

GS 434 MASS MEDIA & SOCIETY



07: ISSUES GOVERNING MASS MEDIA

OBJECTIVES

❑ Issues governing mass media

1. Laws
2. Ethics
3. Objectivity
4. Control



1. LAWS

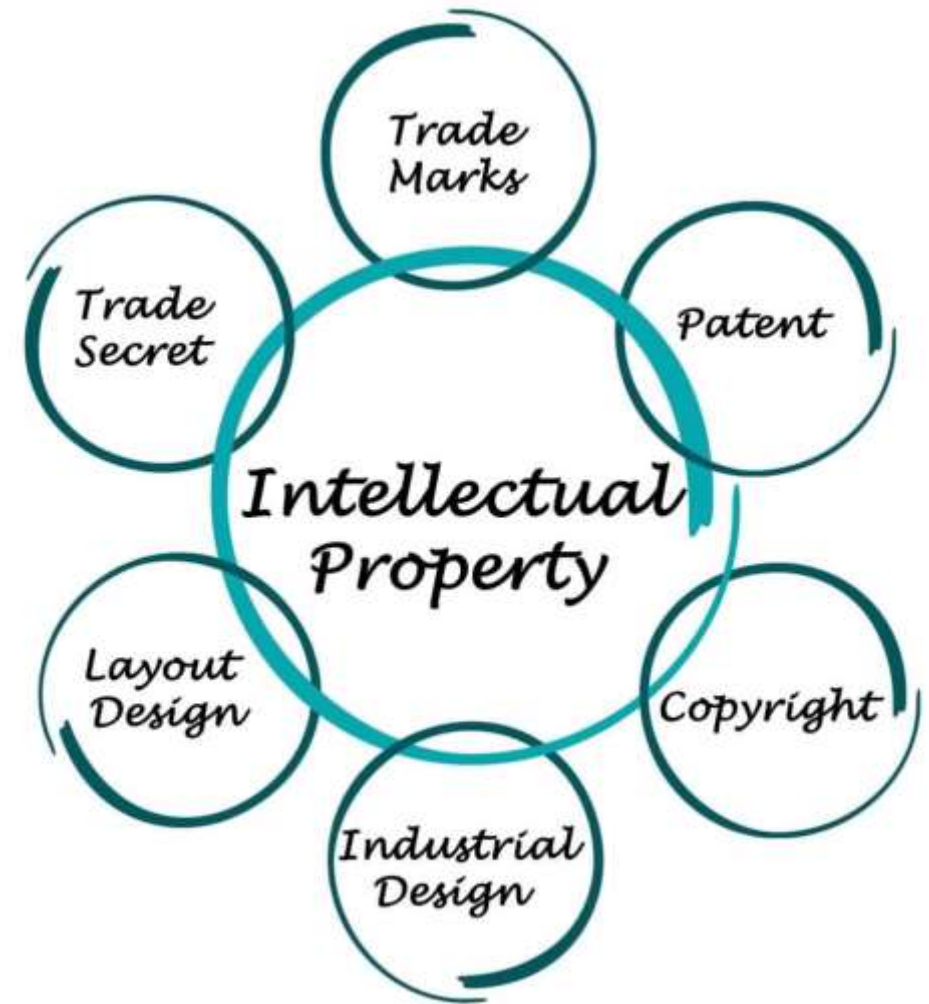
- ❑ Online media has developed rapidly, with technology advancing at a rate that often exceeds the ability of lawmaking and policy to sustain it.
- ❑ Issues like individuals' rights to privacy, copyright protection and fair-use restrictions have become the subject of numerous court cases and public debates.
- ❑ Lawmakers, judges and civil liberties organizations struggle to define the limits of technology and the access it provides to previously restricted information.



- ❑ In general, Law of any country must balance rights and responsibilities of public, organizations and businesses. Government must balance the media's business needs with the government's role to protect the interests of the public.
- **Net Neutrality:** Rules for Internet service providers that require them to keep their networks open and available to carry all legal content. Under these rules, providers cannot exclude other providers from access to their network nor can they limit the type or delivery of content they carry.



