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**MODERN MASS MEDIA:
THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION**

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Introduction

Since 1977, the annual UNIS-UN Conference has been an important tradition not only among the students of the United Nations International School, but for all those students from invited schools who have graced the General Assembly Hall during its two-day period, eager to gain insight into and discuss the consequences of current global concerns. This year's conference is no different. Once again, high school students from around the world have come together within the walls of the United Nations to discuss an issue which is of primary importance worldwide: *Modern Mass Media: The Influence of Information*.

This year's topic seeks to address the undeniable influence of mass media on the world stage. In this age of advanced communication, the dissemination of information—whether it be weather reports or political coverage—has become both an essential and lucrative endeavor for the global community. From the insidious effects of corporate marketing on youth to the censorship of news outlets in totalitarian states, from the deterioration of print journalism to the extensive international coverage of the Second Persian Gulf War, from sensationalism to satire and from Fox News to *Al-Jazeera*, the media is not only a crucial topic in modern discourse, but also the primary medium through which we engage in it.

The articles contained in this working paper range from brief case studies of important media outlets, such as *The New York Times* and *Abu Dhabi* to examinations of pressing issues in the modern media structure, such as the deterioration of print journalism and state-controlled media.

The writers and editors who compiled this Working Paper sincerely hope that the articles within will provide those who attend the 2004 UNIS-UN Conference with a more discerning perspective on today's world, and a better understanding of the influence of modern mass media.

The Influence of Advertising in the United States

Advertising is arguably the most pervasive means of disseminating information in the world today. The rapid development of technology in the past half-century--especially with regard to the internet--has accelerated the expansion and increased the power of advertising dramatically in recent years. Consequently, advertising is no longer merely a simple method of circulating information, but has become an inescapable system of coercive marketing.

The influence exercised by advertising on young children is particularly forceful. It is estimated that by the time they reach their late teens, American children will have viewed 360,000 advertisements on television. This figure does not include the innumerable advertisements that children are exposed to through radio, print media, public transportation, the Internet, and billboards. Commercials have even begun to invade classrooms nationwide. Channel One, for example, produces videos on current events that contain commercials. Advertising targeted at children generally uses one of two approaches to market its merchandise: the first is the traditional method of showing commercials during popular children's programs; the second, begun in 1982, involves featuring toy action figures as the main characters of children's programs, and is often referred to as "program-length commercials," as these programs are often developed specifically by toy companies to market particular toys.

Numerous recent studies have concluded that children under eight years of age are developmentally unable to comprehend the intent of advertisements, and thus accept all advertising claims as true. Aware of their young audiences' lack of understanding, advertisers routinely circumvent the rules imposed on advertising by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Required disclaimers and warnings, for example, are usually either shown in small print or spoken rapidly by the announcer, rendering

them nearly impossible for children to understand.

While adolescents are capable of understanding the nature of advertising, sophisticated marketing techniques and extensive ad campaigns cause them to fall under advertising's compelling sway. Advertisements for alcohol and cigarettes undeniably contribute to teenage tobacco and alcohol abuse; although television advertising of tobacco has been banned, the prominent display of logos, billboards, and banners in televised sports has ultimately increased cigarette advertising on American television. The insidious influence of cigarette advertising was recently revealed by two studies, which found that by the age of six the logo of Camel cigarettes is as familiar to children as Mickey Mouse. The studies concluded that advertising for Camel cigarettes was more effective among children and adolescents than among adults, and reported that Camel's share of the illegal children's cigarette market represents one-third of all cigarette sales to minors.

The speedy growth of modern technology has enabled the development of ever more sophisticated methods of advertising. In recent years, complex advertising techniques involving subliminal messaging, a process by which one is presented with information without being made specifically aware of it, have in particular aroused public concern. One of the most inflammatory recent examples of subliminal advertising occurred during the 2000 U.S. presidential campaigns, when in a political advertisement for George W. Bush the word "RATS" briefly flashed on screen. While Bush and his Republican ad-maker Alex Castellanos denied accusations that the flashed word was intended to surreptitiously attack Al Gore, many concluded that "RATS" was indeed inserted with the intention of subliminally associating the Democratic candidate with rodents. Consistent with techniques of subliminal messaging, the word appeared on screen for only a microsecond (1/30th of a second); sufficient time, according to the theories of subliminal advertising, to register in the viewer's subconscious mind, and cause Gore to be associated with rats.

Executives of advertising agencies insist that subliminal messaging is ineffective, and maintain that it is never used in advertisements. However, not everyone shares this opinion. Subliminal messaging techniques continue to be used in department stores to discourage shoplift-

ing, where they have allegedly had considerable success. Furthermore, a study conducted at Dartmouth University demonstrated that the attitude of viewers toward politicians could indeed be manipulated by inserting single frames into newscasts.

The advertising industry has long devoted much effort to developing new advertising methods intended to capture the attention of ever larger audiences. With the advent of worldwide Internet communication, online advertising has become a popular means of targeting far-flung audiences. Most recently, Internet users have found themselves harassed by barrages of interactive online advertisements (termed “pop-ups” because of the way in which they suddenly appear, unsolicited, onscreen), which, unlike advertisements embedded in the text of websites, are impossible to ignore. The aggressiveness of online advertising today ensures that Internet users are forcibly exposed to hundreds of ads hourly, and make it impossible, in our now Internet-dependent world, to avoid the influence of advertising.

New marketing campaigns have also recently been introduced in the realm of television advertising. The most prominent of these involves the collaboration of broadcast TV networks and the marketing divisions of corporations to create short, entertaining films that subtly advertise products. Networks and marketers hope that these films, which feature well-known actors and revolve around the themes of popular TV programs such as *24*, will capture the attention of viewers and thus keep them from flipping channels during commercial breaks. NBC recently premiered the first of its series of one-minute movies, or “IMMs,” while ABC is currently completing its own “Micro” miniseries project. By appealing to public interest in hit television programs, marketers anticipate that their ads will draw increased viewer attention.

The role of advertising in American society and culture has evolved considerably in recent years, largely as a result of significant advancements made in the technology of communication over the past several decades. The sophisticated techniques employed by advertisers today, enabled through new, wide-ranging media such as the Internet, have accorded advertising more influence in the United States than ever before.

Violence in the American Media

America is a notoriously violent country. Our aggressive and warlike foreign policies are mirrored in our troubled and often dangerous society. More and more Americans ask themselves why they live in a culture that has not only become desensitized to violence, but at times seems to be thoroughly entertained by it. Many see an answer in the media, blaming everything from the TV show *Jackass* to the infamous Marilyn Manson. But does violence in media lead to violence among youth? Does a troubled adolescent find it easier to take a gun to school-mates who have harassed him if he has seen “The Matrix Reloaded”? Is listening to rapper Eminem a legitimate excuse for abusing a girlfriend or a gay classmate?

In October of 2000, MTV (*Music Television*) debuted *Jackass*. The premise was simple: Johnny Knoxville (the show’s protagonist) and an assorted band of daredevils, morons, and jackasses perform a variety of stunts. Among the stunts were deliberate applications of stun guns and pepper spray, skateboarding blindfolded, and belly flopping into elephant feces. Since its conception, *Jackass* has divided the American public into two factions: those who find the show to be a work of hilarious entertainment and those who find it to be an abomination. When teenagers began to emulate Knoxville’s stunts, those in the latter category cried out for action to be taken. The most notorious case (and the one that caused Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman to rally against the show) involved 13-year old Jason Lind from Connecticut, who doused the lower half of his body in gasoline and was set on fire by his 14-year old friend. The act was an attempt to duplicate a similar *Jackass* stunt called “the human barbecue,” in which Knoxville donned a fire-retardant suit, strapped raw meat to his body, and cooked himself over a giant grill. Lind’s amateurish imitation went terribly wrong, landing him in a Boston hospital intensive care unit with second- and third-degree burns on his legs and feet. His friend was subsequently arrested for reckless endangerment.

When Lind's parents wrote a letter to Lieberman explaining what had happened, the Senator fought to get *Jackass* off the air. Lieberman was quoted as saying, "It is irresponsible for MTV to air these kinds of stunts on a program clearly popular with young teens, to air it at a time when many of them are likely to be watching, and to do so without adequate warnings." In defense of itself and the show, MTV pointed out the multiple disclaimers that aired at the beginning of the show and at the end of every commercial segment. MTV also stated that it refuses to accept or even open packages containing video footage of *Jackass* wannabes. In the case of the "human barbecue," a skull and crossbones had been flashed in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen throughout the stunt. Nevertheless, Lind, with the help of his friend, lit himself on fire. As a result of this incident and several others, MTV was forced to completely remove *Jackass* from prime time (8 pm to 10 pm) and even now rarely broadcasts it in a late night slot. But the monumentally successful "Jackass: The Movie," which grossed \$22.7 million in its opening weekend, seems to suggest that the show has only scratched the surface of an entirely new, subterranean level of low-brow comedy with potentially devastating ramifications.

