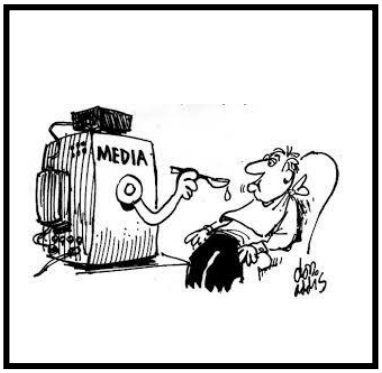
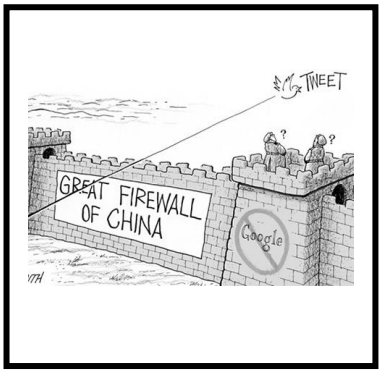
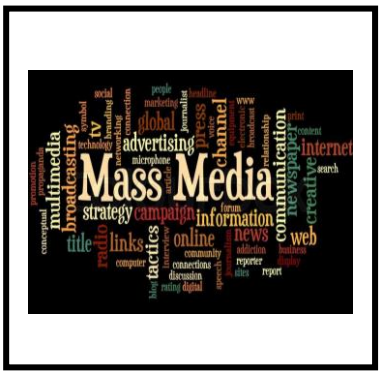
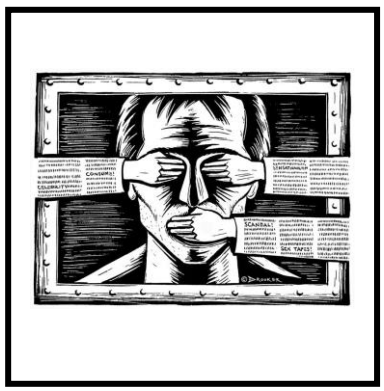
Media & Censorship

Tampines Meridian Junior College
JC1 General Paper
2023









An Overview .

Unit Title: Mass Media & Censorship		
Inquiry Questions: 1. Are traditional forms of media still relevant today? (TPJC, JC2SA2, 2015) 2. Would you agree that the media hold too much power in the world today? (CJC Prelim, 2012) 3. To what extent has social media really empowered people? (NJC Prelim, 2013) 4. Is regulation of the press desirable? (GCE 2017) 5. How far should a state have the right to censor the media? (MJCJC1PE11Q5)		
Unit Strand: Mass Media and its Evolving Landscape	**Unit Strand:** Mass Media, and its Impact on Behaviour and Society	**Unit Strand:** Mass Media and its Regulation
Conceptual lens: Change and Continuity	**Conceptual lens:** Values and Identity, Power	**Conceptual lens:** Power and Conflict
Concept: Change Convergence Diversity Technology	**Concept:** Power of influence Activism Conflict of Interests Legitimacy	**Concept:** Censorship Propaganda Governance Corporate responsibility
Topic: Functions of the media Evolving landscape of mass media due to technological advancements	**Topic:** Impacts of social media (positive & negative) Social Norms Social Polarisation Increasing power and influence of media corporation	**Topic:** Democratisation of information, consumption and content creation Responsible engagement with the media
Possible Generalisation(s):	**Possible Generalisation(s):**	**Possible Generalisation(s):**

Inquiry Questions:
1. Are traditional forms of media still relevant today? (TPJC, JC2SA2, 2015)
2. Would you agree that the media hold too much power in the world today? (CJC Prelim, 2012)

At the end of this section, students will be able to:
- ✓ Evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the media / functions the media play in society.
- ✓ Explain why the media may shape rather than reflect what people think, believe and do.
- ✓ Evaluate the impact of technology on traditional forms of media (TV, newspapers, radio, books, films)
- ✓ Explain how the changing forms of media (i.e. social media) have transformed the ways information is created, accessed and used.
- ✓ Evaluate the impacts of new media on individuals, societies and the world at large.

• What is Mass Media? •

Reading Set 1

Mass communication is characterised by the transmission of complex messages to large and diverse audiences, using sophisticated technologies. The mass media refers to the institutions that provide such messages: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film, multimedia websites and social networking platforms.

While traditional media tends to feature one-way flow of information from the media entity to the public, concentrating power and influence in the hands of a few, the emergence of new media as a two-way, interactive medium with user-generated content has led to a shift in power dynamics towards the consumer.

"Whoever controls the media, controls the mind."

- Jim Morrison

Traditional Media	New Media
Newspapers, magazines, radio and television	Online newspapers, blogs, wikis and social media

The rapid adoption of new media today has led to changes in the way people consume information, as well as how organisations generate content. In order to remain relevant, many traditional media outlets have integrated a portfolio of new media channels to engage their users, with some choosing to go completely online.

Regardless of its form, the mass media continues to play a significant role in modern society, disseminating information, forming attitudes, and motivating behaviour. The media has the power to present all the reports regarding a specific event, which is the main source of information for millions of people from around the world. The mass media, where it was once a separate and distinct channel of propaganda, is now an active and integrated influence within our everyday lives.

Functions of the Media

The media not only reflects societal concerns, as a mirror of society, but can take on multiple roles, sometimes simultaneously. Below is a list of its other functions.

1. **Inform:** To transmit or communicate a message or an idea. Information provided by mass media can be opinionated, objective, subjective, primary and secondary. This is most evident in public service announcements by the government, commercials, advertising etc.
2. **Educate:** To teach, make aware or extol certain areas of studies, knowledge or values and beliefs. This is most pronounced in media like documentaries, interviews, feature stories etc.
3. **Entertain:** To amuse audiences and provide an avenue for enjoyment and relaxation. There is an increasingly larger portion of media dedicated to this, thanks to on-demand platforms.
4. **Watchdog:** Known as the 4th estate, to act as a check and balance against the government and also a feedback channel from the people to the government.
5. **Forum for public debate:** Applicable largely to social media, to act as an avenue for people to discuss issues almost without limitation.

The Evolving Media Landscape

It used to be that publishing was focused on owning and controlling content. Print publications would maintain a large staff and license a certain amount of output from contributors. Broadcasters would produce or procure programming and so on. However, with the arrival of new media, traditional old school media outlets like TV, radio and print had to expand to include digital extensions in order to keep some of their audience engaged. In addition, traditional reports and news personalities are increasingly being replaced by influencers, regular people or subject matter experts.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In this digital age of mobile and social distribution, we are witnessing dramatic changes in the media landscape, especially with massive user-generated content and changing content consumption patterns. With the rise of powerful new media technology, is there still a place for traditional media, such as radio and newspapers? Read the next few articles to find out more.

⇨ Concepts: Change, Traditional Media, New Media

Article 1: What Is Media In The Digital Age?