- ❑ **Intellectual Property (IP) Rights:** The legal right of ownership of ideas and content published in any medium.
- There are several challenges to IP rights, for instance:
 - Digital Media is easy to replicate
 - Difficulties in establishing uniqueness
 - File-sharing over the Internet
 - Some laws are not recognized by other countries



❑ **Libel:** A false statement that damages a person's character or reputation by exposing that person to public ridicule or contempt.

➤ To prove libel, someone must show that:

- The statement was communicated to a third party
- People who read or saw the statement would be able to identify the person, even if that person was not actually named.
- The statement injured the person's reputation or income or caused mental anguish.
- The journalist or the print or broadcast organization is at fault.



- Members of the press and press organizations that are faced with a libel suit can use three defenses:
 1. **The information is true.** True information, although sometimes damaging, cannot be considered libelous. Publishing true information, however, can still be an invasion of privacy. Furthermore, truth is a successful defense only if truth is proved to the satisfaction of a judge or jury.
 2. **The press is free to report** what is discussed during legislative and court proceedings, even though the information presented in the proceedings by witnesses and others may be untrue or damaging. This is called *qualified privilege*.
 3. **The press's freedom to present opinions.** Because opinions cannot be proved true or false, the press is free to comment on public issues and to praise a play or criticize a movie, for example.

2. ETHICS

Ethics: The rules or standards that govern someone's conduct.

Professional Ethics: The rules or standards governing the conduct of the members of a profession.



- ❑ The discussion of media ethics today should be framed internationally. Worldwide access to the Internet means that the work media professionals perform—in their country and abroad—travels globally, no matter where the work originates.
- ❑ It is important to understand the value of ethical standards in the mass media business because when media professionals make the wrong ethical choices, the consequences can be very damaging and very public.



- ❑ Several media groups have published rules suggesting how the media should operate. Professional codes of ethics set a leadership tone for a profession, an organization, a company or an individual.
- ❑ Media support organizations, such as advertising and public relations agencies, usually use guidelines from professional groups as a basis for developing a comparative philosophy.
- ❑ Ethics codes for print, broadcast and Internet organizations are voluntary, with no specific penalties for people who violate the rules. Many media organizations, such as CBS News, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*, maintain their own detailed standards and employ people specifically to monitor ethical conduct.



❑ The media face four types of ethical issues:

1. Truthfulness
2. Fairness
3. Privacy
4. Responsibility



1. Truthfulness

Truthfulness Affects Credibility

- ❑ Truthfulness in reporting means more than being accurate and not lying. Truthfulness means not misrepresenting the people or the underlying motives of a story, as well as reporting the complete story. Another aspect of truthfulness is presenting original, complete work that is not embellished or borrowed from other sources.
- ❑ Following issues can be hurdles in truthfulness in the media:
 - **Fabrication:** Something made up in order to deceive.
 - **Plagiarism:** Passing off as your own the ideas or writings of others.
 - **Misrepresentation:** The presentation of a false or misleading representation of something or someone.

