal.

However, the above studies also showed that many scandal-tainted politicians did survive. In fact, research has shown that the impact of scandals can be weak and short-lived. Pattie and Johnston (2012) found that the 2009 UK parliamentary expenses scandal did affect people’s evaluation of politicians, but that the impact was not huge and had largely dissipated by the time of the 2010 general election as both politicians and voters shifted their attention to other matters. Studying the electoral impact of corruption scandals in 215 parliamentary elections in 32 European countries between 1981 and 2011, Bagenholm (2013) concluded that “there are evidently many elections in which the electorate has thrown out the rascals . . . but there is also ample evidence to the contrary” (p. 607).

The fact that not all scandals have the same impact on public opinion led political scientists to look for the factors shaping the impact of scandals. What emerges from the literature is that the impact of scandals is dependent on a complex configuration of contextual conditions, scandal characteristics, and individual level variables. On societal level conditions, Carlin, Love and Martinez-Gallardo (2015) examined 84 presidential scandals from 18 Latin American countries and found that the impact of the scandals on presidential approval appeared only when the economy was bad. They argued that people were willing to “trade corrupt or illicit practices for the prospect of favorable policy outcomes” (p. 113). Choi and Woo (2012) reached a similar conclusion in their study on public reactions toward official corruption in South Korea (though the study was strictly speaking about how individuals’ perceptions of the economy shaped their responses). For another example, Riera et al. (2013) found that corruption scandals influenced voting in the 2007, but not the 2011, Spanish local elections. They argued that local corruption was a less prominent issue in the 2011 elections because the elections were dominated by national issues related to the ongoing economic crisis and austerity measures.

Other studies focused on how characteristics of the scandals affect public reactions. Since scandals can involve transgressions ranging from corruption to moral improprieties in private lives, people may react to different types of misconduct differently. Indeed, Doherty, Dowling and Miller’s (2011) survey experiment showed that, compared to moral scandals and scandals not involving abuse of power, financial scandals and scandals involving abuse of power affect people’s evaluations of the politicians’ job performance and voting intentions more substantially. Nonetheless, this does not mean that transgressions in private lives are necessarily seen as less serious. Another factor to consider is whether the transgression violates the values publicly professed by a politician, that is, whether the transgression leads people to think that he or she is hypocritical (Bhatti, Hansen & Olsen 2013; McDermott, Schwartz & Vallejo 2015). McDermott et al. (2015), in particular, found that when a scandal about a politician’s private behavior leads to perceptions of hypocrisy, the scandal could influence people’s judgment of not only the politician’s personality but also his or her competence. They argued that perceptions of hypocrisy may lead people to question a politician’s ability to keep a promise.

Beyond the characteristics of the transgressions, Smith, Powers and Suarez (2005) found that people evaluated a politician more negatively when he or she uses the strategy of excuse (i.e., acknowledging the misconduct but shifting the blame to something/someone else) as compared to justification (i.e., articulating an argument of why the “misconduct” should be seen as acceptable) or denial (i.e., denying the factuality of the accusation). This is consistent with the observation by Thompson (2000) that the implicated politician’s inappropriate responses to a scandal may constitute “second-order transgressions” aggravating the negative impact of a scandal. Meanwhile, Stewart et al.’s (2013) experimental study showed that people evaluate
Scandals and public opinion

a politician in a sex scandal less negatively when he or she receives backing from a third party (i.e., not his or her own political party). It is clear from such studies that the conduct of the protagonists and stakeholders can shape public response to scandals.

Public reactions vary not only across scandals but also across individuals facing the same scandal. One well-established finding in the literature is that partisans tend to judge a scandalized politician on one’s side less negatively (e.g., Anduiza, Gallego & Munoz 2013; Miller 1999). This phenomenon is usually explained through motivated reasoning (Fischle 2000; Lee 2015). According to the theory, people process information with either an accuracy goal or a directional goal. In public affairs, the directional goal typically prevails, that is, people are motivated to process information in a biased manner so as to derive a conclusion that would protect their existing views.