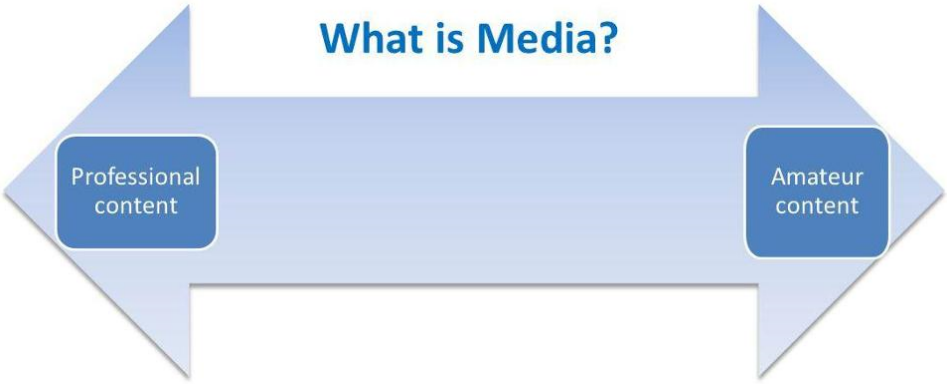
By Nelson Granados I 3 Oct 2016 I Forbes

The role of traditional media has changed dramatically in the age of the internet-driven, 24-hour news cycle and the proliferation of social media. Today, the term "media" is used and abused, and it can mean different things to different people. To paint a picture of the new media landscape, I talked to my colleague at Pepperdine Graziadio Business School, Melva Benoit, executive professor of digital media and entertainment. Benoit has over two decades of television and media experience as a research executive at FOX Broadcasting, NBCU, MTV Networks, Disney/ABC TV Networks and Turner Broadcasting.

Benoit starts with her own view of the term's evolution: "While earning my communications degree, I was taught that media is communicating via television, print, and radio. The idea or content could be in the form of video, print, or audio and it could be fiction or non-fiction. It could be professionally produced or non-professional (think public access). I think that definition still applies to the term media in the digital age, but it has been expanded to include online and social media."

Two key developments are:
1. The internet enables publication of massive user-generated content, and
2. Social media enables one-to-one communication, as opposed to the one-to-many communication structure of traditional media.

(Media as) The Message -



The internet has opened the possibility for all creative content to be published, even the most casual and amateurish. Of all the digital content out there, what constitutes media? Some say it's all the content that's published, others argue it's only the content that has a certain level of artistic quality or viewership.

Media can be the message itself, especially for those who create and own rights to content. In the continuum of professionally produced content at one extreme, and user-generated, amateur content at the other extreme, what constitutes media?

Benoit reacts: "Content is king. All content is media, whether it is of great quality or not. The information on your website, a show on Netflix, comments in your Facebook feed, or a video of your kid on YouTube are content and can

be monetized. If you get enough traffic on your website, then you can put ads on it. If you get enough views of your video of your kid on YouTube, they send you a cheque."

Others industry executives who I talked to are stricter in their definition of media as creative content, based on the degree to which the content can be monetized. They draw the line at a certain level of artistic creativity, viewership, or revenue potential. But even under this perspective, professional production using top artists is no longer the sole guarantee of success. Rather, if media is to be held to a standard, consumers increasingly play a key role because viewership in the form of clicks, streams, and downloads has the biggest leverage towards monetization. A catchy viral, amateur video may get more viewers than a professionally produced video.

(Media as) The Medium - Advertising media

For those who want to use creative content to promote a product, media is the set of channels where the ad or promotional content is placed. It could be a movie, TV, radio, or any web page with online ad space.

Benoit reflects, “As advertising evolves creatively, the lines between content and advertising are often being blurred. For example, it is not always clear that the carefully placed messages and products in a television show are an ad. Procter and Gamble has a YouTube channel to promote its brand. I would argue that advertising is in itself a form of media.”

(Media as) The Messenger - The news media

People often use "the media" to refer to those who write or publish news or other non-fiction. An example is when Donald Trump attacks "the media" for being biased. But does "the media" also refer to news in social networks not written by a professional journalist? Does any comment on social media classify as media?

Benoit says: “When people say ‘the media’, they are talking about news outlets, but the impact that social media has had on news media is fascinating. The Associated Press was once the source for breaking news; when something happened in the world, AP distributed the story over the wire to gain immediate attention. Now, when something happens, more often than not we learn about it on social media.

The New Media landscape

It turns out that media can be the message, the medium, or the messenger; and to complicate things, in this digital age, the lines between them are becoming very blurry. News feeds like Yahoo News contain sponsored stories that look like news. Ad placements in movies are common practice. What used to be a clear delineation between creative content, advertising, and non-fiction is being challenged by new media such as short-form content, which could have elements of all three. And different forms of media in the physical world, like text, movies, music, and games, can be merged in the digital space to create a multi-media consumer experience (think World of Warcraft).

The media landscape is getting more complex for industry executives who are trying to make strategic decisions and for consumers who are deluged with new forms of media and consumption. Trying to define media in the digital space is like shooting at a moving target because it is evolving so rapidly. Hopefully this reflection sheds a light on what media is today, although it will likely be different tomorrow.

⇨ Concepts: Change, Accountability, Legitimacy, Conflict of Interest, Filter Bubble

Article 2: Understanding Media and Culture: Convergence

University of Minnesota Open Publishing

It's important to keep in mind that the implementation of new technologies doesn't mean that the old ones simply vanish into dusty museums. Today's media consumers still watch television, listen to radio, read newspapers, and become immersed in movies. The difference is that it's now possible to do all those things through one device—be it a personal computer or a smartphone—and through the Internet. Such actions are enabled by *media convergence*, the process by which previously distinct technologies come to share tasks and resources. A handphone that also takes pictures and video is an example of the convergence of digital photography, digital video, and cellular telephone technologies.

Kinds of Convergence

But convergence isn't just limited to technology. Media theorist Henry Jenkins argues that convergence isn't an end result, but instead a process that changes how media is both consumed and produced. Jenkins breaks convergence down into five categories:

Economic convergence occurs when a company controls several products or services within the same industry. For example, in the entertainment industry a single company may have interests across many kinds of media. For example, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation is involved in book publishing (HarperCollins), newspapers (New York Post, The Wall Street Journal), sports (Colorado Rockies), broadcast television (Fox), cable television (FX, National Geographic Channel), film (20th Century Fox), Internet (MySpace), and many other media.

Organic convergence is what happens when someone is watching a television show online while exchanging text messages with a friend and also listening to music in the background—the "natural" outcome of a diverse media world.

Cultural convergence has several aspects. Stories flowing across several kinds of media platforms is one component—for example, novels that become television series (True Blood); radio dramas that become comic strips (The Shadow); even amusement park rides that become film franchises (Pirates of the Caribbean). The character Harry Potter exists in books, films, toys, and amusement park rides. Another aspect of cultural convergence is participatory culture—that is, the way media consumers are able to annotate, comment on, remix, and otherwise influence culture in unprecedented ways. The video-sharing website YouTube is a prime example of participatory culture. YouTube gives anyone with a video camera and an Internet connection the opportunity to communicate with people around the world and create and shape cultural trends.