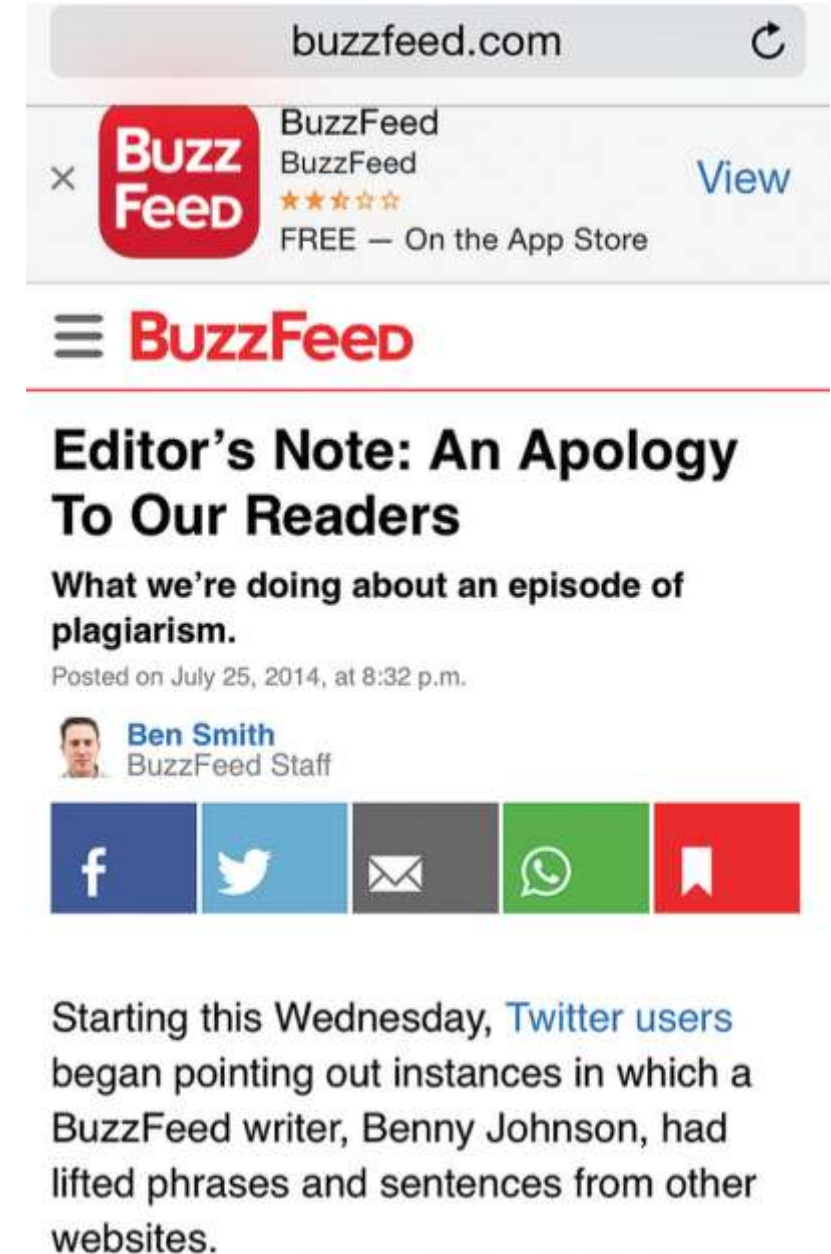
■ Fabrication

A famous anchorperson, Brian Williams, at an American NBC TV network falsely reported he had been shot down by rocket-propelled grenade fire while reporting in Iraq. When this falsehood was uncovered, the network began an inquiry into other stories he had reported and concluded there had been several fabrications. After an independent investigation, the network suspended him as anchor and re-assigned him to a reporting job at one of its secondary news outlets.



■ Plagiarism

Internet access to other people's work makes plagiarism easy, but the Internet also makes plagiarism easier to detect. At most media outlets, plagiarists who are caught are dismissed and asked to issue a public apology, so it is surprising that instances of plagiarism happen as often as they do.



The image is a screenshot of a web browser displaying a BuzzFeed article. At the top, the address bar shows 'buzzfeed.com' with a refresh icon. Below the address bar is a BuzzFeed app advertisement featuring the BuzzFeed logo, a star rating of four stars, and the text 'FREE — On the App Store' with a 'View' link. The main header of the page shows the BuzzFeed logo with a hamburger menu icon to its left. The article title is 'Editor's Note: An Apology To Our Readers' in a large, bold, black font. Below the title is a subtitle: 'What we're doing about an episode of plagiarism.' followed by the posting date and time: 'Posted on July 25, 2014, at 8:32 p.m.' The author's name 'Ben Smith' and title 'BuzzFeed Staff' are displayed next to a small profile picture. Below the author information is a row of five social media sharing icons: Facebook, Twitter, Email, WhatsApp, and a red bookmark icon. The first part of the article text is visible below the icons, starting with 'Starting this Wednesday, Twitter users began pointing out instances in which a BuzzFeed writer, Benny Johnson, had lifted phrases and sentences from other websites.'