"Shock-rocker" Marilyn Manson (real name Brian Warner) pulls no punches when expressing the anger, hate, and frustration he harbors toward his life and American culture in his music. Manson, along with his band of the same name, have been accused of encouraging date rape, murder, and drug use with their songs and stage acts. While none of the above have been unequivocally proven, his lyrics and songs are admittedly very graphic. In "Irresponsible Hate Anthem," Manson sings: I am the ism/ my hate's a prism/ let's just kill everyone and let your god sort them out/ f**k it." In "Cake and Sodomy," he sings, "I am the god of f**k/ I am the god of f**k/ Virgins sold in quantity/ Herded by heredity." If one agrees with David Greene of the First Amendment Project in Oakland, who states "Music has been the medium where young people choose to express rebellion or at least explore culture outside their parents or outside their community," it is reasonable to come to the conclusion that impressionable teens could easily be influenced and misled by harsh and angry lyrics in the songs they listen to.

In 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed twelve students and one teacher in their Littleton, Colorado, high school. When scenes of the "Columbine High School Massacre" flooded TV screens across the nation, a horrified public pointed their fingers less frequently at the government's tinfoil-flimsy gun control policies than at an allegedly violent and irresponsible media. One man in particular was presumed the epicenter of the violence and anger that inspired Harris and Klebold: Marilyn Manson. Manson's popularity (he has had three platinum albums: "Smells Like Children," "Antichrist Superstar," and "Mechanical Animals") and the report that Harris and Klebold were avid fans of his led to the founding of many Anti-Marilyn Manson groups. One Denver-based organization, The Citizens for Peace and Respect, was formed to "protest the negative influence of Marilyn Manson on [their] community."

While it is true that the media contains a certain degree of disturbing violence, to pin all the blame for the violent acts committed by young people on music and television is unreasonable. Parents must be reminded that they are responsible for paying attention to "TV-MA" ratings and warnings of explicit lyrics, while children have to be taught to consider the consequences of their actions. Combining these two precautions with a firm policy that forces artists to acknowledge the effect they have on their younger audiences might well alleviate the violent mentality that is so common among this country's young people.



Broadcast Media and War

In 1861, photographer Matthew Brady journeyed to the front of the Battle of Bull Run to photograph the action. Around the same time, *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley began using his newspaper to provide prompt news about the American Civil War, using Brady's photographs as the war progressed. Through these two men a new avenue of media was conceived: war journalism. The advent of this new journalism forever changed the way in which the public viewed war. Americans could now receive updates, political opinions, even lists of those who were dead or missing in action. War became something that could be experienced at home and was no longer reserved solely for those on the frontlines.

World War I was made a global experience through radio broadcast, which disseminated information much more quickly than newspapers. Twenty years later, during World War II, radio enabled the public to listen to the speeches of statesmen Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt as they occurred. During the Vietnam War, the horror of conflict was brought even closer to home. The American public could watch live footage of battles, see and hear politicians speak about the war, and receive up-to-the-minute information on what was taking place.

As access to such information becomes more widespread, the tendency towards professional bias increases. Politically-minded journalists are quick to manipulate their reports in order to lead the public toward a particular conclusion. For example, death tolls during a war are often unreliable because they can easily be used to skew



public opinion. Because so much information is available, filtering it becomes necessary. Naturally, the prejudices of those to whom this task falls affects what information is discarded and what is not. Furthermore, with the constant stream of frontline footage fed to the public, we are at risk of becoming inured to the terror, bloodshed, and destruction that is war.

A recent change in the structure of American media has affected the way in which we receive information. Formerly, news and radio stations were owned by a variety of companies. Such diverse ownership meant a multitude of opinions and perspectives. In the past decade, however, ownership of the news media has become increasingly consolidated, especially as a result of several mergers between large communications companies such as AOL-Time-Warner and WorldCom. The result is a more uniform media with fewer differing opinions and perspectives. Consequently,

the public is losing its ability to gather information from many different sources and then form its own opinions. Instead, opinions are handed to it directly. Andrew Jay Schwartzman, president of the Media Access Project, a public-interest law firm in Washington, says, "What troubles me is that the most important part of the system of checks and balances has been the diversity of ownership. With increasing concentration of ownership, if one or two big companies are using the same corpo-

rate-wide policy, or relying on the same consultants, there aren't effective competitive forces [to ensure alternative opinions]."

The recent war in Iraq has caused many to question the accuracy of American war journalism. Many of those who opposed the war pointed to the limited coverage of anti-war topics. Often, when war protests were covered, those participating were not asked to voice their opinions on the war and explain why they were against it. "The

anti-war movement in this country is far bigger than it was during the first few years of the Vietnam War, but you wouldn't know it from the coverage," said Adam Eidinger, a Washington activist. "I think the media has been completely biased. You don't hear dissenting voices; you see people marching in the streets, but you rarely hear what they have to say in the media."

In several instances, the news has even been used as a tool of propaganda, as corporations encouraged their stations to pull at the heartstrings of the nation. In one case, McVay Media, a Cleveland-based consulting firm, advised its stations in a "War Manual memo" to "Get the following production pieces in the studio: ... Patriotic music that makes you cry, salute, get cold chills! Go for the emotion," and " ... Air the National Anthem at a specified time each day as long as the United States is at war." Undoubtedly, this is but a sample of the emotional manipulation attempted by major United States media corporations during the Iraq war.

The news media is a powerful tool when it comes to influencing our opinions. When used responsibly, the news media allows us to be involved in global issues that--though perhaps not directly--may deeply affect our lives. It helps dictate whether or not we should support a war, whether we should trust our leaders and much more. But it must be approached with a certain sense of skepticism; we must always question bias, accuracy and how much of what is being presented is attempting to influence our opinion.

Censorship in Latin America

Few countries in the world are encouraged to maintain a free and unbiased press. In many countries, the work of journalists is censored to suit the government in power. This is especially prevalent in Latin America, a region of the world whose history is rife with dictators and military leaders. In some Latin American countries, journalists are suppressed and imprisoned for speaking out against regimes that strictly regulate the release of information to the public.

The Internet is a dangerous tool at the disposal of journalists who wish to challenge their governments. It is for this reason that beginning in March of 2003, the Cuban government issued a series of arrest warrants for opponents of the country's Communist regime. Of the 70 people arrested, 26 were online journalists, most from the Miami-based websites *Nueva Prensa Cubana* and *Cubanet*. Some experts say there was a deliberate strategy to the timing of the arrests. According to Robert Ménard, the director of watchdog group Reporters Without Borders, "The Cuban authorities are clearly taking advantage of the war in Iraq to crack down while the world looks elsewhere." Despite coming under political scrutiny and facing claims like one made by U.S. State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher, who suggested that the arrests "only serve to expose the weakness and desperation of the regime," the Cuban government maintained its own story. Not only did the government accuse the journalists of being undercover American operatives, and therefore traitors, but it also seized their literature and computer equipment.

At the end of the twentieth century, the penalty for speaking out against the Colombian government was far harsher than arrest. While in the late 1980s and 1990s drug cartels were largely responsible for violent attacks against Colombian journalists, in 1999 and 2000 the warring political factions in the country were to blame. One of the more heinous attacks against journalists came in response to a May 2000 article in the Bogota daily *El Espectador*, in which Jineth Bedoya Lima reported on a prison battle between ordinary criminals and inmates belonging to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). The article suggested that the AUC (Colombia's leading right-wing paramilitary group at the time) may have ordered the execution-style killings of many inmates. Bedoya was later kidnapped, tortured, and raped by suspected AUC sympathizers. Her assailants also threatened to kill three other journalists, including Ignacio Gomez, the head of *El Espectador*'s investigative unit and director of the local free-press organization Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP), who later fled the country.

The Panamanian government is also known for attempting to censor its press. On July 31, 2000, Panamanian President Mireya Morosoco signed Law

38, a compilation code of administrative procedure that practically eliminated the concept of public information. Article 70 of the law imposed a range of administrative sanctions on officials who violated strict yet vague standards of confidentiality by leaking government documents to the public or the press. The law was also expected to be significantly detrimental to Panamanian journalism, since it punished government sources who spoke to journalists and defined nearly all government information as confidential. By the end of the year, a set of “insult laws” had been established, under which government officials were granted more protection from supposed slander and libel than ordinary citizens, preventing journalists from printing or broadcasting anything critical about them. In June of 2000, Attorney General José Antonio Sossa used the insult laws to punish those who printed incriminating material about his private life. Carlos Signares, editor of the Panama City daily *El Siglo* was jailed for eight days (under the insult laws’ provision) for printing allegations that the Attorney General frequented a burlesque house for underage prostitutes. Even while serving his sentence, Signares was awaiting an appeals court confirmation on his twenty-year sentence for allegedly defaming former President Ernesto Perez Balladares in a 1993 article.

