The Mass Media

Journalism Has Undergone 4 stages of evolution

1. The Party Press - political parties publication of their own papers. Very biased
   showed only one side of the story
   Limited readership.

2. The Popular Press - mass readership and were profitable as businesses
   The telegraph made it possible for news to spread more quickly
   Improved printing presses meant that papers could be printed quicker and at less expense
   Wire services like the Associated Press provided unbiased stories for papers across the nation
   They attracted readers with sensational stories known as yellow journalism

3. Opinion Magazines- discussed political policy not just what the news of the day was
   Muckraking journalist exposed political corruption and business exploitation in magazines such as The Nation,
   McClure’s and Harper’s

   In the 1920s and 1930 three weekly news magazines attracted mass readership

4. Electronic Journalism -

   Radio - begin in the 1920s and made celebrities out of news personalities broadcasting over national networks
   Politicians could speak directly to the people without having to go through editors or reporters

   Television- claims by far the largest of the audience of the mass media

   Increased the visibility of broadcast journalist and promoted the careers of politicians who learned to use the medium

   Like the 1890s newspapers that engaged in yellow journalism, television news favors events that have audience appeal
The Five Functions the Mass Media Performs for the Political system

1. To Report the News

2. To interpret the news - what does some new policy or political development mean

3. To influence public opinion - the reporters determine what the public will find out about an issue. That affects have the public will fell about an issue

4. to set the agenda - the process by which certain issues come to be important and worthy of government action (Healthcare was made important by the media) The more often an issue is covered the more important it becomes to the public

5. To socialize citizens about politics - for most people it’s their primary source of political information.

How does the media perform these functions?

1. Serve as gatekeepers - they influence which subjects become national political issues, and for how long by deciding what they will report on and what they will not report on.

This is how they set the agenda

2. Serve as scorekeepers- This is how the media perform their role of reporting and interpreting the news, influencing opinion, and socializing people about politics

They know who’s being talked about in Washington politics - who gaining influence and who is loosing influence

3. Serve as watchdogs - this is also a significant part of the way they perform their function of reporting the news

Once the scorekeepers decide that you have gain or could gain political influence, they start keeping a close eye on you in order to expose scandals, learn positions etc.

Know body cared about Gary Heart until he became a contender for the presidential nomination

Gennifer Flowers and Draft Dodging did not become issues until Clinton had a chance of winning the nomination
The watchdogs focus on bringing down those that are the most powerful. This is also how they perform their role of socializing people about politics - people think that are politicians are corrupt

Benefits of the Media

Provide the means for the public and government to interact

The press reports to the people what the government is doing and interprets the publics reaction and sends it back to Washington

The media helps to both shape and reflect public opinion

The media is the primary source of information for most people. For many politics is not very important and the media provides a way of obtaining information quickly and allowing them to form political opinions

People are the most likely to be influence by the media when they have no experience with an issue. This makes the media extremely powerful

The structure of American Media

- most news programs - morning news shows and the late afternoon early evening news are geared to local social and sport events. Local political issues get relatively little attention and national politics often isn’t mentioned unless it has a local impact

- The national press focuses on national and international politics
  - the importance of the national press
    - government officials and leaders in Washington pay a lot of attention to what these reporters say about them and their programs.
    - These reporters tend to be better paid, better educated, and more liberal than the local press. They are the ones who have the greatest opportunity to influence the public on national government policy - since the local press does not like to talk about those issues

How politicians use the media?

Politicians depend on the media to get their message out and advance their careers, but they also fear the media’s power to criticize them or expose improper behavior.
They try to control the message that gets out—publicize good news and try to suppress or put a good spin on negative news.

arrange work schedules to get press coverage for the news and good visuals. Must do something bold or colorful to get on the news.

Congress does not get the press that the president does. There are too many for all of them to be covered.

Hard to get coverage unless you are one of the party leaders.

C-Span has given more exposure and name recognition to senators and congressmen.

People more easily understand what the president is doing than what Alan Greenspan is doing or the chairmen of some committee.

Press secretary and the entire communication apparatus indicates how important the media is to the president.

Provide press releases, leak information etc.

President can hold news conferences or broadcast speeches.

You have Pack Journalism - different reporters develop the same kind or story, with the same information just written in different words. The different networks air the same kind of stories on the same issues.

In newspapers - reliance on wire services results in the similarity in stories in different papers across the country.

On the network news - the national press corps often gets its information from the same sources.

The media and political campaigns:

1. Advertising provides information to the public about candidates. Ads focus more on policy positions and candidates qualifications than news reports.

   the media tends to focus on who ahead and who is behind in the polls than focusing on policy positions.

   Polls are easier for many people to understand.

2. Newspapers endorse candidates.
3. Televised Debates - generally reinforce someone’s opinions or persuades uncommitted voters to make a decision and vote.

Most people tend to believe that the candidate they support won the debate.