Global convergence is the process of geographically distant cultures influencing one another despite the distance that physically separates them. Nigeria's cinema industry, nicknamed Nollywood, takes its cues from India's Bollywood, which is in turn inspired by Hollywood in the United States. Successful American horror movies The Ring and The Grudge are remakes of Japanese hits. While the advantage of global convergence is access to a wealth of cultural influence; its downside, some critics posit, is the threat of cultural imperialism, defined by Herbert Schiller as the way developing countries are "attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system (White, 2001)." Cultural imperialism can be a formal policy or can happen more subtly, as with the spread of outside influence through television, movies, and other cultural projects.

Technological convergence is the merging of technologies such as the ability to watch TV shows online on sites like Hulu or to play video games on mobile phones like the Apple iPhone. When more and more different kinds of media are transformed into digital content, as Jenkins notes, "we expand the potential relationships between them and enable them to flow across platforms (Jenkins, 2001)."

Effects of Convergence

Jenkins's concept of organic convergence is perhaps the most telling. To many people, especially those who grew up in a world dominated by so-called old media, there is nothing organic about today's media-dominated world. As a New York Times editorial recently opined, "Few objects on the planet are farther removed from nature—less, say, like a rock or an insect—than a glass and stainless-steel smartphone (New York Times, 2010)." But modern American culture is plugged in as never before, and today's high school students have never known a world where the Internet didn't exist. Such a cultural sea change causes a significant generation gap between those who grew up with new media and those who didn't.

It's still difficult to predict how media convergence and immersion are affecting culture, society, and individual brains. In his 2005 book Everything Bad Is Good for You, Steven Johnson argues that today's television and video games are mentally stimulating, in that they pose a cognitive challenge and invite active engagement and problem solving. A 2010 book by Nicholas Carr, The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains is more pessimistic. Carr worries that the vast array of interlinked information available through the Internet is eroding attention spans and making contemporary minds distracted and less capable of deep, thoughtful engagement with complex ideas and arguments, citing neuroscience

studies showing that when people try to do two things at once, they give less attention to each and perform the tasks less carefully. In other words, multitasking makes us do a greater number of things poorly. Whatever the ultimate cognitive, social, or technological results, convergence is changing the way we relate to media today.

Video Killed the Radio Star: Convergence Kills Off Obsolete Technology—or Does It?
When was the last time you used a rotary phone? How about a street-side pay phone? Or a library's card catalog? When you need brief, factual information, when was the last time you reached for a volume of Encyclopedia Britannica? You may not even know what these are. All of these habits, formerly common parts of daily life, have been rendered essentially obsolete through the progression of convergence.

But convergence hasn't erased old technologies; instead, it may have just altered the way we use them. Take cassette tapes and Polaroid film, for example. Influential musician Thurston Moore of the band Sonic Youth recently claimed that he only listens to music on cassette. Polaroid Corporation, creators of the once-popular instant-film cameras, was driven out of business by digital photography in 2008, only to be revived 2 years later—with pop star Lady Gaga as the brand's creative director. Several Apple iPhone apps allow users to apply effects to photos to make them look more like a Polaroid photo.

Cassettes, Polaroid cameras, and other seemingly obsolete technologies have been able to thrive—albeit in niche markets—both despite and because of Internet culture. Instead of being slick and digitized, cassette tapes and Polaroid photos are physical objects that are made more accessible and more human, according to enthusiasts, because of their flaws. The distinctive Polaroid look—caused by uneven color saturation, underdevelopment or overdevelopment, or just daily atmospheric effects on the developing photograph—is emphatically analog. In an age of high resolution, portable printers, and camera phones, the Polaroid's appeal to some has something to do with ideas of nostalgia and authenticity. Convergence has transformed who uses these media and for what purposes, but it hasn't eliminated these media.

Application #1: Functions of the Media

Using information from your own research as well as the articles you have read above, fill in the following tables.

Table 1

Functions of the Media	Specific Examples to illustrate the media performing this function
Inform	
Educate	
Entertain	
Act as a political watchdog – the media serving as the fourth estate	
Providing a forum for public debate	

Table 2

Understanding Media and Culture: Convergence	Examples of the Effects of Convergence and Examples (from the article and in your own life)
Economic	
Organic	
Cultural	
Global	
Technological	

• Criticisms of the Mass Media •

Reading Set 2

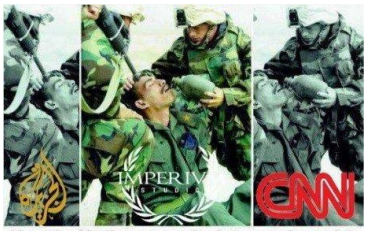
Given the tremendous influence mass media has on our lives, as well as the political, economic and social implications such influence carries, concerns from various parties have been raised regarding the following issues:

Misinformation, Disinformation & Fake News

Perhaps due to the rush to be the first to report new details or the lack of verification, inaccuracies can often be found in new media. Such misinformation is spread, regardless of whether there is intent to mislead. Disinformation on the other hand is deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts. Similarly, fake news is news that is intentionally crafted, and is often totally fabricated information that mimics the form of mainstream news. All this has been aggravated by the rise of social media channels which spread such news further and faster.

Sensationalism

There is the tendency for the press (especially tabloids) to play up and dwell on stories that are sensational - murders, car crashes, kidnappings, sex scandals and the like - to capture more eyeballs. This may lead to less coverage of important issues that affect our lives, for instance those on the environment, government and education.



How the Media can manipulate our viewpoint

Media Bias

This refers to the bias or perceived bias of journalists and news producers within the mass media in the selection of events and stories that are reported and how they are covered. This can emerge in the form of racial or gender bias in the media, or simply the representation of majority views while the minorities are under-reported.

Distortion of Social and Cultural Norms

The constant exposure to media outlets trumpeting similar perspectives can lead to a distortion of reality, where readers may overestimate the severity of certain issues or mistake exceptions for the norm. A classic example of this would be the traditional perception of beauty influenced by the pervasive spread of slim, airbrushed models.

The media can educate the masses and create awareness about important social issues and current events. Yet, in recent years, trust in the mainstream media has been eroding. The following article discusses the reasons why media credibility has dipped globally. As you read on, consider to what extent the media still shapes or reflects what people think, believe and do.

⇨ Concepts: Regulation, Fake news, Propaganda, Echo Chamber, Confirmation bias, Polarisation

Article 3: Why don't we trust the news and what to do about it?