The above examples are the extremes of censorship and suppression of freedom of the press in Latin American countries; they are not the norm. In August of 2000, the Chilean Supreme Court stripped former president Augusto Pinochet of senatorial immunity, paving the way for him to be tried for crimes committed during his seventeen-year term. With this came a radical expansion of political coverage as journalists were granted new freedom in their investigations of the offenses of Pinochet’s administration. This new level of journalistic freedom gave rise to a completely independent news organization known as *El Mostrador*, and even a new satirical newspaper called *The Clinic*. However, some journalists continued to be punished for the stories they reported. In July, Bernardita del Solar Vera, editor of the weekly *Qué Pasa*, was fired after she ran an in-depth story about Chile’s business elite that mentioned Álvaro Saieh, president of the COPESA, *Qué Pasa*’s parent company.

For many corrupt governments and political parties aiming to remain in power, the manipulation of the media is imperative. This has long been a problem in many Latin American countries. While some have taken strides to break the trend of journalistic suppression that has become commonplace in their countries’ policies, journalists to this day sacrifice their lives for the right to a free press.

The Media’s Role in Inciting Public Hysteria

In order to assess how the media initiates public hysteria, it is helpful to think of mass communication as a filter. Public reaction has long shaped the way in which information is disseminated, and as more and more corporate press organizations focus on news that sells, information is increasingly filtered based on the controversy and popularity of current events. Every day, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television programs bring new issues to our attention, yet tend also to over-publicize certain popular topics. Despite the diversity of perspectives encompassed by the media, common public interests are clearly emphasized.

Considering the media generally focuses on pressing current events, it is only fitting to review the news in recent years for examples of how the media provokes public hysteria. In this post-9/11 age, the Bush administration’s “war on terrorism” and consequent assault on the Iraqi regime have furnished the media with plenty of stories that have stirred controversy and excitement among Americans.

Immediately after the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., reports of Palestinians celebrating in the West Bank were repeatedly broadcast on television and in newspapers. Photographs and video footage of this “celebration” were circulated by reputable stations such as CNN and MSNBC, arousing shock and outrage in the United States. While the footage was dated correctly and some Palestinians were

in fact celebrating the attacks, European media analysts discovered that reporters had at least partially staged the scene. It was revealed that aside from the few children filmed directly in front of the camera, the street featured in the footage was quiet and empty. One woman shown “celebrating” later explained that she was offered food for celebrating in front of the camera, and wasn’t fully aware of the reason for which she was supposedly celebrating. In short, the footage, so vastly circulated and the cause of such hysteria among Americans, was largely fabricated.

A recent example of media initiating public hysteria involves U.S. President George Bush’s use of television to promote the allegation that Iraq had been hiding weapons of mass destruction and was thus an imminent threat to the United States. The public now knows, however, that the facts cited as evidence for this were either erroneous or contrived. Yet the President was able to convince millions of Americans that Iraq posed an immediate threat, leading some to support the war in Iraq simply because this fallacy was constantly relayed by the media. In this case, the media itself was not responsible for the fabricated claim, but inadvertently increased the hysteria it incited.

Recently, however, even President Bush has shifted the spotlight onto the media, claiming that America’s



recent recession was due in part to the constant coverage of the war in Iraq. Bush has said, “On some TV screens there was a constant reminder for the American people—‘March to War.’ War is not a very pleasant subject in

people’s minds [and] it’s not conducive for the investment of capital.” In fact, though constant, coverage of the Iraq war was hardly thorough. Rather, the media seemed preoccupied with the positive aspects of the conflict, continually reporting stories of Iraqis welcoming U.S. troops into their homes while largely neglecting its unpleasant details. For instance, media coverage of the casualties incurred during the war, both civilian and military, was on the whole sparse.

These are just a few examples that illustrate the ability of the media to influence the views held by society. While the American public cannot be expected to assimilate all the information circulated in newspapers and on TV, the media should nonetheless be obligated to divulge all the facts--whether pleasant or objectionable--and allow its audience to come to its own conclusions.

Censorship of the Internet in the United States

As this age of information advances, more and more flaws are discovered in progressive technologies, the Internet in particular. Everyone is finding some new subject offensive, whether it is a political statement or pornography, and various attempts are being made to wash out these “insulting” materials from the World Wide Web.

Since the inflation of Internet use in the 1990s, a range of efforts has been focused toward censoring the Internet. In 1996, the Communications Decency Act (CDA) was passed, making it a crime to send “indecent material by the Internet into others’ computers.” This incited great controversy, for many saw this as a breach of the First Amendment right to free speech. In the summer of 1997, the case was taken to the Supreme Court, which consequently voted unanimously for the highest level of First Amendment protection for the Internet. Three years

later, the United States Congress passed legislation requiring all pornographic materials in public schools and libraries to be blocked from access.

Many of those who don't understand the Internet are intimidated by it. These people fail to understand what the Internet is and who engineers it, and as a result point fingers at the Internet itself, convinced that pornography and bomb-building websites invariably find children. The truth, as stated by Glenn Simon in the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, is that "positive steps on the part of a person must be made to access the information," and "the risk of a child accidentally accessing harmfully explicit material on the Internet is quite low."

The original intent of the CDA was to protect minors from the "damaging" information available to them at the click of a mouse. It was later discovered, however, that while some illicit material was successfully blocked, perfectly acceptable information was being blocked as well.

In an attempt to censor material inappropriate for children, a major computer online service tried to filter out all sites containing offensive words. The word "breast" was included on this list. This automatically blocked access to breast-cancer and breast-feeding information sites as well as various recipes sites (for chicken breast). Another attempt blocked all sites containing the name "Pamela" (for Pamela Anderson), and thus prevented one from learning about any woman in history named Pamela.

Some believe that keeping children from accessing information on birth control and protection from disease may have a significant negative effect on them. According to a study released in late 2002 conducted by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, federally mandated filtering software often denies people access to information on such health topics as diabetes, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, and suicide. In particular, the study warned of the "harmful effect on young people, who may be reluctant to otherwise seek details on such subjects from adults."

The main controversy revolves around whether or not there can ever be a set list of rules for the regulation of the Internet. The Internet is presently the only medium of communication that allows complete freedom of expression regardless of religious and racial boundaries. Unfortunately, it is also a bulletin board where opinions

and claims that lack factual support may be tacked up by anyone who wishes to do so. This leads many to propose that the Internet be treated more like television and radio. Those who share this opinion suggest that all information posted on the Internet be closely monitored by an independent organization, not unlike the Federal Communications



Commission, which surveys the material broadcast by TV and radio.

To some, the Internet signifies an almost complete and ideal fulfillment of our First Amendment right to unbridled free speech. The threat of it being controlled endangers this very concept. Others believe it is the sole responsibility of the individual, and not a grand jury or a sanctimonious monitoring commission, to decide what is appropriate for them. However, this is all legislative conjecture, as the multitude of countries and religions the Internet touches, and the sheer number of websites there are, make establishing a set of universal laws defining what is and isn't acceptable nearly impossible to set down.

The ideal would be a set of laws that would protect children from harmful material easily accessible to them, while not endangering anyone's freedom of speech. Unfortunately, this goal is practically unattainable. For now, a conceivable set of rules that would satisfy the remarkable amount of people who use and are affected by the Internet is impossible. We have to accept the possible risks that go hand in hand with the best demonstration of complete free speech that our country and many others have to offer.

State-Controlled Media

“Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press,” reads the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. While freedom of the press is fundamental to American news media, in many other countries the government closely regulates print and broadcast media. A free press ensures the presentation of all facts without bias; if media is controlled by the state, however, disseminated information may be distorted or altered to suit the purposes of the government.

An article in the *South Asia Tribune* (an online newspaper for investigative reporting) by Jan Muhammad Dashti in Issue No. 24 (January 2003) explains the “Dubious Role of Pakistan’s Controlled Media.” The article identifies three types of media in Pakistan. The first are a small number of relatively independent and diverse regional presses. The second are the media of Pakistan’s various political, ethnic, and religious groups. The third are the

state-controlled newspapers, radio and television, which are the most prominent form of news media in Pakistan. In reference to these three types of media, Dashti says, “The state of Pakistani media presents a pessimistic view. There has never been ‘serious’ political journalism in the country to the detriment of the democratic process. It is generally argued amongst the conscientious and vocal elements of minority nationalities that media in this country is an oppressive apparatus, reflecting essentially the interests and values of the ruling elite of a dominant nationality and can thus never serve the genuine interests of the people as a whole.” The author concludes the article by lamenting the loss of journalistic “ethics” in Pakistan and explaining that state-controlled media poses a serious problem, making “freedom of media a misnomer.” However, in the recent past several independent media channels have surfaced in Pakistan, immediately becoming very popular among the general public.