Motivated reasoning can explain not only the impact of partisanship but also the impact of political cynicism and (di)trust. Dancey (2012) found that politically cynical people do not pay more attention to scandals than non-cynical citizens do, but they tend to interpret scandal information more negatively because doing so would confirm their negative views of politicians. Wroe, Allen and Birch (2013) also found that political distrust could lead people to regard corruption as present when the presented scenario is actually ambiguous.

One distinctive contribution made by studies following the motivated reasoning perspective is their identification and conceptualization of various scandal-related perceptions. Summarizing from various studies, a distinction between transgression perceptions and process perceptions can be made. The former refers to perceptions about the alleged transgression, including its factuality (Did it occur? Was it intentional?), seriousness (Is it a major or minor transgression?), and relevance (Is it pertinent to the politician’s public role?). Process perceptions are those concerning the scandal event, including its nature (Is it a matter of political persecution?), procedural fairness (Is the accused treated fairly?), and response appropriateness (Does the politician respond appropriately?). These perceptions hold the key to understanding the impact of scandals at the individual level, that is, pre-existing attitudes would lead people to hold different perceptions about a scandal, which in turn influence their attitudes toward the scandalized politician (e.g., Lee 2015).

Other scholars have examined how informational level and political awareness shape people’s response to scandals. Klasnia (2017) analyzed decades of U.S. election data and showed that politically aware individuals were less likely to vote for politicians involved in corruption scandals. More interestingly, research has produced contrasting findings regarding how political awareness shapes partisan bias in responses to scandals. Anduiza et al. (2013) found that partisan bias disappeared among the politically sophisticated. In contrast, Wagner, Tarlov and Vivyan’s (2014) UK study found that partisanship has stronger influence on opinions toward corrupted politicians among the more knowledgeable people. Wagner et al. (2014) argued that the politically involved citizens have invested more effort in constructing their political views and hence are more motivated to protect their existing views. This puzzle created by the contrasting findings remains unresolved.

Up to this point, this chapter has reviewed studies about how scandals influence public opinion toward the scandalized politicians. But studies have also examined how scandals may “spillover” and influence people’s attitudes toward other politicians, political parties, and/or the political system at large (e.g., Bowler & Karp 2004; Ulbig & Miller 2012). Maier (2011), for instance, contrasted the functional and dysfunctional theories of scandals. The former sees scandals as a means for a system to single out the “bad apples.” The latter sees scandals as dampening people’s confidence in politicians and the political system in general. His findings support the dysfunctional view: a scandal could negatively impinge on people’s attitude toward both the implicated politician’s party and other political parties.
Psychologically, spillover effects may be understood by an assimilation and contrast model. Schwarz and Bless’s (1992) classic study showed that a scandal negatively affects people’s trust in “politicians in general,” yet increases their trust in specific politicians other than the implicated person. The theoretical rationale is that the scandalized politician belongs to the broader category of “politicians in general.” Hence assimilation effects occur. But other specific politicians are distinctive from the scandalized politician, resulting in contrast effects (also see Regner & Le Floch 2005).

However, it is unlikely for all specific politicians to benefit from a scandal surrounding another person. When a scandal arises, politicians closely tied to or perceived to be the same as the implicated politician may also suffer. Lee (2018) showed such findings in Hong Kong, where recall of scandals surrounding the head of the government was associated with more negative evaluations of two other top government officials, but not a third one. He explained the findings in terms of an associative-diagnostic framework that has been used in research on commercial scandals (e.g., Gao, Zhang, Zhang & Knight 2015). In this framework, positive or negative spillover effects arise depending on the linkages between the scandalized politician and other political objects in the associative networks in people’s minds.

