

Webcode

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a word list for
Part A here:
WES-73644-024

Media literacy

1

- a) In class, agree on a recent controversial issue. Here are some ideas: alternative energy, gun control, abortion.
- b) Decide on your personal view regarding that issue. After that, think about how you came to that opinion. List all the sources that influenced your opinion.
- c) Compare your sources (NOT your opinion!) with those of your classmates. Agree on the three biggest influences on how you formed your opinion.

→ **S25:** How to work
with a dictionary,
p. 374

→ **S1:** Checklist:
Summary, p. 330

2

- a) Look at the information on public opinion from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on p. 79. Some keywords you will need in b) have been highlighted. If necessary, look up their meaning in a dictionary.
- b) Read the article and, using all of the highlighted words, summarize the role of the mass media for the public opinion as defined in the article.

3

- a) Look at the overview of "media literacy" below and sum up its most important message in no more than three sentences.
- b) In many countries, "media literacy" is part of the compulsory curriculum in schools. Use the overview to explain why this subject is seen as so important by many school authorities today.



Media are constructions

- They don't simply reflect external reality.
- What goes into them is based on many conscious decisions (e.g. to inform, persuade, move to action, scare, stir up emotions, entertain, sell).



Audiences negotiate meaning

- Different audiences can take away different meanings from the same media.
- Factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and social status can influence a person's interpretation of media.

Media have commercial implications

- It is a business and it must make money.
- Businesses and corporations influence content and distribution.

Media are social and political

- They convey values, power and authority.
- They can be non-inclusive and affect social norms regarding acceptance.
- They can drive political change.

Factors influencing public opinion

Environmental factors

Environmental factors play a critical part in the development of opinions and attitudes. Most pervasive is the influence of the social environment: family, friends, neighbourhood, place of work, church, or school. People usually adjust their attitudes to conform to those that are most prevalent in the social groups to which they belong. [...]

The mass media

Newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet – including e-mail and blogs – are usually less influential than the social environment, but they are still significant, especially in affirming attitudes and opinions that are already established. The news media focus the public's attention on certain personalities and issues, leading many people to form opinions about them. [...]

The mass media can also reinforce latent attitudes and “activate” them, prompting people to take action. Just before an election, for example, voters who earlier had only a mild preference for one party or candidate may be inspired by media coverage not only to take the trouble to vote but perhaps also to contribute money or to help a party organization in some other way.

The mass media play another important role by letting individuals know what other people think and by giving political leaders large audiences. [...] In areas where the mass media are thinly spread, as in developing countries or in countries where the media are strictly controlled, word of mouth can sometimes perform the same functions as the press and broadcasting, though on a more limited scale. In developing countries, it is common for those who are literate to read from newspapers to those who are not, or for large numbers of persons to gather around the village radio or a community television. Word of mouth in the marketplace or neighbourhood then carries the information farther. In countries where important news is suppressed by the government, a great deal of information is transmitted by rumour. Word of mouth (or other forms of person-to-person communication, such as text messaging) thus becomes the vehicle for underground public opinion in totalitarian countries, even though these processes are

slower and usually involve fewer people than in countries where the media network is dense and uncontrolled.

Interest groups

Interest groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious groups, and labour unions (trade unions) cultivate the formation and spread of public opinion on issues of concern to their constituencies. These groups may be concerned with political, economic, or ideological issues, and most work through the mass media as well as by word of mouth. [...]

Opinion leaders

Opinion leaders play a major role in defining popular issues and in influencing individual opinions regarding them. Political leaders in particular can turn a relatively unknown problem into a national issue if they decide to call attention to it in the media. [...]

Opinion leadership is not confined to prominent figures in public life. An opinion leader can be any person to whom others look for guidance on a certain subject. [...]

Complex influences

Because psychological makeup, personal circumstances, and external influences all play a role in the formation of each person's opinions, it is difficult to predict how public opinion on an issue will take shape. The same is true with regard to changes in public opinion. Some public opinions can be explained by specific events and circumstances, but in other cases the causes are more elusive. [...]

People presumably change their own attitudes when they no longer seem to correspond with prevailing circumstances and, hence, fail to serve as guides to action. Similarly, a specific event, such as a natural disaster or a human tragedy, can heighten awareness of underlying problems or concerns and trigger changes in public opinion. Public opinion about the environment, for instance, has been influenced by single events such as [...] the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, Ukraine, in 1986 [...]. It is nonetheless the case that whether a body of public opinion on a given issue is formed and sustained depends to a significant extent on the attention it receives in the mass media.