Another article that discusses similar problems criticizes China’s state-controlled media in light of the country’s newfound democratic ideals. The author of a May 2003 BBC News article agrees with this report: “China’s media is tightly controlled by the country’s leadership. Beijing also attempts to restrict access to foreign

news providers by jamming radio broadcasts and blocking access to web sites. Beijing says it will only allow relays of foreign broadcasts which do not threaten ‘national security’ or ‘political stability.’” A September 2003 article by Tod W. John of the *Asia Times* also reproaches China’s state-controlled media. It discusses the removal of ten sections of the Chinese version of Hilary Clinton’s memoir, *Living History*, by the government-owned Yilin Publishing House. John states, “Such censorship of books and media in China is common practice by Beijing’s authoritarian Communist government, and is nothing short of outrageous.”

Often, we blindly assume the validity of and accept the information provided to us via print or electronic



media. The danger of this is revealed through the coverage of the July 1995 Srebrenica tragedy, in which Serbian soldiers massacred approximately 6,000-8,000 innocent people. The state-controlled *TV Serbia* reported that the Muslims in Bosnia had begun killing each other, and that some Muslims were subsequently killed by Serbian soldiers provoked by the Muslim attacks. Since the Serb media was in the hands of the state, it made the Muslims seem responsible for the massacre. In 1996, independent media started to publish the stories of survivors of the massacre in an effort to rectify the portrayal of the event. Their attempts were futile, however, since the media persisted in presenting a false account of the killings to the Serbian public. The people were made to believe that there hadn't been any crime at all, and that the terrorists had been chased away.



Apart from the distorted portrayal of news, state-controlled media also imposes restrictions on freedom of expression. In some Muslim countries, especially those in the Middle East, women are not allowed to appear on television unless they are covered from head to toe. This is primarily due to the state's ideological and religious ethics. However, this dress code is rarely followed in the independent media of the same countries. Yet the state-controlled media must appear politically and morally correct because it represents the ideology of the entire nation.

Recently, due to the rapid globalization of information, the power of state-controlled media organizations has waned. Independent media is surfacing in many countries previously dominated by state-controlled news groups. Initially, programs that criticized the government could not be aired on TV because of a lack of willing sponsors. Now, numerous companies and organizations are willing to take the risk of sponsoring such programs, because the people's mentality has changed over the years. The common man's mind has become less susceptible to manipulation, and with the vast amount of information currently available he can now form his own interpretations and draw his own conclusions.

Al-Jazeera

Al-Jazeera, a prominent Arabic news station, was founded in 1996 with an initial grant of \$140 million from the Qatari government. Since then it has grown rapidly to become one of the most watched and most controversial news stations in the world. However, Al-Jazeera has just as quickly fallen under the spotlight for politically independent views that have been criticized, in particular, by the United States.

Based in Doha, Qatar, Al-Jazeera broadcasts news 24 hours a day to its 35 million viewers. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman tagged Al-Jazeera as "not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television, but also the biggest political phenomenon."

Al-Jazeera began inciting anger in Washington, D.C., late in 2001 when it broadcasted unconfirmed reports of the capture of U.S. Special Forces troops by Taliban forces in Afghanistan. The U.S. government also expressed concern when Al-Jazeera aired video-taped messages from Osama Bin Laden and his terrorist organization. U.S. officials were also angered by the airtime given to individuals who expressed anti-American sentiments and views and attacked U.S. policies in the Middle East. *The New York Times* accused Al-Jazeera of reporting that Jews had been informed of the September 11th attacks and were told not to go to work. The

channel has been further criticized by many for its use of the word “martyr” to describe Palestinian suicide bombers. James Morris of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter in England commented, “This isn’t playing with fire; this is using a flamethrower...This is Osama Bin Laden’s loudspeaker.” An angered Al-Jazeera staff rejected the allegations, maintaining that their reporting is objective. Director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University of the West Bank and an observer of Arab regional media, Daoud Kuttab, agrees, “The work of Al-Jazeera has been professional and balanced. As for the Americans, they are completely wrong and apply a double standard. I can see why they are angry but it is not because Al-Jazeera is not fair. On the contrary, I think they wish for Al-Jazeera to be biased to the United States.”

Al-Jazeera has been further attacked for its biased reports on the war in Iraq. U.S. Deputy of Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told Fox News that Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya Television were “falsely reporting” events in Iraq and “endangering the lives of American troops.” He claimed that the news station “spreads hatred and violence” and presents “slanting news” in favor of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Strong feelings of resentment towards Al-Jazeera have led to the banning of their reporters from the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). Mark Bench, executive director of the World Press Freedom Committee, commented that the decision was “at best very clumsy and at worst a reprisal against the station. The reasons given by the NYSE are not very plausible. We warn against the temptation to regard the media as being on one side or other in war. This can be very dangerous for journalists in the field. Al-Jazeera was only

doing its job of informing the public by showing pictures of the U.S. soldiers.”

Recently, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) allegedly released documents through the Iraqi National Congress that claimed that Iraqi spies had infiltrated the station. On April 8, 2003, Al-Jazeera’s office in Baghdad was attacked during a U.S. bombing campaign, killing reporter Tareq Ayyoub. The United States had supposedly been informed of the office’s exact location, which led some to speculate that the strike was not accidental.

Complaints about the station have come from the Arab world as well. Algeria reportedly cut power in part of Algiers to prevent residents from receiving Al-Jazeera reports on its savage civil war. Kuwait also temporarily banned reporters from the country when a caller phoned in and criticized Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah live. Yasser Arafat closed Al-Jazeera’s Ramallah bureau because of a promotional trailer for a

documentary series about the Lebanese civil war that contained offensive images of the Palestinian leader.

Despite the many attacks on Al-Jazeera from the western world, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) boldly signed a deal with the controversial station that would allow them to share information and facilities. This was generally seen as an affirmation that the BBC maintains a great sense of neutrality.

Since its rise in 1996, Al-Jazeera has opened a critical window onto the Arab world, making an indelible mark on global media. It has become one of the biggest and most notable news stations in the world. Whether or not it is biased, however, depends entirely on what part of the world one hails from.



Islamic Media

What is Islamic media? Contrary to popular belief, media controlled by a Muslim organization or a Muslim country is not necessarily classified as Islamic media, unless it conforms to Islamic ideology. In the case of Islamic media, Islamic ideology determines the media's general and specific function, including its concept, content, audience, and impact. There also exists an Islamic media philosophy and an Islamic mass media charter, which outlines the objectives of most Islamic media. The goal of this media is to highlight the prominent features of Islam, unite Muslims all over the world, and win the hearts of followers of other faiths.

In this modern age of war and destruction, however, the definition and goals of Islamic media have been distorted. There are several reasons for this change: regional governments use Islamic media to their advantage, and terrorists use it to spread their radical message. Overall, like other media in the world, Islamic media has been forced to sacrifice noble goals in the face of pressure from outside political forces.

Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran believed that the duty of the media was to always present a true picture of the world, uninfluenced by external forces such as political parties or governments. This is seldom true of Islamic media today. Many governments control their media, including Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. These governments are often influenced to do so by super-powers such as the United States. Thus it is not uncommon to see pro-United States reports in many Islamic newspapers and on Islamic TV channels. Nasir Jamal, a Pakistani journalist, states that the Pakistani government controls local television networks and advises them not to criticize the United States and its policies.

Iraq is another country whose media is heavily influenced by those in power. Before the United States dismantled Saddam Hussein's regime, his government completely controlled the media in Iraq. In an April 2002 article in the *Star Tribune*, an anonymous Egyptian source said that the media was "generally not allowed to report human rights abuses, criticize the president or his family, criticize the military, or



discuss modern unorthodox interpretations of Islam." Now the major media network in Iraq, the Iraqi Media Network (IMN), is controlled by the Coalition. This radical change proves that the volatile infrastructure of Islamic nations leaves their media open to swift shifts in control.