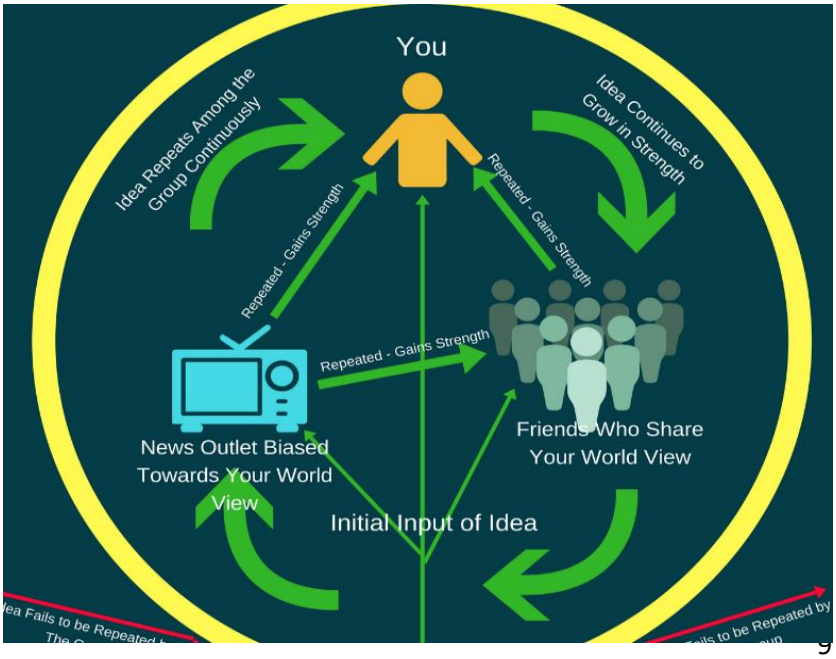
By Jeanmiguel Uva I February 2018 I The London School of Economics and Political Science

The latest **Edelman Trust Barometer** report, presented at the LSE by its UK CEO Ed Williams, highlights the increasing distrust in media as an institution, growing **polarisation** and the technological trends that surround the so-called phenomenon of fake news.

What's going on? Does it matter?

Fake news is anything but a modern phenomenon. What is different this time around is the audience and scope, aided by global social media platforms. The real root of the problem is how this has arisen from a growing cynicism with media conglomerates. The Edelman Trust Barometer, a 33,000-person-survey conducted in 28 countries, shows that 59% of people say it is becoming harder to tell if a piece of news was produced by a respected media organisation. This is worrisome for those who believe in liberal democracies, where political participation is rooted not only in being informed but having truthful knowledge of public affairs. It highlights that the media is losing its central role in society and citizens are not doing enough to protect themselves from distortive content.

Another key insight revealed how news outlets and the individuals who run their operations have lost touch with the average person. This has resulted in a market of less engaged citizens. In the UK, for example, Edelman reports the rise of a 'nation of news skimmers' where people's attention span on news items has been decreasing, amidst a saturated market of news and increasing distrust.



Social media and technology has also enabled anti-democratic practices: there has been increasing segmentation of smaller communities, or **echo chambers** (see picture to the right), **where individuals use their social media mediums to mainly interact with like-minded people.**

Implications

What we are seeing is **a rise in polarisation of the sources of news-consumption**.

Fake news, in tune with the realities of social media, is clearly not a localised phenomenon – meaning its political implications are global.

Dissemination of fake news is likely to cause polarisation in society, unfair distrust in institutions and the erosion of liberal democracy—all, namely, desirable goods. To stop fake news, we must look at trust afforded to the media, alongside soft and hard regulatory solutions.

At the end of the day, news consumption is not necessarily top-down, and consumers can also demand higher standards.

Expecting consumers to be more aware and critical of the news they consume is important when dealing with the spread of fake news. Increasingly, our focus should be on future generations: teaching younger citizens to be probing about what is presented to them without question or counterbalance.

The following article discusses the unprecedented phenomenon of media consolidation in recent years. As you read on, consider to what extent what people think, believe and do are in the hands of a powerful few who have majority control of the world's mass media.

⇨ Concepts: Government Oversight, the 4th Estate, Informed Citizenry

Article 4: The Unprecedented Consolidation of the Modern Media Industry has severe consequences

By Helen Johnson I Miscellany News I 29 April 2021

In 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned against the "acquisition of unwarranted influence" and the "disastrous rise of misplaced power." In fact, he alluded to how we might avoid such a dangerous threat: "Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together." Eisenhower was right to emphasize the importance of an "alert and knowledgeable citizenry." Without this key aspect of democracy, the people are unable to hold their government accountable or influence its decision-making—including, and perhaps especially, decision-making regarding war. In the United States, our free press is entrusted with keeping us "alert and knowledgeable." The freedom of the press is a pillar of our democracy.

The press is meant to serve as a check against government control over the marketplace of ideas and dissemination of information, to ensure that the public gets fairly neutral reporting and a truthful account of the news regardless of who may be involved. The United States was founded on the principle of government by consent of the governed; a free press that keeps the citizenry informed of the happenings in government is what allows the "governed" to give their consent and make informed decisions when voting for elected officials. Hence, for debate on public issues to be uninhibited and the marketplace of political ideas to be free, the logical conclusion is the more the better—more newspapers, more television stations, more editors, more writers and more independent, local media owners. This ensures that as many people's voices as possible are heard, and that those in charge of media outlets are more likely to be locally based and familiar with their areas and communities. However, the consolidation of media conglomerates over recent history has moved us in the opposite direction.

In 1983 there were 50 dominant media corporations. Today there are five. These five conglomerates own about 90 percent of the media in the United States, including newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios and radio and television stations. As of 2020, the five media giants are AT&T (Time Warner, CNN, HBO), Comcast (NBC Universal, Telemundo, Universal Pictures), Disney (ABC, ESPN, Pixar, Marvel Studios), News Corp (Fox News, Wall Street Journal, New York Post) and ViacomCBS (CBS, Paramount Pictures). An extreme lack of regulation regarding media companies has resulted in the media giants managing to secure major holdings in all forms of media, including newspapers, radio and television stations and movie studios. In his book "The New Media Monopoly," Ben Bagdikian writes that "[t]his gives each of the five corporations and their leaders more communications power than was exercised by any despot or dictatorship in history." The benefits of consolidation for company owners and shareholders are clear: the fewer the owners, the larger each one's share of the billion-dollar media industry. Additionally, the larger the media giants grow, the more impossible it is for smaller, independent outlets to stay afloat.

No analysis of the concentration of media power and the corporations that control today's messaging would be complete without a close look at big tech and the internet. The rise of the internet has also led to the tech giants accumulating an obscene amount of power over *which* media we consume. Unlike the conglomerates like AT&T, Comcast, Disney, etc. (and the news outlets they control), tech companies don't produce the content we see – they control what we view. The market power of platforms like Google and Facebook is obscene: Facebook and Google combined account for over 70 percent of users directed to the websites of major news publishers. On its own this may seem trivial, but the rise of fake news, intense polarization and increased acceptance of conspiracy theories imply

otherwise. The power held by huge tech giants only serves to magnify the impact that media conglomerates have over messaging.

The implications of the extreme consolidation of media power are extensive. First, the largest source of political money comes from corporations, and the media conglomerates are some of the largest corporations in the world. These billions upon billions equal more influence in political discourse and elections. Money determines the winning issues and candidates in American politics, so the larger the corporation, the stronger the influence. But no other industry is as directly linked to voting patterns as the media industry. Their product *is* the messaging that dictates the issues and candidates that dominate the national arena. What this means is that not only do the media giants contribute money to campaigns, they also cover them. They report, record, narrate, document and broadcast them. Consequently, the political power of media conglomerates grows exponentially with their size and wealth; the larger the corporation, the greater its political influence through both monetary power *and* messaging. The greater the political power of the media giants, the more easily they lobby and influence the government to slash regulations, grant antitrust approvals and pass laws that increase their corporate domination.