The associative-diagnostic framework has the advantage of allowing the possibility of negative spillover effects to other specific politicians or political objects. It also allows researchers to develop hypotheses about how other variables may moderate the spillover effects. For instance, Lee (2018) found that political cynicism—the tendency to see all politicians as similarly selfish—leads to stronger negative spillover effects of scandals.

**Media effects in scandals**

The previous section has reviewed the work done mainly by political scientists and social psychologists. In most of the studies discussed, a scandal was implicitly defined merely as the revelation of misconduct. With the exception of the few studies that took into account how politicians respond to scandals, the identity of the person or organization revealing the misconduct and the way the misconduct is communicated in the public arena are not factors incorporated into the analysis. However, to the extent that people may develop various kinds of perceptions regarding a scandal, how the media cover a revealed transgression can significantly shape people’s perceptions and responses. More fundamentally, the presence of media coverage of scandals cannot be taken for granted. There is no simple equation between the presence of a revealed transgression and substantial press coverage. As Nyhan (2015, 436) put it, “when the political and news environment is unfavorable, scandals may erupt in the press despite thin evidentiary support. By contrast, under more favorable conditions, even well-supported allegations can languish.”

It is therefore important to examine the determinants of media coverage of scandals and whether size of coverage matters. For example, Nyhan (2015) found that the U.S. media were less likely to focus on a presidential scandal when the president received strong support from opposition party supporters, which reduced the incentives for oppositional party members to attack the president, and when there was “news congestion” caused by other major social or political events. Nyhan (2017) reported similar findings about governor scandals in the U.S.

For another example, Galvis, Snyder and Song’s (2016) study of U.S. newspapers between 1870 and 1910 found that market competition reduced partisan bias in scandal reporting: when competitors were present, newspapers were less likely to focus selectively on covering scandals affecting politicians “on the other side.” In a study in Argentina, Di Tella and Franceschelli (2011) measured the extent of government advertising on four newspapers and the extent to which the four papers covered government corruption scandals on their front pages. A negative
correlation was found, suggesting that the Argentinian government was successful in exerting financial pressure on the press.

Other studies directly or indirectly illustrate the impact of scandal coverage on public opinion. Costa-Perez, Sole-Olle and Sorribas-Navarro (2012) examined press coverage of corruption between 1996 and 2009 in Spain and found that the amount of coverage did influence the impact of scandals in elections. In the 2007 elections, the average vote loss following a corruption scandal was 4% for cases with fewer than 10 news reports. When there were more than 10 reports and the judiciary decided to investigate, the vote loss became 14%. Graffin, Bundy, Porac, Wade, and Quinn (2013) found that, in the 2009 UK parliamentary expense scandal, scandalized MPs “on the frontbench” received more press coverage than other scandalized MPs. Press coverage in turn influenced the probability of the MPs leaving Parliament through resignation or losing the 2010 election. Shea’s (1999) and Song’s (2016) U.S.-based studies showed similar effects of media coverage on the impact of scandals. Interestingly, beyond the sheer amount of coverage, one recent experimental study shows that public reactions to a politician’s misconduct can be more negative when the press disseminates information about a political scandal through a series of reports instead of in one single report (von Sikorski & Knoll 2018).

Obviously, media coverage of scandals may have “agenda-setting effects” on people. Palau and Davesa’s (2013) Spanish study found that variation in the amount of media coverage of corruption scandals over time was related to the extent to which the Spanish public saw corruption as an important problem. Moving a step further, one may ponder if a priming effect exists, that is, if persistent media coverage of scandals would alter the criteria underlying people’s evaluation of political leaders. Gilens, Vavreck and Cohen’s (2007) analysis came closest to tackling this question. They analyzed U.S. election data and found that, over the years, people’s evaluations of presidential candidates have actually become more reliant on policy issues than personal characteristics. Their study, however, was not concerned only with scandals. Their key argument is that the rise of issue-based campaign ads has compensated for the decline of issue content in the news, thus leading to the rise of issue-based evaluation despite common perceptions of the rise of personality-based news coverage, including a focus on scandals. Whether scandal coverage itself could lead people to emphasize personal integrity when evaluating politicians has yet to be directly tested.