The rise of the Internet has become crucial to Islamic media. The World Wide Web is used to promote Islamic issues, give a voice to Muslim countries against more dominant Western nations, and, in many cases, spread propaganda. Many Islamic websites, including *Afghanistan Online* and *Islamic Gateway*, are now flourishing, visited daily by thousands of Muslims as well as non-Muslims. In an effort to encourage nationalism among Muslims in Islamic countries, many websites have posted thousands of pictures showing Afghanistan and Iraq war-torn at the hands of American aggression. In many instances, however, the rise of the Internet has helped to balance the propaganda methods employed by other types of media, as there are so many different viewpoints presented on the web. With the burgeoning availability of the Internet, its propaganda has nonetheless become an influential force to which people

are subjected on a daily basis. As professor Bill Dutton explains, “[Although] people tend to gravitate towards sites that reflect their own views, there’s no doubt that there’s potential to access a wider diversity of opinion.”

An impressive demonstration of the capabilities of unbiased Islamic media has been the Iqra Channel. Launched on October 21, 1998, and transmitted from Rome, Iqra was the first Islamic satellite station to specifically serve Arab viewers. Because it originates from a European country, Iqra has managed to remain true to the ideals of Islam without being swayed by the influences of Muslim political rulers. Its programs have been classified as 34 percent religious, 16.5 percent Islamic cultural, 11.5 percent general cultural, 22 percent drama serials (mostly historical), 12.5 percent children’s programs and 3.5 percent political and current events. The programs on Iqra are very carefully filtered so as to contain almost no violence and obscenity. The Iqra Channel has been crucial in promoting tolerance of Islam, unifying Muslims all over the world and tackling issues important to the Islamic community.

Unfortunately, many countries are unable to reap the benefits of reliable, external, and relatively unbiased Islamic media. Iran, for example, has very strict rules as to what liberties its journalists and media may take. Newspapers earn their publishing license under the condition that they print no “anti-Islamic” news. The government has the right to confiscate books that are considered “un-Islamic,” such as Salman Rushdie’s now notorious *The Satanic Verses*, and charge both author and publisher with “offending the public.” Any group or organization that opposes the established government must run their radio programs through Iraq due to the stranglehold maintained by the Iranian government on TV and radio.

The Islamic media has great influence over the way in which Islamic peoples perceive everything from themselves to the United States. As more and more Muslims rely on the media for their information, Islamic media will play an increasingly important role Muslim society as a whole. While bias is not a desirable characteristic of media, it is hardly restricted to Islamic journalism and broadcasting. Diversity in news coverage, although at times confusing, serves to encourage the public to better its knowledge of the world at large.

International and U.S. Media

The media is potentially everyone’s access to the world. People all over the globe are kept up to date on current events through the radio, television, newspapers and magazines that flood their communities. Media is the global informant; it is the glue that keeps the world connected. While the media plays a significant role in the development and globalization of countries, its influence and power vary from region to region.

The United States is known as the land of the free; a nation in which people say what they want, when they want. But American media is often the subject of international criticism. It is accused of being overly dramatic and closed-minded, only presenting those stories that concern and benefit the United States. The main criticism of American media is that its goal is not to objectively present the news, but rather to promote its country as the Big Brother of the world.

American media is frequently stereotyped as going unquestioned by U.S. society. According to this stereotype, that which is presented by the media is considered to be the pre-eminent, complete version of the story. While it is true that American media has a lot of influence on the



American people and that--in some areas of the United States--the media does indeed have the final word on a story, this is not always the case.

Still, it seems that the American people desire drama. During the coverage of the war in Iraq, United Paramount Network (UPN) news became the most-watched news program in the United States, not because its reports were more comprehensive than others, but because its presentation was dramatic. During its newscasts, UPN scrolled the words "AMERICA AT WAR" in large, bold print at the bottom of the screen. Reporters on site in Iraq delivered their reports in gas masks with an element of panic and terror. The news resembled an action movie, and the American people ate it up.

The United States, more than most other countries, allows its public to speak freely; it acknowledges that different people have different opinions and thus encourages debate. Some countries, however, are rarely so understanding of difference and instead use the media as a pretext for limiting individual opinion.

Media in most totalitarian countries is heavily filtered; stories are edited and rearranged until they are deemed acceptable by the government. The act of filtering media is called censorship and dominates broadcasting and publishing in many totalitarian countries worldwide. Iranian media, for example, has for years been subject to censorship for two main reasons: to keep Western influence out of Iranian society and to prevent the Iranian people from rebelling. Regardless of the differences between American and international media, one thing is true of both. News organizations and other media-related groups select what

they feel is "newsworthy" to relay to their audiences. One may question what factors define the "newsworthiness" of stories. Generally speaking, "newsworthy" topics include destruction, conflict, the influence of economically powerful countries, and the lives of famous people. But what about the events that take place in poorer, less powerful countries? They often tend to be swept under the carpet because they don't interest the audiences of major news corporations.



Stuart Hall, professor of sociology at the Open University in the United Kingdom, perhaps best describes the distortion of news by the media: "Journalists speak of the news as if events select themselves. Further, they speak as if which is the 'most significant' news story and which 'news angles' are most salient, are divinely inspired.

Yet of the millions of events which occur every day in the world, only a tiny proportion ever become visible as 'potential news stories,' and of this proportion, only a small fraction are actually produced as the day's news in the news media."

With the expansion of communications technology, the varying views on information have become increasingly hard to interpret. Compared to American media, international media is more focused and, in terms of the news it presents, tends to be less biased. American media, on the other hand, despite consistent accuracy, tends to be dramatic and focused on issues that only concern the United States. Regardless of the disparity between the two, media in general--whether one considers its influence to be positive or negative--is a great means for us to express and share our lives and culture with one another.

The BBC

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is the dominant national and publicly funded broadcaster in the United Kingdom. It presently operates two public television channels, a 24-hour cable news channel, several digital channels, five national radio networks, and an online news service. The largest global sector of the BBC, known as the World Service, broadcasts radio programming in more than 40 languages and is the sole source of news in some parts of the world. Television subsidiaries of the radio-based World Service are BBC Worldwide and BBC Broadcast Limited, which offer daily international television channels such as BBC Prime and BBC America. The BBC is frequently heralded as the most widely respected broadcaster in the world.

The BBC was officially founded on January 18, 1923. Although radio had existed in the United Kingdom for four years before the BBC's inception, its acceptance had been slow. It was only the competition with American stations and the profits to be reaped by radio manufacturers that galvanized the founding of a national broadcasting organization in Britain. Originally, the BBC was supported by six large firms and licensed by the Postmaster-General, its goal to create a nationalized media that would educate and inform the British people without the biased interference of the government and politicians. However, in January of 1927 the BBC underwent a transformation from a privately owned partnership to a public corporation. Consequently, what had previously been referred to as the British Broadcasting



Company became the British Broadcasting Corporation. A group known as the Crawford Committee was appointed by the British government to advise on the management and control of the BBC. It is this government-sponsored structure on which the BBC's present organization is based.

The autonomous nature of its board of governors gives the BBC independence from direct government control. Though the BBC is virtually independent as national media, it does ultimately answer to the British government. The twelve governors who run the BBC are appointed specifically by the monarch and British Parliament. Despite its political affiliation, the autonomous nature of the board of governors has made the BBC fairly successful in maintaining the objectivity of its broadcasts. The BBC from time to time has taken

advantage of its independence to criticize government policy. However, the BBC does not have any constitutional protection for such criticism and in the past it has suffered as a result. The BBC is regularly accused by the British government of being biased in favor of the opposition, and conversely is often accused by the opposition of being biased toward the British government. In spite of these criticisms, the BBC is widely regarded by the British public as a trusted and politically neutral news source.

The BBC's principle source of income has always been an annual license fee charged to every owner of a radio or television set. In 1950, there were 12 million radio licenses and a mere 350,000 television licenses, but after the BBC's televised coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the popularity of television skyrocketed, along with the BBC's part in it. Approximately 20 million watched the coronation on television, an unheard of amount of people for the time. In recent years the BBC has also amassed considerable revenue from its commercial wing, particularly by exploiting its massive back catalogue of programs. As a result of this unique method of funding, BBC radio and television have been free of the constraints imposed by commercial advertisers, and thus are able to concentrate on providing high-quality programs that service all aspects

of society. The fact that the BBC has never had to cater to commercial interests is one of the major reasons for its continued popularity.

The BBC was originally established to provide a radio service for the British public, and radio would remain the bulk of its output until the introduction and widespread adoption of the BBC's television service. In terms of radio today, the BBC runs ten domestic radio stations, as well as regional radio stations throughout the United Kingdom, which focus on regional issues to a greater extent than their national counterparts. Compared to advertising-funded independent local radio stations, which often broadcast contemporary popular music, BBC Radio stations offer a more serious alternative.