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Editor's Note: An Apology To Our Readers

What we're doing about an episode of plagiarism.

Posted on July 25, 2014, at 8:32 p.m.

 **Ben Smith**
BuzzFeed Staff

Starting this Wednesday, [Twitter users](#) began pointing out instances in which a BuzzFeed writer, Benny Johnson, had lifted phrases and sentences from other websites.

■ Misrepresentation

The classic case of several instances of journalistic misrepresentation by a prominent reporter involved Jayson Blair, a *The Times* reporter who was forced to resign on May 1, 2003. The day he resigned, *The Times* published a front-page story: “Times Reporter Who Resigned Leaves Long Trail of Deception.”

The Times magazine said that as a reporter for The Times, 27-year-old Blair had:

- ▶ Written stories purported to be filed in Maryland, Texas and other states, when often he was still in New York.
- ▶ Fabricated comments.
- ▶ Pretended scenes.
- ▶ Stolen material from other newspapers and wire services.
- ▶ Selected details from photographs to create the impression he had been somewhere or seen someone, when he had not.

2. Fairness

- ❑ **Present Issues Fairly:** Reporting issues fairly requires not only factual accuracy, but also lack of favoritism toward any organization, political group, ideology, or agenda. Additionally, journalists should avoid inflating stories for sensation and be as transparent as possible about their sources of information so that the public can investigate the issues further on their own.
- ❑ **Present stories in a way that addresses their complexity:** There can be a temptation to dismiss the finer points of an issue for the sake of efficiency. Additionally, most audience, increasingly busy and overwhelmed by the amount of information available, want stories that can be quickly digested and easily comprehended. However, the media must balance what readers want with what they need but cannot anticipate. Oversimplifying issues, whether for the sake of a quick story or to satisfy public tastes, becomes a violation of the vital information premise.
- ❑ **Present diverse perspectives:** Diversity in journalism is of fundamental importance. Not only should newsroom staff represent a diversity of gender and races, but journalists should also speak for all groups in society— not just those with attractive demographics. Journalists should represent the underrepresented because ignoring citizens is a form of disenfranchisement.

- ❑ **Checkbook Journalism:** The practice of a news organization paying for an interview or a photograph. Therefore, it is an unfair practice.



- In 2012, Alliance, the film company that represented actor Brad Pitt, requested £2,000 from journalists for a 20-minute interview with Pitt at the Cannes Film Festival, paying an interview source, directly or indirectly, for access. Alliance claimed it was not a direct interview payment but helped cover some of the star's costs for the trip.
- Besides ethical questions about whether actors, newsmakers, witnesses and even criminals should profit financially from manufactured publicity, there are other hazards in any type of checkbook journalism:
 1. A paid interviewee may sensationalize the information to bring a higher price, so the interviewee's truthfulness cannot always be trusted.
 2. Paid interviews may become the exclusive property of the highest bidder, shutting out smaller news organizations and independent journalists from the information.
 3. The person who is paid by the news organization to comment could carry a hidden agenda.

3. Privacy

Privacy involves respect

- ❑ Privacy for e-mail and voice communications is a very important ethical and legal issue.
- ❑ In July 2011, the British newspaper *The Guardian* reported that journalists at the competing British tabloid *News of the World* (owned by a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.) repeatedly hacked e-mails and voice mails belonging to British and U.S. celebrities and government officials. There were at least 800 documented hacking victims, allegedly including Queen Elizabeth II and former Prime Minister Gordon Brown as well as actor Jude Law. Murdoch printed a public apology and then shut down the 168-year-old newspaper.