Several scholars have employed the framing perspective to examine how media portrayal of a scandal may influence public opinion. In the U.S., the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal in the 1990s was a classic example of a scandal having seemingly no effect on the approval rating of the protagonist. Shah, Watts, Domke and Fan (2002) suggested that media framing can be a core explanation of the phenomenon. They differentiated among the Clinton behavior frame, the Conservative attack frame, and the liberal response frame. The former centered people’s attention on Clinton himself, whereas the latter two focused on partisan politics. Combining content analysis with longitudinal poll data, their analysis showed that the two frames centering on partisan politics did lead to a more positive appraisal of Clinton.

Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear if the media always employ coherent frames when covering scandals. Keppinger, Geiss and Siebert (2012) constructed a theoretical framework which emphasizes the possibility of “fragmentary framing” of scandals by the media. They argued that the media rarely see a scandalized politician as guilty in all possible senses (e.g., having advanced knowledge of the matter, having self-interested motivation, and having freedom of action simultaneously). Their model posited that the media typically offer fragmented frame components to the audience, while the audience’s biased information processing leads to the formation of consistent audience frames. That is, people end up seeing a politician as either completely guilty or completely not guilty. The audience frames then shape people’s emotional
Francis L. F. Lee

and cognitive responses to scandals. Part of the value of this framework resides in its applicability to various scandals. Indeed, the core propositions of the framework were supported by evidence derived from content analyses and surveys surrounding four different scandals in Germany.

There are studies tying the analysis of media coverage of scandals to other well-established media effects theories, such as third-person effects (Huge & Glynn 2015; Joslyn 2003). But those studies arguably have stronger implications on the media effects theories themselves than on the understanding of the effects of scandals on public opinion.

Meanwhile, as the previous section has pointed out, political scandals may influence not only the reputation of the implicated politicians but also people’s attitudes toward other politicians and the political system. One might wonder if a regular stream of scandal coverage would relate to political distrust or cynicism. Jibril, Albaek and de Vreese (2013) provided an interesting study that indirectly addressed this question. They differentiated the notion of privatization from personalization. Privatization refers to a focus on the private lives and scandals of politicians, whereas personalization refers to a shift in journalism towards a news form in which public issues are discussed from the viewpoint of the ordinary citizens. While both are related to the trend of infotainment, their study showed that privatization increases political cynicism, whereas personalization has the opposite effect. For this chapter, the findings mean that persistent media coverage of scandals can indeed lead to political cynicism, keeping in mind the caveat that scandal coverage was only one of the indicators of privatization in the study.

More studies are therefore needed to ascertain the impact of media coverage of scandals on general political distrust. Besides, there has also been a lack of study tying the analysis of media coverage to the spillover effects of political scandals. As discussed in the previous section, the effects of a scandal may spillover to public evaluations of other politicians, political groups, and the political system at large depending on how people understand the linkages among the politicians, political groups, and the system. Here, the possibility that the media can shape public understandings of the linkages among political objects deserves consideration. In recent years, the idea of “network agenda-setting” was proposed by media effects researchers to refer to the power of the media to shape the salience of the network relationships among political objects in people’s minds (Guo & Vargo, 2015; Vu, Guo & McCombs, 2014). No matter whether it should be considered an issue of “agenda-setting,” the method and arguments in that emerging literature may be employed to examine how media coverage shapes the spillover effects of scandals.