On November 2, 1936, the BBC (originally restricted solely to radio) broadcasted their first television transmissions, known as BBC1. During World War II, the BBC's television broadcasts were suspended in order to protect England, as there were fears that the country's security would be unintentionally compromised. In 1946, the BBC was reopened and a second BBC channel, BBC2, was created.

In 1954, with the establishment of the Independent Television Authority, which later became the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the BBC's monopoly on television broadcasts ended. Initially, the competition caused a drastic decline in BBC viewers, who dwindled to a mere 28 percent of all viewers. In 1973, the first com-

mercial radio stations appeared and the BBC also lost its monopoly on radio.

Early on, the BBC recognized the power of broadcast as a source of entertainment as well as of information and culture. By the late 20th century, the BBC had an estimated global audience of over 120 million. The BBC is currently the largest exporter of information to other countries in the world, its programs ranging from coverage of international current events to children's shows. At present, 90 percent of the British population relies daily on the BBC as its principal source of news.

Abu Dhabi

On January 30, 2000, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) launched a new development in the evolution of Arab broadcasting: Abu Dhabi Television, which has since grown to become one of the Middle East's most dependable news stations.

As the main television station of the UAE capital, the Abu Dhabi Channel is focused primarily on news in and around the Middle East. Just recently, it has expanded to cover news in North America and parts of Asia (India, Pakistan, and China). In addition to the news it provides, the Abu Dhabi channel also produces 90 percent of the programs it broadcasts.

The second channel under Abu Dhabi Television is the Emirates Channel, launched on January 8, 2000, with the two goals of reporting important cultural issues and capturing the identity of the UAE. It broadcasts a variety of programs ranging from political and social talk shows to children's programs and soap operas. Directed at all of the socio-economic demographics of the UAE, the Emirates Channel is only available to countries in the Middle East.

The third and final station of Abu Dhabi Television is the Sports Channel. Launched in 1995, Abu Dhabi's Sports Channel has since become the most watched sports channel in the Middle East. Along with regular broadcasts of cricket, tennis, and soccer, it recently



gained exclusive rights to broadcast the Italian soccer league, which greatly broadened the channel's spectrum of viewers. Because of such additions to its broadcasting lineup, Abu Dhabi's Sports Channel has proved to be the most popular of its three stations.

Abu Dhabi's coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine has been praised as the most balanced of any Middle Eastern television station. However, Abu Dhabi television has also recently been subject to criticism. In December of 2001, the network broadcast a cartoon of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon drinking the blood of Arabic people. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) criticized the television station for broadcasting the cartoon, claiming that it was anti-Semitic. Under pressure from the ADL, Abu Dhabi stopped airing the cartoon, but its conflicts with Israel and its people didn't end there. In 2002, two senior reporters from Abu Dhabi TV were stripped of their press credentials and were deported from Israel for engaging in "crude anti-Israeli propaganda and taking an inflammatory hostile approach to Jews."

In recent years, Abu Dhabi's broadcasts have spread far beyond the Middle East, making their way to the western world. Because of its location in the center of Baghdad near the Tigris River, the Abu Dhabi station in Iraq was able to feed "crucial coverage" of the Second Persian Gulf War to western news outlets such as CNN, Reuters, and the Associated Press Television News. Abu Dhabi has also had exclusive interviews with influential Coalition figures such as United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and former P.O.W. Jessica Lynch. However, Abu Dhabi's focus on the Coalition's side of the war in Iraq has led to a severe decline in its popularity in the Middle East.

Media in the Middle East, whether biased or impartial, has a great effect on society. Abu Dhabi television is no exception; its slanted views of recent crises in the Islamic world have undoubtedly changed opinions of its credibility. However, Abu Dhabi TV is one of the few media outlets in the Middle East that has the power to sway the hearts and minds of its viewers.

Media and Political Campaigning

In recent years, mass media has become increasingly significant in political campaigning. The media is able to not only influence the opinions of entire communities regarding political candidates, but in many cases, it has also been able to shift the focus of campaigns. The media has certain ways of covering political campaigns that result in biased portrayals of candidates. For example, advertising has been said to distort candidates' positions and trivialize important issues. Politicians aiming to win an election often employ advertising consultants to aid them in expressing their views to voters, frequently spending millions of dollars to create an image that will appeal to the public. When considering the media's influence over voters, it is also important to consider to what extent the media misrepresents politicians in order to render them more attractive to voters.



One of the first aspects of political campaigning to come under scrutiny for the distorted portrayal of candidates is advertising. Advertising--for any purpose--makes judgments; product commercials, for example, contend that the product they advertise is the best. Likewise, advertisers working for political campaigns present their candidates as favorably as possible. Advertisements familiarize voters with political candidates and help them understand the issues that are at stake in a given campaign. However, political advertising is often misleading. It is difficult, for example, to determine whether a candidate featured in an ad is speaking truthfully or merely

telling the public what it wants to hear. Advertisements in political campaigns aim to offer their audience a convincing first impression of a candidate that the voters will remember on election day. According to a study conducted during the 1976 United States presidential race between Jimmy



Carter and Gerald Ford, first impressions of candidates are crucial to the outcome of elections. Thanks to an aggressive media blitz by his campaign team, initial favorable reactions to Carter's image in ads led Americans to vote for him and gave him a tremendous boost in the election.

Televised debates between candidates are another form of media involved in political campaigning. This method of presenting candidates' stances on critical issues has been praised for its honesty and straightforwardness. It is often said that the differences between candidates outlined in political debates set the stage for the rest of the campaign. The points raised in the questioning of the candidates supply the insight needed by voters to reach a final decision. The debate between

Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy in 1960 is a textbook example of this; Kennedy's charisma and intellect during the debate appealed to viewers and ultimately played a major role in his presidential victory.

Undeniably, media coverage during political campaigns influences public awareness in elections. Researchers have found that exposure to any kind of media causes changes in viewers' mentalities. The influence of the media on elections can even be felt at the local level. Newspaper articles and advertisements raise public awareness of municipal and school board elections; as a result,

voter turnout increases. Television, radio, and the Internet have the power to modify the truth and present it in a way that captivates voters. In 2000 alone, approximately one billion dollars of the revenue from television stations came from political advertising. A study of political ads found that approximately 840,000 political ads

were aired in the top 75 television media markets during the 2000 election season, over 10,000 per market. From these figures alone, it is clear that television is the most important tool for a politician when attempting to attract attention to a campaign.

The influence of the media in political campaigning today is a key factor in the victory of any candidate. Radio, television, the Internet, and the press are valuable to politicians, but can be dangerous to voters. Ultimately, the question remains: Can one trust the media to provide accurate information if its goal is persuasion rather than honesty?

Sensationalism

The international public has been bombarded with dramatic newspaper and magazine headlines in recent years. The increased attention paid to this type of reporting has led many to believe that journalists are sacrificing their credibility to ratings in a competition for supremacy and lucrative advertising contracts. However, many among the general public are unaware of the history of sensationalism in the media and what sensationalism actually is, contributing to the emergence of many myths and misconceptions.

Sensationalized media has been tagged as negative. In an article in *Journalism Quarterly*, P.H. Tannenbaum and M.D. Lynch comment that sensationalism “shocks and thrills our moral and aesthetic sensibilities.” Emery and Emery, in *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, insist that it “emphasizes emotion for emotion’s sake.” Despite evidence that seems to point to an increase in negative sensationalism in recent decades, it is unfair to ignore the potential positive aspects of dramatized media.

Some scholars, like Dan Berkowitz, contend that sensationalism in journalism is designed to attract “high viewership ratings.” Other theories debate this, however. In an article in the Fall 2001 issue of the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Maria Elizabeth Grabe writes, “Respected journalists readily admit that they intentionally arouse emotion in readers with the hope that they will channel audience excitement into efforts to right social wrongs.”

Those involved in science- and medicine-related journalism give more complicated reasons for sensational practices. David and Richard Ransohoff, in their 2001 article, “Sensationalism in the Media: When Scientists and Journalists May be Complicit Collaborators,” argue that the sensationalism that occurs when reporting scientific news is a result of miscommunication. They believe that “the two professions [journalism and medicine] have similar goals but differ in style and language.” The article concludes that “media constraints of time, brevity, and simplicity

preclude the careful documentation, nuanced positions, and precautionary qualifications that scientists feel are necessary to present their work.” Such fundamental differences in professions “may distort research that has a meaning only in a broader statistical context.”

