

THE MEDIA

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WHAT IS THE MEDIA

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- Not a singular institutions (like Congress and the presidency)
- An industry
- Business model: develop and distribute (news) content
 - Make money through ads and subscription fees

- Try to reach as many people as possible
- Basically all homes have at least one TV
 - About 75% have internet access

MEDIA AS POLITICAL INSTITUTION

TYPES OF MEDIA

- Print
- Broadcast
- Internet

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Which do you use most?

- More than a thousand daily newspapers in the US
- Historically a cheaper option than broadcast
- Very unregulated

- Newspapers hugely important
- Set the news agenda
- Provides details and context not usually seen in the short TV segments

- Many newspapers are in serious financial trouble
- Many (most?) newspapers will close over the next few years
- Remains to be seen whether the internet can replace them, especially with regard to local news coverage

- Historically more expensive than print
- Technological limitations forced the federal government to heavily regulate licenses for the broadcast spectrum

- More Americans get their news from TV than anywhere else
- Oftentimes programs provide less analysis than newspapers
- Radio
 - Talkshows (Rush Limbaugh, etc)
- Rise of *soft news* and *infotainment*

- Emerges as a form of communication in the mid-1990s
- Internet has displaced newspaper and radio in importance
- Since 2008

- Occupies a place between TV (short but constantly updated) and print (detailed but once per day)
- Allows people to get involved directly
- Becoming more popular
- People, media, candidates can all talk directly to each other
 - Hard to implement well

- US has fewer regulations than many other countries
 - Also no government-owned media outlets
- Print media has little regulation
- Government regulates both content and ownership of broadcast media

- Between 6am and 10pm, the FCC limits obscenity, indecency, and profanity on TV and radio
- The FCC attempted to limit ownership, but the 1996 Telecommunications Act did away with that
 - Led to many mergers

- The **equal time rule** says that a broadcaster must provide candidates for political office equal opportunity to broadcast their message

- The **right of rebuttal** is an FCC regulation that gives individuals the opportunity to respond to personal attacks

- FCC requirement that broadcasters must provide time for opposing viewpoints
- No longer enforced by the FCC since there are so many stations

- **Prior restraint:** an effort by a government agency to block the publication of material it deems harmful in some way (censorship)
- In the US, except under extraordinary circumstances, the First Amendment prohibits government from preventing

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- The Supreme Court said yes

- Other court decisions have ruled that network stations have the same protections as traditional print media

- ~2,000 TV stations, ~1,400 daily newspapers, 13,000+ radio stations
- 20 major TV networks
- Through the 80s, TV dominated by the big 3
- CNN gains substantial viewing in the 1990s
- FOX comes along shortly after

- The US only has one wire service: AP
 - Reuters in Europe is similar
- Since 1996, many mergers and acquisitions
 - ABC bought by Disney
 - CNN bought by Time Warner
 - NBC bought by Comcast
 - FOX bought by Rupert Murdoch

- Many point to the internet as being less concentrated than print and broadcast media
- But large corporations (e.g. Google) have a large presence on the internet and can effectively censor parts

WHAT AFFECTS COVERAGE?

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- Journalists
- Sources
- Consumers

- Historically publishers had lots of leeway in what they wanted reported
- Not the case as much today - business interests (money) tend to prevail
- Journalists have large leeway in interpretation of news stories

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- What do you think?

- Journalists tend to be Democratic and liberal in their personal beliefs
- But does this translate into their stories?

- Little evidence that news stories are more or less positive (or negative) about one party or the other...
- However, some networks tend to use loaded words for one party more than the other
 - FOX and the Wall Street journal tend to be conservative
 - Most other major outlets lean slightly to the left
 - PBS leans neither way

- Many journalists follow an ethical code requiring them to be fair and unbiased
- This may be shifting with the rise of FOX and MSNBC

- Leaks
- Press releases
- Hiring reporters

- **News leak** - disclosure of confidential information to the media
- Sometimes are **whistle-blowers** - low-level workers aiming to call attention to improper behavior
- More often high-level officials who regularly leak information to the press
 - Establish relationship
 - Ensure the story is published on their terms

- Companies & politicians put out **press releases** that are basically pre-written news stories
- Newspapers often publish these with little or no revision
- Allows companies/politicians to control a story's context

- Some governments/corporations pay reporters to write favorable things about them
- At best questionably ethical

- Consumers tend to be middle-upper or upper class, so the news reports tend to cater to their interests

MEDIA EFFECTS

- Agenda setting
- Priming
- Framing

- Media sets the agenda
- Decides what to cover, which side(s) of the story to focus on

- Prime people to think of a story in a certain light
- Cover the debt, then cover a welfare story
- This makes people think of welfare in terms of money and expenses

- **Framing** theory states that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and have implications for multiple values and considerations
- Small changes in the presentation of an issue can produce large changes in opinion

Do you favor or oppose allowing a hate group to hold a political rally?¹

¹Examples from Sniderman & Theriault 2004

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Given the importance of free speech - 85% favor

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Given the importance of free speech - 85% favor

Given the risk of violence - 45% favor

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