4. Responsibility

Responsibility generates trust

- ❑ Responsibility means that reporters and editors must be careful about how they use the information they gather.
- ❑ Present news stories that inform and serve the needs of citizens.
- ❑ In 2014, the Website BuzzFeed reported that Uber senior vice president Emil Michael said the company had considered investigating the private life of Sarah Lacy, a technology reporter who had written critically about the company. Uber's CEO eventually apologized.





- ❑ **Fake news** is any article or video containing untrue information disguised as a credible news source.
- ❑ Fake news typically comes from sites that specialize in bogus or sensationalized stories. It tends to use provocative headlines, like Celebrity endorses not brushing teeth or Politician selling toxic waste on the black market.
- ❑ Fake news are spread for various reasons; such as economic motives, political agenda, creating disturbances, terrorism, etc.



HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS



CONSIDER THE SOURCE

Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



CHECK THE AUTHOR

Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?



CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to current events.



CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What's the whole story?



SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.



IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

How to Spot Fake News?

- If it sounds **too ridiculous to be true**, it probably is a fake news.
- **News on social media are not always reliable.** Don't get most of your news from social media websites. At least, double check with TV or newspapers news before forwarding them.
- **Check the Domain.** many fake news stories use similar URLs and domain names to mimic reputable news sources, but rather than using a .com they use .com.co endings. This is true even when the site looks professional and has semi-recognizable logos. For example, abcnews.com is a legitimate news source, but abcnews.com.co is not, despite its similar appearance.

- **Is it just on one website?** See if the story you are reading about is being shared on any other mainstream news outlets, such as BBC News, Sky News, Al-Arabiya.
- **Is it politically framed content?** Does it take you less than 2 seconds to strongly agree or disagree with an article or headline? Then it's probably framed to increase polarization. We selectively attend to and process information that we agree with more fluently than information we disagree with, this is also known as "confirmation bias" or "myside bias".
- **Is there a proper explanation of statistics?**
- **Location of the article matters.** In addition to the organization that supports or sponsors a given article, you should think about where you found it. For example, if it is about science, was it in a peer reviewed journal?
- **Go beyond the headline.** Read the article properly. Check the dates. Is it what's in the headline? Is it a joke/April fools story?



- Do a Google Reverse Image Search
- Fact-check! When in doubt, fact-check the information that you read! You can start with a simple search to look into the keywords or the event that is being reported on.
- You can also use sites like PolitiFact, FactCheck, and Snopes for fact-checking — all of which are extremely reputable fact checking sites for a variety of issues and topics (not just politics).



Jokes and Satire are **Not** Fake News!

- ❑ It is also incredibly important to mention that satire Web sites like **The Onion** and **Clickhole**, which feature funny stories based on relevant current events, are not “fake news.” They are smart satire pieces intended to be humorous — not real — and their entire sites are based around their readers being knowledgeable about this strategy and theme.
- ❑ With branding like Clickhole’s own “Because Everything Deserves to Go Viral” or The Onion’s “America’s Finest News Source,” their articles’ joking nature is intended to be common knowledge.



3. OBJECTIVITY

- ❑ **Objectivity:** Expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices or interpretations.