While the motives of sensationalism in the media are debatable, its effects are consistent. As was the goal of the muckrakers in the early 1900s, the reporting of sensational news can have the positive effect of motivating the general population to become more aware of pertinent global issues. Moreover, in an age when the public seeks ever faster and more efficient ways of doing things, sensationalism, especially in print media, has become an easy way to attract an audience to read stories in papers and magazines or to watch them on television. As Owen Gregory from the Imprint Online News staff observes, “The public appears to accept some of the responsibility for the media sensationalism of the news.” He cites that while 49 percent of the Canadian population dislikes sensationalism in the news, Canadians still contribute to its perpetuation because they buy sensational newspapers and magazines. The positive aspect of this is that the public becomes more aware of issues. However, those in the media must find a delicate balance between encouraging public awareness of important issues and promoting fanciful falsehoods.



Howard Kurtz of CNN's weekly program "Reliable Sources" stated in a recent interview that "Journalism and sensationalism have sadly become merged in the public mind during the media frenzies of the last decade." However, as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11th, he believes that "the media are heading for a more serious and sober period in which international news, the military, intelligence agencies, and other subjects that have previously been on the back burner will be getting lots of attention." It remains to be seen whether this will prove true; as long as the public is still reading sensational papers and watching sensational news stories on television, however, it is unlikely that we will witness a significant decrease in the amount of sensational news reported.

The Deterioration of Print Journalism

Print journalism can be defined as all forms of news and information that is conveyed through the written word. In today's modern world, however, the media has stretched beyond print journalism to include many newer, faster means of dissemination of information, which are rendering the once common printed news obsolete. The evolution of technology, with innovations such as the radio, the television, and especially the Internet, has brought about a transformation in journalism. While print journalism will forever remain a critical component of media as a whole, the lessening of its influence has had serious repercussions on the quality of the reports being printed.

Since its origin, print journalism has always been susceptible to manipulation and fraud. "Yellow journalism," an early example of sensationalism, was a common form of exploitation of information employed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Yellow

journalism was highly prejudiced, incorporating flagrant use of slander, exaggerations of the truth, and wild illustrations. It was used liberally at the turn of the 19th century to encourage American support of a war against Spain in the name of Cuban independence. However, conscious efforts were eventually made to return the integrity to print journalism. An example of this is the *New York Times*' adoption of the slogan, "All the News That's Fit to Print," in 1897.

The term "journalist" has long carried a connotation of professionalism. Accurate and informative articles are often referred to as "the first draft of his-



tory;" while journalists are called "seekers of truth." Yet today, fewer and fewer of them are living up to the code of journalistic ethics. Many are taking liberties with accuracy and objectivity, liberties once associated only with the realm of supermarket tabloids. The quality of the content in some of the world's most reliable newspapers and periodicals has noticeably deteriorated. Facts are no longer substantiated and cross-referenced, and the check and balance system that once regulated the editing and printing of newspapers, magazines, and journals has disappeared.

The most recent example of the deterioration of print journalism was the May 2003 scandal involving

reporter Jayson Blair of the *New York Times*. Blair falsified evidence, fabricated sources, and outright lied in articles he wrote for the internationally esteemed paper. While Blair was the most recent high-profile journalist to be found guilty of plagiarism, he joins a long list of seemingly reputable journalists who have recently committed similar offenses, including Janet Cooke of the *Washington Post* and Patricia Smith of the *Boston Globe*.

The Associated Press endeavored to find out why the subjects of the articles written by these journalists never objected to the lies and exaggerations printed about them. The recurring answer was that they “doubted that the newspapers cared.” This response further demonstrates the failure of print journalism to maintain its credibility in the eyes of the public. Newspapers and periodicals are seen as large corporations, more concerned with circulation figures than with the details of their articles.

The responsibility for this deterioration in print journalism does not lie solely in the hands of the journalists and their publications. It can also be attributed to the general public. In the average household of a developed country, the major source of news and information is the television. As a result, newspaper circulation has declined drastically. The influence of print journalism is waning, along with its quality. The “avid newspaper readers” are a dying breed, and, for many, television’s brief synopses of the news are both expedient and sufficient.

Today there is an unparalleled amount of raw information widely available to the public. However, the bulk of this information is no longer transported to the masses physically through newspapers and magazines. Libraries have ceased to save hard copies of old papers that were once frequently used for research. Instead newspapers are mostly saved on microfilm, which decades from now may also cease to exist as a means of preserving history.

Some say the age of print journalism ended long ago. For many, reading the newspaper has become a luxury. Where printed news was once the only source of current information, the written word has now taken a back seat to its electronic competitors.

The New York Times

The New York Times Company is a media corporation responsible for a large part of the news that Americans receive daily. The company’s businesses include newspapers and magazines, as well as broadcast and electronic media.

The New York Daily Times was founded by Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones; its first issue was published on September 18, 1851. The *Times* was to be published every morning of the week except Sunday. In 1852, a “Western Edition” called the *Times of California* was published, but was discontinued with the rise of California newspapers. In 1856, the Associated Press (AP) was formally organized, with the *Times*’ own Henry Jarvis Raymond as a director. Today, the AP is the dominant source for world news in the United States.

Due to increased demand, the *New York Times* began publishing a Sunday edition. To ensure the continued interest of readers, the *Times* arranged for itself to be the official recipient of all war news from the government, a significant advantage over rival news agencies. With the death of Henry Jarvis Raymond in June of 1869, George Jones took over as publisher, rather than allow the paper’s publication to terminate.

In order to meet the needs of New York’s large German population, the *Times* began in 1871 to print articles in German in a special supplement. In its earlier days, the *Times* had been closely affiliated with the Republican Party. In 1876, however, following the scandalous presidency of Republican Ulysses S. Grant, George Jones distanced the *Times* from the Republican Party.

Jones died on August 12, 1891. This did not prevent the New York Times Company from continuing its expansion, however. On August 18, 1896, Adolph S. Ochs, former publisher of the *Chattanooga Times*, acquired controlling ownership of the *Times* for

\$75,000, and consequently installed himself as publisher.

The price of the *Times* was lowered in 1898 from two cents to one. Circulation tripled within a year, increasing from 26,000 to 76,000. In order to preserve the paper's morality, Ochs made a list of products and services that were unacceptable for ads. This list included word contests, prize puzzles, and immoral books, as well as references to male diseases, female pills, fortune tellers, clairvoyants, palmists, masseuses, offers of large salaries, offers of something for nothing, guaranteed cures, or guaranteed large dividends. Censorship of this kind was fairly common in large daily newspapers at the time.

The *New York Times* soon moved its headquarters to an area of 42nd Street called Long Acre Square, subsequently renamed Times Square. On April 13, 1904, the *Times* received directly from a naval battle the first on-the-spot wireless transmission which reported the destruction of the Russian fleet at the Battle of Port Arthur in the Yellow Sea during the Russo-Japanese War.

The *Times* began chronicling New York's "Neediest Cases" in 1912. At Ochs's suggestion, the

Times published 100 short, unemotional articles about New Yorkers in need. The first year, 117 contributors sent in a total of \$3,630.88. (In 2000-2001, donations to the Neediest Cases Fund topped eight million dollars, and a 9/11 Neediest Fund, established after the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York, raised over \$45 million.)

The *Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for its "Neediest Cases" section, and later received a second Pulitzer for public service in publishing the text of official reports, documents and speeches about World War I.

On November 9, 1965, a blackout swept the Northeast, leaving New York City without electricity. The *Times* consequently used the printing presses of the *Newark Evening News* and printed a 10-page issue, the only New York newspaper to appear the next morning.

The New York Times Company is a pioneering news source responsible

for a large portion of what the American public knows of global current affairs. It is the *Times'* strong reputation and history which allows its readers to trust its reporting.



The FCC

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was established by the Communications Act of 1934. The FCC is an independent United States government agency that has direct responsibility to Congress. It is charged with regulating international and interstate communications by television, radio, satellite, wire and cable. All 50 states and all U.S. territories are under the jurisdiction of the FCC.

The FCC is run by five commissioners appointed by the President of the United States and approved by the Senate for five-year terms. They supervise all FCC activities and delegate responsibilities to staff offices and bureaus. The commissioners are not to have any financial interest in any commission-related business. Out of the five commissioners, only three can be members of the same political party.

The FCC has six operating bureaus and ten staff offices. Its six bureaus are the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, the Enforcement Bureau, the International Bureau, the Media Bureau, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and the Wireline Competition Bureau. Its ten staff offices consist of the Office of Administrative Law Judges, the Office of Communications Business Opportunities, the Office of Engineering and Technology, the Office of the General Counsel, the Office of the Inspector General, the Office of Legislative Affairs, the Office of the

Managing Director, the Office of Media Relations, the Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Analysis, and the Office of Work Place Diversity.

The FCC's responsibilities include the development and administration of licensing and policy programs relating to electronic media, conducting investigations, developing and implementing regulatory programs, taking part in hearings, and analyzing complaints.

