

MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY

Media Themes

Media we will study

There is a difference between media and mass media. And there are several mass media. The mass media and support industries or issues we will study this semester are:

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Books
- Radio
- Television
- Movies
- Music

In addition, we'll look at some support industries related to the mass media:

- Public Relations
- Advertising

Further, we'll look at some issues that affect the mass media:

- Media Law
- Effects
- Ethics

We'll probably spend a bit more time on newspapers than other media because that is where most of my background is. We'll only touch on the other print media of magazines and books.

Cerritos College offers another class similar to this one that focuses the broadcast media, so we will only touch on radio and television.

Public Relations and Advertising are intertwined with the mass media, so we'll look at them, but again, we'll only be able to touch on them. Cerritos College offers an 15-week intro class to public relations online.

Laws that affect the media affect all of them, so, we'll spend a few weeks on them.

And while we'll touch on issues and effects throughout the semester, we'll especially take time with the effects of violent content in the media.

Media Themes

Before we get into the study of the media, however, let's discuss some themes that will reoccur in our study. Themes are concepts that will reoccur throughout the semester.

Mass Media is Big Business

The first of the author's themes says that the central force driving the media is the desire to make money. Many decisions about the media, including content, are influenced by this force. Media are profit-centered. A good example of that is what is happening to a lot of newspapers today. The LA Times is just one example of news organizations laying off hundreds of reporters and cutting pages and sections of newspapers to save money, all the while making annual profit margins that would be considered obscene in other industries. Another example would be your favorite TV show being taken off the air for low ratings; low ratings mean advertisers don't want to pay for it, even if it has a relatively large and loyal audience.

Mass Media are Technology Driven

Media evolve when and how they do based on the available technology. Several times this semester we'll talk about major changes in media that come about when they do only because the technology made it possible. For instance, there are major changes taking place in newspapers, magazines, radio and television because of what is possible with the Internet and the World Wide Web. Take the music industry, for example, major shakeups are taking place today because of MP3 technology and programs such as Napster that allows people to swap music online for free rather than buy CDs. We'll soon see new marketing schemes with music thanks to this.

Mass Media both Mirror and Influence Society

Media have a profound impact on political, social and cultural institutions. What is covered in the media changes society. Increased media coverage about poor standardized test scores will influence governments and schools to change education, for instance.

But the media merely mirror society. The media did not create the low test scores, it just gave additional attention to them (see agenda setting in another lecture).

What the media chooses to cover and how it chooses to cover it will affect how it is presented in the first place. Although the media can influence society, they also mirror it, and scholars constantly strive to define or separate the differences.

The First Amendment Does Not Exist for the Majority

Journalists, naturally, are very concerned about the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which, in part, guarantees free speech/expression/press. But there are a lot of misconceptions about the First Amendment. We look at someone or some group spouting things "everyone" disagrees with and wonder why they allowed to in a democracy. After all, if we are a democracy, then shouldn't the majority rule?

The First Amendment was not drafted to protect popular speech, but unpopular speech. Popular speech or expression enjoyed by the majority does not need protection in a democracy. Unpopular speech or expression needs protection.

The First Amendment is in Danger Today

Not only does the First Amendment concern itself with protecting unpopular speech, too many people in this country today would change that. They feel that the majority SHOULD rule, even

with free speech.

The First Amendment, particularly the free speech and free press clauses, constitute important civil rights that are under attack today with speech codes, political correctness, attempts to control content of the media, attempts to regulate content of the Internet, etc. Apathy and willingness to give up rights also threatens free speech.

And aren't there times when you feel that the media overdo coverage of some incident, such as the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewensky story? Or the OJ Simpson story? Or the Michael Jackson story? Shouldn't there be some law that says "enough is enough?" A lot of people would say "yes." That is a threat to the First Amendment.

New Media Borrow Heavily from the Old, Which Then Must Adapt

As new media evolve, they borrow heavily from previous media . . . and they tend to do a better job with the information or content than the older media did. For example, early radio was a lot like television is today: entertainment shows for the whole family. Television siphoned talent and content from radio and became better at that form of entertainment. Radio had to change and meet new needs or die. Today the Internet is threatening various other forms of media, who must join in, adapt, change or risk becoming obsolete.



An interesting look at the possible future of the media, and a somewhat scary one, is shown in this mocumentary online video: <http://epic.makingithappen.co.uk/new-masterfs1.html> . See if you can tell where reality ends and fiction begins.

We regulate the broadcast media differently than print.

Despite First Amendment freedoms, we impose a regulation structure on the broadcast media that we would not even consider applying to print media. Anyone can put out a newspaper or magazine, but not everyone can become an over-the-air broadcaster. We'll look at reasons for this.

Exercise

This lecture introduces some themes, or concepts, that will reoccur throughout the semester. List those themes.

Note that when submitting the answer start the subject line with:

J100x - YourLastName - Themes

Send to rcameron@cerritos.edu