Media giants have the power to not only shape public debate, ensure the passage of favorable legislation and bend elected officials to their will, but also to bolster entire ideologies. One must look no further than Fox News. The American cable news television channel was spawned by Australian-American Rupert Murdoch, i.e. media mogul and creator of the empire that includes News Corp and Fox Corporation. Fox News was launched on Oct. 7, 1996, as a conservative news network and is now the dominant cable news network in the United States. According to a study published in The Quarterly Journal of Economics, there was a significant effect of the introduction of Fox News on the vote share in Presidential elections between 1996 and 2000, and Republicans gained 0.4 to 0.7 percentage points in the towns that broadcast Fox News. Fox News exemplifies the dramatic effect the news media has on the electorate and what happens when one media mogul with a political agenda builds an empire that becomes one of the largest media corporations in the world.

With the consolidation of media power, the pool of people that control the vast majority of the industry is ever shrinking. The smaller the pool that controls the news media, the narrower the information reported. These narrowed choices will themselves be biased by corporate interests as they use their messaging power to enhance the social and economic values that are favorable to the corporate world. Additionally, media giants are not only global corporations themselves, but are invested in other million- and billion-dollar industries. They are not stand-alone companies with isolated interests. Media conglomerates make money off of advertising, which holds influence over reporting and broadcasting. Beyond even this, however, the media giants have physical and financial ties to other industries. Interlocking directorates, revolving doors of personnel and financial stakes and holdings connect the corporate media to the state, the Pentagon, defense and arms manufacturers and the oil industry. Our free press, which assures "government by consent of the governed," is in bed with the captains of industry and profiteers of war.

The following article focuses specifically on advertising in the media. As you read on, consider to what extent the media shapes or reflects what people think, believe and do.

⇨ Concepts: Diversity, Consumerism, Self-gratification, Sexual Objectification

Article 5: The Dogma of Advertising and Consumerism

By Ziad Abu-Saud | Jan 25th 2013 | Huffington Post (Edited to include recent examples)

It's not clear how many advertisements we are exposed to every day. Taking into account the average hours of TV viewing, radio listening, newspapers/magazine reading, internet surfing, public street and transport use; common estimates range from around 250 per day on the conservative side, to 3000 and above.

As well as showing us products, adverts also present us with values, ideals and social standards. They draw upon major personal themes such as beauty, happiness, love, companionship, sex, and self-image, in a positive but unrealistic light to promote their product. As a consequence, these adverts are potentially shaping us towards mental states, which are in fact, quite inhibiting, insecure, and unhealthy.

How Advertisers And Influencers Are Buying And Selling Your Insecurities On Instagram

A common psychological principle used by advertisers is that repetition constitutes **mental conditioning**. Studies show that the more something is repeated to you, the more you will believe it. So whether it's "I'm lovin' it" or "Have a break, have a `Kit-Kat", the mere repetition of these messages is able to motivate potential buyers and construct certain ideas in their minds with added cognitive and emotional associations. A company's main purpose is to sell a product and make money, even if that means falsely creating insecurities in people and offering their product as a solution.

The values being presented through major advertising come in all shapes and sizes. Constant images of happy, smiling, healthy people with buyable products both insists on a **materialistic** existence, and promotes the idea that if you want fulfilment, you need to buy things. As a result, our worth is valued more and more by what we own as opposed to what we do, or who we are. **Self-gratification** is also excessively promoted by the advertising culture, encouraging a focus on our own immediate desires as opposed to our relations with others.

Sexualization and Body Dissatisfaction

An increasingly concerning issue regarding images in advertising is the consistent connection between women, sex, desire, beauty, thinness, and happiness. Gender clichés remain painfully present in the advertising realm. Scantily clad and unrealistically perfect female forms still flit across television and computer screens, billboards and the glossy pages of magazines today.

The American Psychological Association defines 'sexualization' as: "when a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics." **Sexual objectification** shares a similar definition, and is theoretically accentuated in a consumer-advertising context, where, not only is the individual sexually objectified in the way the body is presented, but also in the fact that they are associated with a purchasable object. Further studies have confirmed that images which sexually objectify women have led to them being seen as "less human", lacking "mind" and morality, and has caused men to grow indifferent to women's experience of pain.

4 Ways Businesses Use Targeted Advertising to Take Advantage of Female Insecurities

The phenomenon of '**body dissatisfaction'** is defined as the perceived difference between one's own body image and the ideal body image established and maintained by commercial media. Countless psychological studies show that this 'dissatisfaction' is a precursor to both eating disorders and psychological disorders such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, shame, and even self-disgust.

It has been argued that the female body-type typically portrayed in adverts is genetically true to some 5% of the female population, while photoshopped images and the portrayal of eternal youth further distances the ideal into an ever-higher fantasy. The media tends to portray beauty as extreme thinness, which is often unattainable. For example, Victoria's Secret is famous for having supermodels on their ads and in their annual fashion show. The brand has received criticism for the "ideal" body image it portrays. One of their most criticised campaigns was "The Perfect Body" campaign, which featured skinny models. Worryingly, these insecurities are worsened by evidence showing that men who are exposed to "media-perfect" beautiful women tend to view real life average females as significantly less attractive.

Critically, this beauty standard is imposed on children, especially young girls. As one psychologist puts it: "the current aesthetic model for women, characterised by skinniness, is **internalised** early on, before the age of 10, and remains throughout adolescence." Since children are below the age of responsible choice, freedom is entirely undercut, directing them to a series of potentially life long social and personal disorders and harms. Arguably, the media has shaped how children view body image.

In conclusion, advertisers are proving incredibly successful at shaping these associations for the sake of commercial and financial interests. While they may not always anticipate the negative effects, there's more than enough evidence to suggest that **consumer culture**, along with its accompanying adverts, promotes far more social problems and insecurities than it does freedoms.

Application #2: Can You Trust the Press?

Scan the QR code on the right to watch the video "Can you trust the press?" (PragerU). Based on this video and the articles that you have read, explain the reasons below for why there has been a decline in trust in the media.

Reasons people do not trust the media			
Influence of social media	**Bias in the news**	**Advertising & Consumerism**	**Other factors**

• Social Media Revolution•

Reading Set 3

The media landscape is shifting and will continue to shift at unprecedented speed. Initially consisting almost exclusively of user-generated content, social media now largely comprises of professionally generated content from major brand manufacturers and mass media conglomerates. In fact, the way in which social media is now thoroughly enmeshed in all mass media has functioned more to enhance mass media and perpetuate its supremacy rather than disrupt it. It has reshaped the power relationships between platform owners and users, not only in terms of who may steer information but also who controls the vast amount of user data that rushes through the combined platforms every day. However, there is also a darker side to social media. As you read on, consider the impacts of social media in your society: whether it **empowers** or **endangers**.