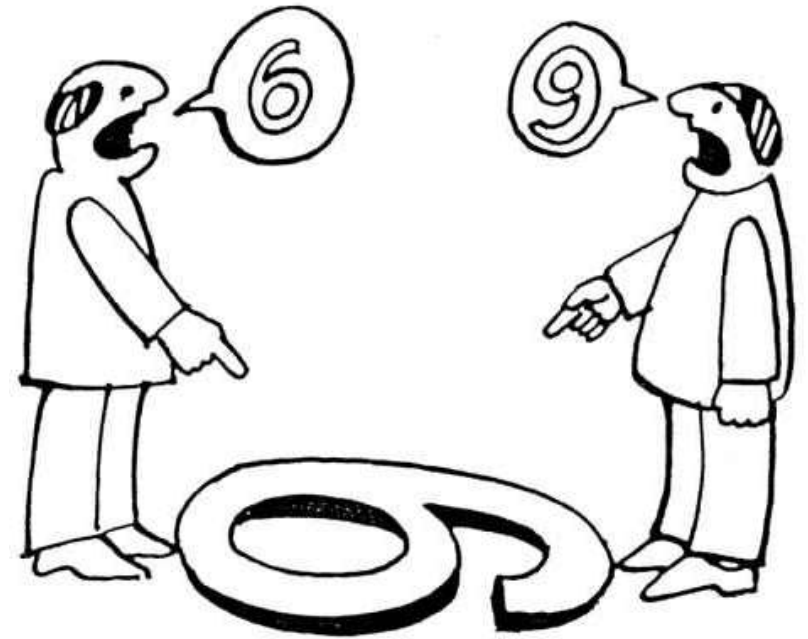


❑ Journalistic objectivity has two components:

1. **depersonalization**, which means that journalists should not overtly express their own views, evaluations, or beliefs.
2. **balance**, which involves presenting the views of representatives of both sides of a controversy without favoring one side.



- ❑ Objectivity requires that:
 - 'fact' must be separated from 'opinion'
 - 'hard news' must be separated from 'editorial comment'
- ❑ To be an objective reporter is to report an event or series of events in a way that does not reflect the reporter's attitudes about the events and people involved.

