

 microphones

# Mass Media Influence on Society

Over the last 500 years, the influence of mass media has grown exponentially with the advance of technology.

First there were books, then newspapers, magazines, photography, sound recordings, films, radio, television, the so-called New Media of the Internet, and now social media.

Today, just about everyone depends on information and communication to keep their lives moving through daily activities like work, education, health care, leisure activities, entertainment, traveling, personal relationships, and the other stuff with which we are involved.

 blogger typing on computer

It's not unusual to wake up, check the cellphone for messages and notifications, look at the TV or newspaper for news, commute to work, read emails, take meetings and makes phone calls, eat meals with friends and family, and make decisions based on the information that we gather from those mass media and interpersonal media sources.

## So what?

We need to be aware that the values we hold, the beliefs we harbor and the decisions we make are based on our assumptions, our experiences, our education and what we know for a fact.

We rely on mass media for the current news and facts about what is important and what we should be aware of.

We trust the media as an authority for news, information, education and entertainment. Considering that powerful influence, then, we should know how it really works.

## How media Influence us

The degree of influence depends on the availability and pervasiveness of media. All of the

traditional mass media still have great influence over our lives.

Books once were supremely influential because they came first before newspapers, magazines, radio or television.

Newspapers and magazines became great influencers after they were developed.

Sound recordings and film were and still are influential.

Radio and then television were very influential. As the 20th century closed, TV exposed us to untold numbers of images of advertising and marketing, suffering and relief, sexuality and violence, celebrity, and much more.

New and influential media-distribution channels have appeared in the 21st century. Delivered via the World Wide Web across the Internet, we are influenced daily by blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and myriad forms of content sharing.

### Who controls the message?

Who owns the media companies that shape our values, beliefs and decisions?

A media conglomerate or media group is a company that owns many mass media businesses.

According to a recent Fortune 500 list, the top five in terms of revenue are:

- Walt Disney Company
- News Corporation
- Time Warner
- CBS Corporation
- Viacom

Other well-known major conglomerates include:

- NBC Universal
- Sony Corporation of America

 Walt Disney Company logo

Together, these giants control 95% of all the traditional media we receive every day.

These media conglomerates own the major television and radio broadcast stations and networks and programing, video news, sports entertainment, entertainment theme parks, movie studios, integrated telecommunications, wireless mobile entertainment and information distribution systems, video games software, electronic and print media, the music industry, and a whole lot more.

Back in the day, there was more diversity in companies, but they have merged over the decades so now they are few in number. Today's huge merged companies have the power to shape our opinions and beliefs and influence our decisions.

This is why it's important to be aware of what we are exposed to every day, so we can look at things from different perspectives and not just from the perspective of a medium.

### Why are audience ratings important?

Money. Revenues. Profits.

A commercial medium wants to sell ad space or time to businesses with products or services for sale. To make that sale, they need to be able to tell potential advertisers that their messages on the air, in print, or on the monitor screen will be viewed and heard by large numbers of consumers.

For example, here are Nielsen program ratings for cable news channels for April 2012:

1. The O'Reilly Factor – Fox News — 2.87 million total viewers
2. Hannity – Fox News — 2.075 million total viewers
3. Special Report with Bret Baier – Fox News — 1.778 million total viewers
4. On the Record with Greta van Susteren – Fox News — 1.722 million total viewers
5. Fox Report with Shepard Smith – Fox News — 1.688 million total viewers
6. The Five – Fox News — 1.674 million total viewers
7. America's Newsroom – Fox News — 1.272 million total viewers
8. Your World with Neil Cavuto – Fox News — 1.252 million total viewers
9. O'Reilly Factor (11PM) – Fox News — 1.22 million total viewers
10. America Live – Fox News — 1.191 million total viewers
11. Studio B – Fox News — 1.113 million total viewers
12. Fox & Friends – Fox News — 1.082 million total viewers
13. Happening Now – Fox News — 1.029 million total viewers
14. The Rachel Maddow Show – MSNBC — 985,000 total viewers
15. The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell – MSNBC — 931,000 total viewers
16. The Ed Show – MSNBC — 875,000 total viewers
17. Hardball with Chris Matthews – MSNBC — 744,000 total viewers
18. PoliticsNation – MSNBC — 712,000 total viewers
19. Piers Morgan Tonight – CNN — 567,000 total viewers
20. The Situation Room – CNN — 548,000

 FNC MSNBC CNN logos

Notice that programs owned by News Corporation dominate the first 13. The next five are NBC Universal programs and the bottom two in the top 20 list are Time Warner programs.

Bill O'Reilly has five times as many viewers as Wolf Blitzer.

## How do media influence public opinion?

Media shape public opinion in different ways depending on the content.

### *Here's an example:*

Following the 9/11 terrorism, media coverage followed accusations by government authorities that pointed toward al Qaeda as the group that carried out the attack on the United States and Osama bin Laden as leader of that group. Those news reports on the attack and the aftermath shaped public opinion to support the war on terrorism.

Other ways to influence public opinion include political advertising.

Trends for and against political candidates are measured by public opinion polls. Candidates raise money to pay for media exposure -- political advertising -- that influences public opinion so they will receive more votes on Election Day.

### How do ads influence us?

The media altogether receive billions of dollars in revenue from the advertising they sell and that we are exposed to.

Ads in print, on the air and on the Internet tell us what products and services are good. After seeing thousands of persuasive advertising messages, we make buying decisions based on what we saw in newspaper and magazine ads, saw and heard in television and radio ads, and saw and heard in ads on websites.

Those ads tell us we can trust a product or service and that many people we know are buying the product or service and liking it.

- We buy what we see on TV or in the newspaper or on a Web page.
- We buy things to which our favorite celebrities testify.
- We buy goods that media tell us are fashionable and acceptable to society.

#### ***Here's an example:***

If a recreational sport gets a lot of attention from media and through that media exposure your friends begin to enjoy it, you will be more likely to engage in the sport.

#### ***Another example:***

Advertising can have a negative influence on teenagers through the depiction of celebrity movie stars using tobacco products, exposure to thousands of junk food ads, the constant excessive exposure of sexual and violent images, and endless beer ads.

We all want to be accepted by our peers. We want to be loved. We want to be successful.

- Media depict idealized images of handsome men and beautiful women.
- Media depict idealized characteristics of a successful person.

If you are not like those beautiful, handsome and successful people, advertising tells you it's time to buy the goods necessary to look like they look.

#### ***A sad example:***

Teenage obesity and anorexia have been identified in recent years as nationwide problems. Even while millions of adolescents presumably are fighting obesity, they are exposed to countless advertisements for fattening junk food juxtaposed against countless idealized images of successful

 Coca Cola ad 125 years



people appearing thin.

Many girls and women of average proportions have been influenced to want to look like the images of super-thin models and celebrities they see in media, so they allow themselves to acquire eating disorders, which lead to health issues and even death.

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**Additional resources:**

- [What Is Advertising? »](#)
- [History of Advertising »](#)
- [What Is Public Relations? »](#)
- [Music and Popular Culture in America »](#)

[Resources for Courses page »](#)

 [Korean beer ad](#)