⇨ Concepts: Change, Ideology, Power, Freedom of Speech, Activism, Reform

Article 6: Major Ways Social Media Shaped the World for the Better

1. The Rise of User-Generated News For generations, the only way one would hear about an event would be from the news media. Now that social media sites let people from all over the world share their story through videos and images, it has changed the way people get their news and think about news in general. The situation has changed so much that back in 2013, the Chicago Tribune laid off their full-time photographers, choosing to rely solely on freelancers and shots submitted by the public via social media.

2. Platform for Activism: a) Political Reform

Arab Spring and the Uprisings in the Middle East
The 2011 "Arab Spring" uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, have proven that social media can be used to transform society and politics on a global scale. These uprisings used social media to organize protests, highlight injustice and government crackdowns, and sway public opinion at home and abroad.

Hong Kong Protests
Hong Kong's protests started in June 2019 against plans to allow extradition to mainland China. Critics feared this could undermine judicial independence and endanger dissidents. Social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WeChat, Weibo etc. were used recognition and solidarity, and as a platform for global responses.

Whistle Blowing on Corruption
China uses social media to encourage public tip-offs about corrupt or for the organization and mobilization of protesters, censorship of information, international unprofessional official practices. Thousands of citizens have used an app on WeChat and Weibo which enables them to report officials' "undesirable work styles" such as bureaucracy and extravagance to the city's discipline watchdog.

b) Social & Cultural Reform

#MeToo

The movement began on social media after a call to action by the actor Alyssa Milano, with an exposé detailing countless allegations of sexual harassment against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. Within days, millions of women – and some men – used Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disclose the harassment and abuse they have faced in their own lives, and the hashtag #MeToo became a rallying cry against sexual assault and harassment.

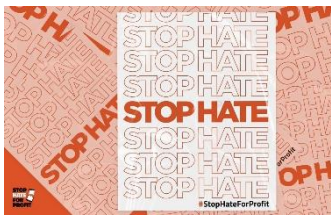
Closer to home, a victim of voyeurism, National University of Singapore (NUS) undergraduate Monica Baey took to social media to vent her frustration after her perpetrator was given a conditional warning by the police. Her Instagram posts quickly went viral and sparked an online debate over NUS' handling of the case. This prompted a landmark change in NUS's policy on voyeurism, with NUS committing to a review of its disciplinary framework and victim support system.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

This is an international activist movement, originating in the African American community in the United States, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards Black people. BLM regularly holds protests, speaking out against police killings of Black people and broader issues such as racial profiling, police brutality, and racial inequality in the United States criminal justice system.

#StopAsianHate is calling for mainstream news to cover growing instances of racist and often violent attacks against Asians. In the US, there has been a 1,900 per cent increase in violence against the ESEA (East and South East Asian) community since January 2020. The hashtag is shining a spotlight on an illness that, unlike the virus, kills discriminatorily and preys on the vulnerable – a sickness that knows no borders. Incidents of hate crimes against ESEA in the UK have risen by 21 per cent.

#STOP ASIAN HATE



Celebrities ranging from Kim Kardashian West to Mark Ruffalo "froze" their Instagram accounts for 24 hours in September 2020, to protest hate speech and misinformation being spread on Facebook, Instagram's parent company. The day-long freeze, during which the celebrities ceased to share photos or posts on either platform, was organized by Stop Hate for Profit, a coalition of nine civil rights groups that are asking Facebook to make policy changes to address online harassment and conspiracy theories that spread hate on the

3. Improving Living Conditions in Poorer Countries Yemen's humanitarian crisis is routinely categorized as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Over the last five years, from when the Yemeni Civil War launched the emergency, children have been hit the hardest. Tens of thousands of children have died, not only from the conflict but also due to preventable diseases and malnutrition. UNICEF estimates that about 80% of Yemen's population is in desperate need of humanitarian aid. Because children are among the most affected by the crisis, four out of every five children (about 12.3 million) require help. TikTok activism, spearheaded by millennials and Gen Z, has been instrumental in bringing awareness to this pressing issue. They've cleverly utilized the apps' algorithms to spread the word of issues that are important to them, one of which is the crisis in Yemen. Activism like this is further supported by larger non-profit organizations like The Borgen Project that addresses poverty and hunger and works toward ending them.

4. Natural Disaster Responses For disaster governance – i.e. norms, practices and coordination between government and communities to reduce disaster risks and impacts – social media adds another channel for the flow of information. During emergencies, it speeds up news delivery and enhances joint efforts for immediate relief. After a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti in 2010, non-profit organisations used social media to mobilize rescue efforts and to support the community. This also saw the deployment of one of the most successful text-to-donate campaigns seen at the time. Additionally, Facebook included 'Safety Check' & 'Crisis Response' functions where users could find information about recent disasters and indicate their safety status, so that friends and family members can be updated on the safety of their loved ones.

5. Crowdfunding Crowdfunding can provide seed money for many projects that can benefit humanity. Donors provide funding to individuals, projects or companies based on philanthropic or civic motivations with no expectation of monetary or material return. Probably the biggest donation based crowdfunding platform in the world is US based gofundme.com. An equivalent in Asia is GIVE.asia, an online fundraising and donation collection platform focusing on convenience and simplicity. GIVE.asia allows crowdfunding campaigns for medical expenses, education, volunteering, emergencies, natural disasters and projects benefiting individuals and communities in need.

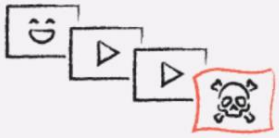
gofundme mightycause INDIEGOGO GIVE.ASIA PATREON seedinvest

Issues arising from the Social Media Revolution *Most of society use social platforms to communicate and stay informed. Despite the benefits we receive, there are some problems in this media ecosystem. Let's read about some of these problems in details in the articles after the info chart.*

Filter bubbles

Highly-personalized content feeds result in a lack of exposure to viewpoints that are outside a user's existing worldview.

Filter bubbles can cause people to develop an us-vs-them view of the world. The less familiar we are with others, the less empathy we have for them.



Algorithmic radicalization

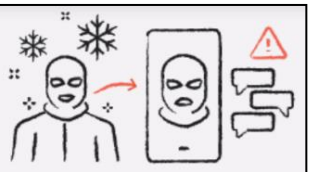
The hypothesis that recommendation engines can steer users towards increasingly extreme content on social platforms.

On platforms like TikTok which have fast feedback loops to train the algorithm, this can happen in a matter of hours.

Surveillance capitalism

The capture and monetization of personal data.

Browser fingerprinting is one example of this activity. When you visit certain news websites, 3rd party vendors scan your device and browser settings to track you online.



Context stripping

As stories are shared over social media channels, the most compelling, intuitive framing wins out. This digital "natural selection" strips layers of context away, warping how stories are perceived.

An old clip of a rocket attack is shared out of context during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Many assume it's a recent attack.

Slacktivism

Publicly supporting political or social causes through low effort social media updates or online petitions.

Symbolic gestures like profile picture flair can feel like activism, but ultimately don't affect change in the real world.

Fake news / Disinformation

Deliberately disseminating untrue information or publishing fake news.