**Digital media and political scandals**

The advent of digital and social media has several important implications on the politics of scandals. First, the popularization of digital and mobile media technologies further enhances the visibility of public figures, blurs the distinction between the public and private realms, and thus solidifies the techno-social conditions that have led to the proliferation of political scandals (Thompson, 2005). Second, digital media provide the platforms for people other than professional journalists to break a scandal (Toepfl, 2011; Trottier, 2017). They undermine, though not eliminate, the gatekeeping role of journalists. Third, digital media quicken the flow of information and the news cycle. This can influence the dynamics of scandals as communicative events. Fourth, digital media allow ordinary people to take a more active part in the scandal process. People’s sharing behavior on social media directly influences the reach of scandal-related information, and how people talk about a scandal online provides new types of “evidence” about public opinion toward the scandal.

There has not been much published research on how digital media influence public opinion toward scandals. A study of the contaminated milk scandal in China has shown that the Internet
Scandals and public opinion

can serve as an information channel through which people outside the country acquired information about the scandal and consequentially altered their behavior (Seror, Amar, Braz, & Rouzier 2010). But the study concerns merely the transmission of information about the scandal instead of how it was portrayed and/or discussed. Suffice it to note that, given the sheer size and likely fragmentary nature of online materials, Kepplinger et al.’s (2012) “fragmentary framing” model can be a useful framework for analyzing the impact of online discourses on people. That is, different themes and “frame components” surrounding a scandal may be present in the online arena to different extents, whereas individual users are likely to create more coherent frames by themselves based on the fragmented materials derived from the Internet. The user frames would then determine people’s attitudes toward the scandal and the implicated parties.

Digital media are not only channels of information. As just noted, digital media allow people to express their views and participate in the communication of scandals. They are therefore platforms through which “images of public opinion” emerge, and such images may influence the judgment and actions of politicians and citizens. Seeing images of public opinion as influential is not new. In their classic study of Watergate, Lang and Lang (1980) argued that the news media served as the “looking glass” in which politicians can see how they appear to the public. But in the contemporary mediascape, while the mainstream press continues to construct images of public opinion, such images also emerge on the Internet through a more bottom-up and decentered process.

A couple of recent studies have demonstrated the impact of online public opinion expressed through reader comments associated with news stories. Von Sikorski and Hanelt (2016) conducted an experimental study in which the valence of reader comments under a news story was manipulated. They found that predominantly positive reader comments would lead people to perceive the opinion climate to be favorable to the scandalized politician, perceive him or her to be less responsible, and hold a less negative attitude toward the politician. In a second study, von Sikorski (2016) examined whether the valence of comments and status of the commenting readers would affect the perception of scandals. The participants were asked to respond to a fictitious news article about a food scandal. While the story framed the transgression as scandalous, reader comments were manipulated so that they were either supporting or opposing the framing of the story, and the commenting readers were either portrayed as high status or low status. The results showed that reader comments did influence reader perceptions, but the impact was largely restricted to participants encountering comments from high-status readers who opposed the framing of the story.

Interestingly, a finding consistent across the two studies is that reader comments matter only when they predominantly favor the scandalized person. It seems that people tend to react negatively to the scandalized person by default. Further negative comments do not matter. Yet comments favorable to the scandalized politician may alleviate the impact of the scandal. In any case, such findings point to the significance of the online opinion climate. The formation and impact of the online opinion climate is a promising area for future studies.

Internet users can engage in activities beyond simply commenting on public affairs. Digital media have led to the emergence of a “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006), and users can generate various kinds of contents related to public matters. For instance, social media users in Hong Kong produced and circulated a large number of satirical movie posters addressing several ongoing candidate-related scandals during the Chief Executive Election in 2012. Lee (2014) examined the impact of this online satirefest on university students’ political attitudes. He found that the satirical materials had different impacts on students depending on the presence or absence of interpersonal political discussions. Among students who discussed politics with others, exposure to the satirical materials was related to more critical attitudes toward the
electoral system. Among those who did not discuss politics with others, exposure to the satirical materials was related to perceptions of the election as a farce.