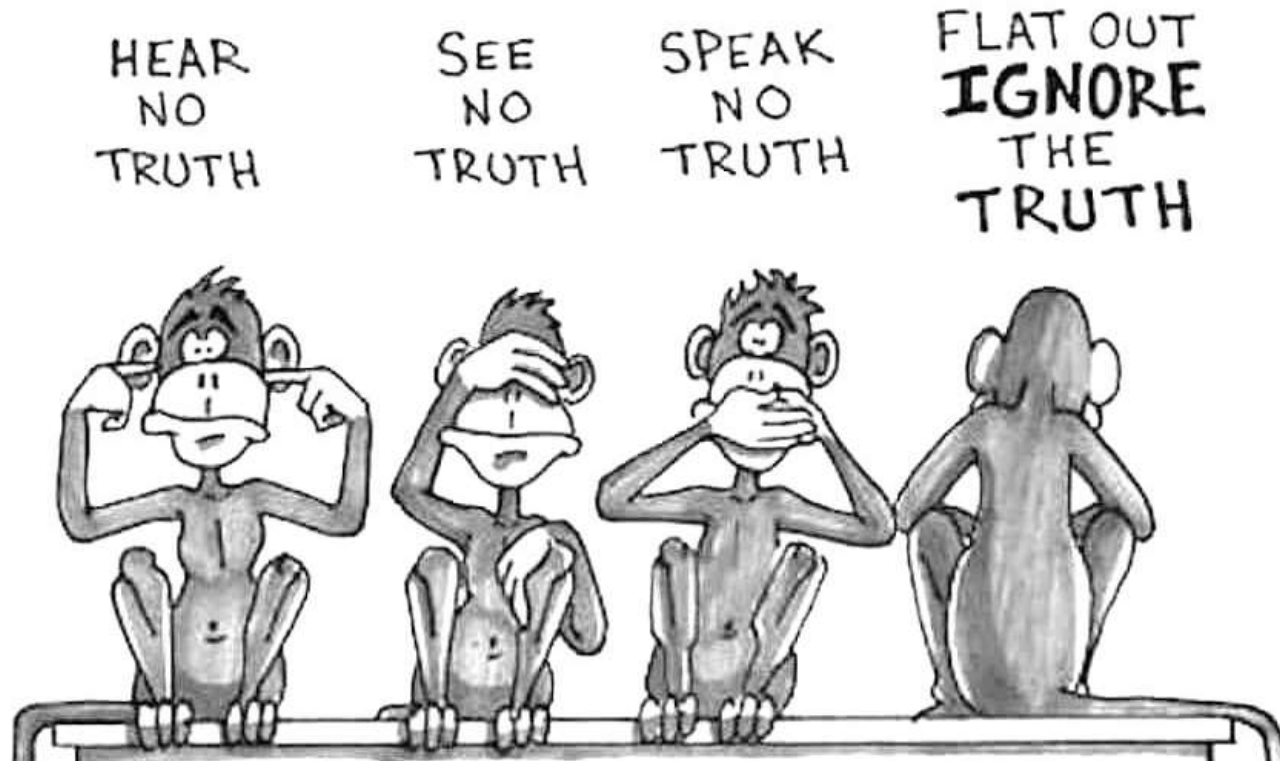


□ According to David Brook, a famous American journalist, there are five steps to achieve objectivity:

1. what somebody called negative capacity — the ability to suspend
2. modesty
3. the ability to process data
4. the ability to betray friends
5. the ability to ignore stereotypes



❑ **Media bias** is a term used to describe a real or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media, in the selection of which events will be reported and how they are covered. The direction and degree of media bias in various countries is widely disputed.



❑ Reporters with conflicts of interest are divided between at least two loyalties, and the ethical question is this:

1. One type of conflict of interest involves allowing the subject of a report to alter its content before the report is broadcast, published or posted, fearing that the subject will not cooperate without control. For example, in June 2015, PBS postponed a future season of the show *Finding Your Roots* after the network discovered that producers had omitted information about actor Ben Affleck's slave-owning ancestor from the report at Affleck's request.
2. Another type of conflict of interest happens when reporters accept free meals and passes to entertainment events and free travel. For example, in one survey of newspapers, nearly half said reporters accepted free tickets to athletic events, and nearly two-thirds accepted free tickets to artistic events. In an editorial about junkets, *The New York Times* said, "Accepting junkets and boondoggles does not necessarily mean that a reporter is being bought—but it inescapably creates the appearance of being bought."

- ❑ How much objectivity is possible?
 - Of three people watching the same event, one might see a demonstration, one might see a protest, and one might see a riot- and each will report the incident differently.
 - Because psychologists have taught us that we enter every situation with a “set”- that is, a number of beliefs, expectations, and attitudes that determine what we notice and how we interpret what we observe.



4. CONTROL

- ❑ Governments control the media in their favor with an assumption that a free media will lead to cultural intrusion, political problems, etc.
- ❑ Following concepts can help understand the control of the media:
 - **Censorship:** The practice of suppressing material that is considered morally, politically or otherwise objectionable.
 - **Self-censorship:** The act of censoring or classifying one's own words/content.
 - **Media regulation:** The control or guidance of mass media by governments and other bodies. This regulation, via law, rules or procedures, can have various goals, for example intervention to protect a stated "public interest", or encouraging competition or establishing common technical standards.
 - **Deregulation:** Government action that reduces government restrictions on the business operations of an industry.

- **Freedom of press:** The right to circulate opinions in print without censorship by the government.
- **Prior Restraint:** Government censorship of information before the information is published or broadcast.
 - In 1979 in the USA, when editors of *The Progressive* magazine announced that they planned to publish an article by Howard Morland about how to make a hydrogen bomb. The author said the article was based on information from public documents and interviews with government employees. The Department of Justice brought the case in Wisconsin court, and received a restraining order to stop the information from being printed. So, *The Progressive* did not publish the article. Before the case could reach up to the U.S. Supreme Court, a newspaper published a letter from a man named Charles Hansen that contained much of the same information as the Morland article. Hansen sent eight copies of the letter to other newspapers, and the *Chicago Tribune* also published the letter, saying that none of the information was proprietary. Six months after the original restraining order, *The Progressive* published the article.

Thanks

Any Questions?