Outlets will sometimes adopt the look and feel of credible news outlets without applying the same standards of quality.

Clickbait

A framing method that uses exaggerated language and omitted information to entice readers to click through or watch.

The quintessential "You won't believe what happened next!" headlines.

Deviancy amplification spiral

A phenomenon defined by increasing reports of violent or antisocial behavior which grows into a moral panic.

The "Knockout Game" and the "Tide Pod Challenge" are prototypical examples that captured headlines, despite few incidents actually occurring.

Social bots

Autonomous or human-run accounts on social media platforms that manipulate discussions and boost specific messages.

While these accounts may seem obvious or harmless, they alter the tone of online discourse and artificially boost the spread of messages.

Dogpiling

A high volume of messages and/or targeted harassment for an infraction or opinion that the group does not agree with.

Example: Man expresses dislike for pineapple on pizza on Instagram, and comes back online to 10,000 angry messages on his account.

Deplatforming

When individuals and communities are banned from social and publishing platforms.

Critics of deplatforming argue that rules are inconsistently enforced, and that bans drive conversations to 'the shadows' where communities become increasingly radicalized.

Rumor cascades

When a single social media post begins to spread in unbroken chains across a platform. This distribution pattern enables the viral spread of unvetted information.

On platforms like Twitter, a single spoof post can go viral and reach millions of people. This is how celebrity death rumors become trending topics.

⇨ Concepts: Slacktivism, Viral Hashtag, Activism, Change, Legitimacy

Article 7: 'Slacktivism': Legitimate Action or Just Lazy Liking?

By Llona Lodewijckx | 20th May 2020

Clicktivism
A combination of terms deriving from activism that is carried out through the Internet

A contraction of 'activism' and 'slacking', 'slacktivism' has become a widespread phenomenon that urges us to reflect on the nature of activism and participation. The United Nations defines slacktivism as when people "support a cause by performing simple measures" but are not necessarily "engaged or devoted to making a change." Other frequently used terms are 'clicktivism' or 'arm-chair activism'. Basically, slacktivism is a way to voice your opinion about a certain cause without taking to the streets or risking your neck. It's the viral hashtag you're retweeting. The pink ribbon on your shirt. The rainbow-coloured frame on your Facebook picture. The 'Save The Turtles'-petition you signed last week. Of course, we do those things with the best intentions. But is this a valid type of activism? Or is it just a way to appease our conscience without truly having to engage?

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

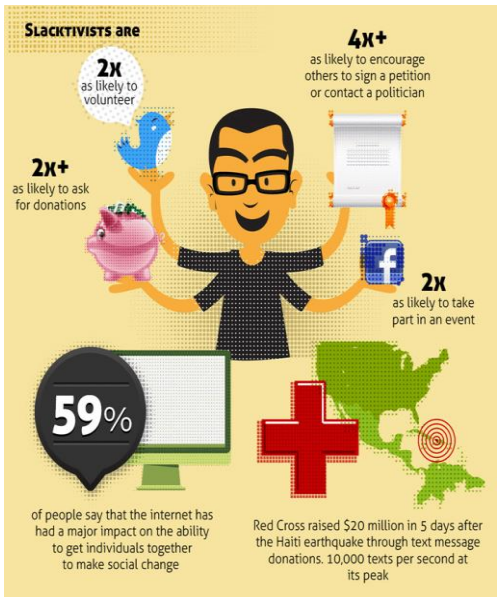
Generally, slacktivism has a questionable reputation. Critics argue that it doesn't lead to actual, foot-on-the-ground change, and that it oversimplifies complex global problems. Sharing a link or signing a petition is easy, and so is disengaging from the cause 10 seconds later. Is the realm of social media, where everything seems fleeting, the right place for activism? Many think not. We know that our Facebook like won't actually feed a hungry child. And that chronic diseases don't take into account how many viral hashtags condemn their existence. In the end, we still have to put our money where our mouth is.

But it isn't all bad. During these times of crisis, communities across the globe have shown exceptional resilience and solidarity. Across the world, people are offering each other help in doing groceries, babysitting, picking up medication or walking the dog. While volunteers in Brussels are distributing meals for health care workers, volunteers in Germany have set up a platform that facilitates person-to-person assistance. While these initiatives are more activism than slacktivism, they do show that helping out and getting involved doesn't always require an enormous effort.

And over the course of the pandemic, pure slacktivism has shown its value as well. Instagram has launched #StayHome and #IStayHomeFor stickers that people can use in their stories. This new feature has helped to highlight the importance of respecting the lockdown guidelines, especially for younger audiences. If a simple sticker on a social platform can make younger audiences realise the dangers of a deadly virus, beyond being a personal threat but critically having extended impacts to other family and friends, and simultaneously send a positive message to a key worker they care about, that is slacktivism at its best.

And that's not the only example we have of slacktivism gone exactly right. Let's zoom in on two of the most successful cases of the last few years. Born as slacktivism: ALS & #BLM. The ALS-challenge, urging people to empty a bucket of ice water over their heads or donate a sum to the cause, took the internet by storm in 2014. Everyone, from famous soccer players and actors to your neighbour's hairdresser's cousin was joining the ice bucket challenge. And in the end, the fad didn't only raise awareness about the disease, it also gathered thousands of dollars that could ultimately make a real-life difference.

Similarly, the #BlackLivesMatter-movement was born as a viral hashtag, but the uproar quickly catalysed into offline reality. People took to the streets for protests, and the topic soon dominated the national conversation in the US. After the death of George Floyd, the #BLM movement is more topical than ever and saw a spike in slacktivist initiatives of varying impacts. On #BlackOutTuesday, thousands of companies and individuals shared a black square on their social media feeds to show solidarity with the BLM-movement, which unintentionally drowned out resources and information in the hashtag algorithms. On the other hand, the viral hashtag #AmplifyMelanatedVoices aimed to put Black and coloured voices front and centre in the movement. Social media also played a vital role in raising awareness for petitions and sharing information. **It seems that this blend of the online realm with everyday reality is the most important precondition for slacktivism to make an impact.**



Slacktivism has a bad reputation but can actually be valuable. It can be an easy, shareable way for people to talk about a cause they are passionate about, or to get educated on new topics. After all, isn't every reasonable voice addressing an urgent topic inherently a good thing? Is limited action not always better than no action at all?

⇨ Concepts: Surveillance, Corporate responsibility, Personal Freedom, Democracy

Article 8: High Tech is Watching You

By John Laidler I Harvard Gazette I 4 March 2019

In her new book, "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism," Zuboff offers a disturbing picture of how Silicon Valley and other corporations are mining users' information to predict and shape their behavior. The Gazette recently interviewed Zuboff about her belief that surveillance capitalism, a term she coined in 2014, is undermining personal autonomy and eroding democracy — and the ways she says society can fight back.

GAZETTE: The digital revolution began with great promise. When did you start worrying that the tech giants driving it were becoming more interested in exploiting us than serving us?