One significant case involving the FCC, *FCC v. Pacifica*, reached the Supreme Court in 1978. Known as the "filthy words case," it was initiated by a monologue presented by comedian George Carlin on the New York



radio station WBAI (FM) entitled "The Seven Words You Can't Say on Radio and Television." Because Carlin repeatedly uttered the seven taboo words on air, complaints were registered about the broadcast and the FCC conducted an investigation into the bit in 1975. The FCC issued a declaratory order stating that the words were "patently offensive by contemporary community standards for the broadcast medium and are accordingly 'indecent' when broadcast by radio or television." The radio station and civil rights advocates together appealed to the federal court, denouncing the order as a threat to freedom of expression. Their appeal was to no avail, however, for the court

ruled that radio and TV stations do not have the constitutional right to broadcast words deemed indecent, adding that the government had the right to ban such words because of the broadcast medium's "uniquely pervasive presence in the lives of all Americans." Since the court's ruling, the FCC and Congress have tried to set apart freedom of speech for broadcasters

and for material considered indecent. In 1987, the FCC established a time for stations to broadcast indecent programming, a so-called “safe harbor,” which fell between the hours of midnight and six in the morning.

The FCC has dealt with many difficult issues, notably the backlash of the Act of 1996, when it was called to review the Communications Act which stated that ownership rules should be reviewed every two years to ensure that regulations were keeping pace with technology and market practices. However, since the act went into effect, the FCC has been accused of abusing it in an attempt to expand its narrow authority.

On June 2, 2003, the FCC, headed by Michael Powell, voted 3-2 to allow common ownership of papers and broadcast stations in 180 of America’s 210 media markets. This destroyed long-standing federal checks and balances on corporate media power. Experts speculate that the decision will allow large media companies to grow vastly, forging media monopolies.

Since June of 2003, hundreds of thousands of Americans have contacted Congress to oppose the FCC’s decision. They maintain that Congress should work to make the media “balanced, diverse, competitive, and fair” and fear what has already happened in one city, where, according to the Consumer Federation of America, newspaper-TV mergers have enabled a local media giant to own one-third of the television audience, one-third of the radio audience and a ninety-percent share of newspaper circulation.

Because of the pervasive influence of mass media in the United States, the task of the FCC is both vital and difficult. In regulating communications throughout the nation and its foreign territories, the FCC should try to foster a fair and competitive media market which upholds, within reason, the First Amendment right of broadcasters to free speech.

CNN

Cable News Network (CNN) is the primary source for domestic and international news in the United States. With over a billion viewers, it is one of the most watched news channels in the world. Ted Turner, media mogul, philanthropist, and corporate billionaire, founded the pioneer broadcasting station on June 1, 1980. CNN, the first twenty-four-hour, news-only network, was originally deemed a huge disaster for Turner Broadcasting. However, the channel, principally broadcast over cable and satellite, grew to provide unprecedented nationwide news coverage from New York to Los Angeles.

CNN’s use of satellites facilitated its expansion into the international market as it experimented with varied programming. “Headline News” was the first program it offered apart from standard desk news reading, and in 1985 it became the first program to be broadcast by the network from an international satellite. Soon after the landmark broadcast, CNN International was founded as a division of CNN and eventually established 39 bureaus around the world. CNN International gained popularity during the Gulf War of 1991, when,



approved to cover the war by both the Iraqi and U.S. governments, it was acknowledged for its largely unbiased coverage. CNN was the only foreign media group that was able to broadcast from Iraq when the United States commenced its attack. CNN was also recognized for its moving coverage of the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986.

CNN’s success is partially due to its ability to cater to the needs of its diverse audience by airing news in many different languages. CNN airs nearly all its news through its Newsroom Center, where its various sub-networks

decide which news to broadcast. Furthermore, CNN buys airtime on various local channels around the world, allowing it to reach a wider audience and thus facilitating the expansion of its network base.

CNN's success can also be accredited to its use of state-of-the-art communications technology to provide viewers with clear images and sound. CNN's headquarters in Atlanta keeps in close contact with its correspondents abroad, and constantly acts to protect the lives of reporters in high-risk locations.

Despite CNN's reputation of high quality journalism, it has recently been accused of biased reporting. In an interview last year, Ted Turner accused Israel of engaging in its own brand of "terrorism" against the Palestinians. CNN quickly terminated relations with Turner and produced "Victims of Terror," a documentary series on Israeli civilian deaths since September 2000. CNN has also been accused

of ignoring the deaths of Palestinian civilians, particularly at the hands of the Israeli military. Many American and international viewers have begun to feel a pro-United States bias in CNN's news reports, especially in stories about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In subtle ways, CNN is seen as promoting controversial U.S. foreign policy in its international coverage, while refraining from reporting stories detrimental to the image of the United States, its policies, or its allies.

In times of war, news networks have the very delicate task of balancing accurate and unbiased reporting with responsibility and national interests. Unfortunately, they often do tilt one way or the other. While some networks (like the BBC) have acquired the laudable reputation of reporting news across the world in the most objective manner possible, it seems CNN has gained the reputation of being the official news network of the American government.



Racial Stereotypes in the Media

The media has a powerful influence over the way in which the world perceives different ethnicities. In an effort to appeal to the general public, the media creates a biased image of different ethnicities. These stereotypes have been accused of perpetuating prejudices, thereby preventing audiences from understanding the reality of different cultures and propagating ignorance and inequality in the world. This article will focus solely on stereotypes of African-Americans in the United States.

News reports in print and on radio and television rarely emphasize issues important to the African-American community today. Issues concerning the quality of health care, environmental dangers, and funding for education in black communities tend to be under-reported, while similar concerns in Caucasian communities are given top priority.

A current issue that has not been significantly covered in the popular press is the dangerous use of lead pipes in urban communities where large numbers of African-Americans live. Lead pipes are known to contaminate drinking water, and those who consume significant quantities of lead run the risk of developing neurological problems, including mental retardation. This has been a significant problem in some communities, but instead of focusing on such threats to the health of underprivileged African-Americans, the

media portrays African-Americans through stories like the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The media described these events as racial riots for which the black community was principally responsible. According to later reports, however, 60 percent of the rioters and looters were either Hispanic or white. This misrepresentation of African-Americans in the media is driven in part by stereotypes depicting African Americans as involved in violence, crime, and drug-use.

The representation of African-Americans as criminals and gangsters may curb both the aspirations and success of young black children, who grow up accustomed to the negative portrayal of African-Americans in the news. If television shows and news stations were to include more inspiring black role models, such as doctors and lawyers, it might help promote an increase in the number of young African-Americans pursuing higher education. These successful individuals might be able to dissolve the stereotypes portrayed in the media and assist in breaking the cycle of poverty that pervades many African-American communities.

Many African-Americans have noticed these trends as well. Two hundred and seven randomly selected African Americans were surveyed in a study by researchers at Northwestern University. The study revealed that over 51 percent of the subject group reported that local news focused on negative things in their communities. The researchers also reported that blacks felt that TV news too often focused on African-Americans who were inarticulate and appeared unintelligent, contributing to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. In a second study, considerable evidence indicated that self-images are established primarily by the expectations of others in the same social environment. It can hence be concluded that the stereotypes created by the media may be a source of negative self-images among the stereotyped group.

Entertainment and news reports commonly portray African-American youth as dangerous and violent. Popular primetime television shows from the nineties like "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" and "Family Matters" feature African-American youths who frequently get into trouble with the law. Also, in a computerized search of three hundred nightly "ABC World News Tonight" for stories containing words such as "inner-city," "racism," and "ghetto," 66 stories were about African-Americans

and 234 mentioned "black" or "blacks." Despite this tendency to stereotype African-American youths as criminals, research indicates that most serious inner-city crimes are committed by a very small proportion of African-American youths, approximately eight percent. Such biased depiction may promote unfounded hostility toward African-Americans.

The media has the potential to display the positive aspects of African-American culture today. The influence of mass media has ramifications far beyond mere entertainment value. The way in which the media portrays various ethnic groups affects not only how others perceive that group, but also how they perceive themselves. Without an impartial media to dispel stereotypes, an accurate understanding of other cultures and a tolerant world-view is virtually impossible to attain.

Conclusion

The issues discussed in this Working Paper are of paramount global importance today. As technology continues to rapidly expand mass communication, the problems generated by modern media will only increase. These problems, from relentless advertising to groundless censorship, neither can nor should be taken lightly. As of yet, however, the negative consequences of the rise of media fail to outweigh its positive effects. Mass media is still very much a tool of enlightenment for those who hold information to be a precious commodity. It is our generation's responsibility to ensure that the influence of information transcends political and cultural limitations to bring people closer together. By presenting the reality of modern mass media, we hope that we have aided in furthering this ideal.

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