In either case, exposure to online satire about the scandals led to more negative attitudes toward the politicians and the election, but interpersonal political discussions seemingly allowed the students to develop a more substantive critique of the undemocratic political system. That is, interpersonal communications may help people elaborate on the significance of a scandal. This possible role of interpersonal communication was also examined in Lee (2018), who found that social media communication—presumably including people discussing with each other—can strengthen the spillover effects of scandal recall.

In sum, digital media have brought about a wide range of new possibilities and phenomena. For instance, Trottier (2017) developed the notion of scandal mining to refer to “practices where individuals or organizations actively search targeted political actors on open or otherwise accessible data sources, including but not limited to popular social media platforms” (p. 2). In the 2015 Canadian election, 39 candidates were forced to repent or resign because of publicization of materials derived from digital media. Scandal mining is one way through which ordinary citizens can proactively engage in the revelation of politicians’ misconduct. Beyond existing studies, we may take the “#MeToo campaign” that swept the world in late 2017 as another example. A revelation of sexual abuse committed by a powerful Hollywood producer was turned into a worldwide campaign. It led to sex scandals surrounding major politicians in several countries and resulted in multiple resignations. The #MeToo campaign is an exemplar of an online campaign in which ordinary people played the role of the “citizen marketer” (Penney 2017). It is also a case where digital activism meets political scandals.

How digital activism shapes the dynamics of scandals and people’s responses constitutes another important research question. More broadly speaking, the evolution of digital media practices will continue to reshape the questions that we can pose about the relationship between scandals, media, and public opinion.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter has reviewed studies about how political scandals influence public opinion, and the role of the media in shaping the influence. On the one hand, scandals do not always affect people’s attitudes toward the implicated politician substantially. But on the other hand, under certain conditions, scandals can affect people’s attitudes toward not only the implicated politician but also other political figures and the political system at large. Scandals do not always have the same impact on public opinion because the effects of scandals can be conditioned by contextual factors, scandal characteristics, and individual-level variables. Media coverage—both quantity and quality—constitutes another set of factors that could shape the impact of scandals. Moreover, digital media have led to new ways for people to engage in scandal-related communication. The online expressions and activities of ordinary citizens can in turn influence the attitudes of each other.

Given the complexities of the relationships among media, scandals, and public opinion, there are certainly gaps in the literature that need to be filled. But beyond the issues already discussed, it is worth giving some brief remarks on two other directions of future research, namely the adoption of digital methods and the development of comparative analysis.

As the previous section suggested, the advent of digital media allow people to continuously express their views and reactions to ongoing political events. In other words, instead of having snapshots of public opinion derived from polls, researchers should be able to register the rise and fall of online sentiments over time. Tying the presence of the continual stream of online public
Scandals and public opinion

sentiments to the conceptualization of political scandals as communicative events, it is possible for researchers to examine how various moments of the scandal event, for example, the original revelation of the misconduct, the implicated politicians’ responses, institutional intervention, and so on, influence public sentiments in real time. Put more generally, researchers can attempt to examine the interactive and dynamic relationships between online public opinion and the evolution of the scandal event. This, of course, entails the employment of various “digital methods” to capture online public sentiment.

For comparative analysis, although every scandal is unique with its own protagonist, transgression, and context, it is worth noting that different countries can have their own “scandal cultures” (Hondrich 2002). For example, people from different societies may perceive the seriousness of different kinds of misconduct differently and have different value preferences, such as the priority between honesty and competence (Allen & Birch 2011). Reflecting media norms and prevailing conceptions of what is regarded as publicly relevant, media in different countries may cover different types of scandals to different extents (Esser & Hartung 2004). In media coverage of political scandals, different frame components may also appear with different frequencies across counties. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to construct a formal framework for comparative analysis of media scandals and their impact on public opinion. Suffice it to note that there are several dimensions along which comparisons can be made. The rise of political scandals is a worldwide phenomenon, and comparative studies would be highly useful for enhancing our general understanding of the impact of media scandals on public opinion.

References

Scandals and public opinion