ZUBOFF: The early indications were that the people framing that first generation of e-commerce were more preoccupied with tracking cookies and attracting eyeballs for advertising than they were in the historic opportunity they faced. By 2007, I understood that this was actually a new variant of capitalism that was taking hold of the digital milieu. The opportunities to align supply and demand around the needs of individuals were overtaken by a new economic logic that offered a fast track to monetization.

GAZETTE: What are some of the ways we might not realize that we are losing our autonomy to Facebook, Google, and others?

ZUBOFF: I define surveillance capitalism as the unilateral claiming of private human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. These data are then computed and packaged as prediction products and sold into behavioral futures markets — business customers with a commercial interest in knowing what we will do now, soon, and later. It was Google that first learned how to capture surplus behavioral data, more than what they needed for services, and used it to compute prediction products that they could sell to their business customers, in this case advertisers.

Right from the start at Google it was understood that users were unlikely to agree to this unilateral claiming of their experience and its translation into behavioral data. It was understood that these methods had to be undetectable. So from the start the logic reflected the social relations of the one-way mirror. They were able to see and to take — and to do this in a way that we could not contest because we had no way to know what was happening.

We rushed to the internet expecting empowerment, the democratization of knowledge, and help with real problems, but surveillance capitalism really was just too lucrative to resist. This economic logic has now spread beyond the tech companies to new surveillance–based ecosystems in virtually every economic sector, from insurance to automobiles to health, education, finance, to every product described as "smart" and every service described as "personalized." By now it's very difficult to participate effectively in society without interfacing with these same channels that are supply chains for surveillance capitalism's data flows. For example, ProPublica recently reported that breathing machines purchased by people with sleep apnea are secretly sending usage data to health insurers, where the information can be used to justify reduced insurance payments.

GAZETTE: Why have we failed even now to take notice of the effects of all this surveillance?

ZUBOFF: One big reason is that surveillance capitalism, invented by Google in 2001, benefitted from a couple of important historical windfalls. One is that it arose in the era of a neoliberal consensus around the superiority of self-regulating companies and markets. State-imposed regulation was considered a drag on free enterprise.

A second historical windfall is that surveillance capitalism was invented in 2001, the year of 9/11. Just hours after the World Trade Center towers were hit, the conversation in Washington changed from a concern about privacy to a preoccupation with "total information awareness." In this new environment, the intelligence agencies and other powerful forces in Washington and other Western governments were more disposed to incubate and nurture the surveillance capabilities coming out of the commercial sector.

A third reason is that these methodologies are designed to keep us ignorant. So the thought is that if these disturbing practices are the inevitable consequence of the new technologies, we probably just have to live with it. This is a dangerous category error.

A fourth explanation involves dependency and the foreclosure of alternatives. We now depend upon the internet just to participate effectively in our daily lives. Whether it's interfacing with the IRS or your health care provider, nearly everything we do now just to fulfill the barest requirements of social participation marches us through the same channels that are surveillance capitalism's supply chains.

GAZETTE: You warn that our very humanity and our ability to function as a democracy is in some ways at risk.

ZUBOFF: The competitive dynamics of surveillance capitalism have created some really powerful economic imperatives that are driving these firms to produce better and better behavioral-prediction products. Ultimately they've discovered that this requires not only amassing huge volumes of data, but actually intervening in our behavior. The shift is from monitoring to what the data scientists call "actuating." Surveillance capitalists now develop "economies of action," as they learn to tune, herd, and condition our behavior with subtle and subliminal cues, rewards, and punishments that shunt us toward their most profitable outcomes.

What is abrogated here is our right to the future tense, which is the essence of free will, the idea that I can project myself into the future and thus make it a meaningful aspect of my present. This is the essence of autonomy and human agency. Surveillance capitalism's "means of behavioral modification" at scale erodes democracy from within because, without autonomy in action and in thought, we have little capacity for the moral judgment and critical thinking necessary for a democratic society. Democracy is also eroded from without, as surveillance capitalism represents an unprecedented concentration of knowledge and the power that accrues to such knowledge. They know everything about us, but we know little about them. They predict our futures, but for the sake of others' gain. Their knowledge extends far beyond the compilation of the information we gave them. It's the knowledge that they have produced from that information that constitutes their competitive advantage, and they will never give that up. These knowledge asymmetries introduce wholly new axes of social inequality and injustice.

GAZETTE: So how do we change this dynamic?

ZUBOFF: There are three arenas that must be addressed if we are to end this age of surveillance capitalism, just as we once ended the Gilded Age. First, we need a sea change in public opinion. This begins with the power of naming. It means awakening to a sense of indignation and outrage. We say, "No." We say, "This is not OK."

Second, we need to muster the resources of our democratic institutions in the form of law and regulation. These include, but also move beyond, privacy and antitrust laws. We also need to develop new laws and regulatory institutions that specifically address the mechanisms and imperatives of surveillance capitalism.

A third arena relates to the opportunity for competitive solutions. Every survey of internet users has shown that once people become aware of surveillance capitalists' backstage practices, they reject them. That points to a disconnect between supply and demand: a market failure. So once again we see a historic opportunity for an alliance of companies to found an alternative ecosystem — one that returns us to the earlier promise of the digital age as an era of empowerment and the democratization of knowledge.

⇨ Concepts: Regulation, Power, Terrorism, Borderless, Internet subcultures, Propaganda

Article 9: Social Media – A Tool for Terrorism?

By Kajal Saxena I 9 September 2020 I The Security Distillery

With its ability to circumvent traditional media, social media enables its own access into the lives of billions of people around the world. The direct accessibility to these audiences and the ease of which their attention can be garnered by a few taps on a phone or computer, highlights the possible reach of terrorism propaganda and media. These effects can be felt on multiple levels of society and can serve to reach terrorists' objectives of disrupting and frustrating state responses, as well as creating serious fear among the global population. In 2013 and 2014 social media networks such as Twitter overtook internet forums as the preferred space for Jihadist propaganda. Jihadi groups are known to use mainstream media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to post their content and create sponsored accounts where they release news statements and videos.

The instantaneous nature of social media networks also allow for the immediate, almost real-time viewings of terrorist attacks and their aftermath, which can deliver maximum impact of fear. The 2013 Westgate Mall hostage crisis in Nairobi is an example of how the terrorist group Al-Shabaab used Twitter to narrate their attack while it was occurring and share an alternate perspective to challenge the accounts of those witnessing the terrorist attack from the outside. Al-Shabaab and its supporters were able to garner worldwide mainstream media attention, and broadcasted their attack through engagement on Twitter. Therefore, social media texts and images have become a strategic part of the terrorist attacks as well.

The effects of the borderless flow of terrorist propaganda is reflected in the number of Jihadist terrorist attacks in the Western world, like Canada, France, the US and the United Kingdom (UK). Social media has provided terrorist groups with the infrastructure to evolve their internet presence into meaningful online social communities that engage in the spread of online disinformation worldwide. As cybersecurity security specialist Dr. Maura Conway suggests, "today's

internet does not simply allow for the dissemination and consumption of extremist material in a one-way broadcast from producer and consumer, it also facilitates high levels of online social interaction around this material".

Propaganda has always been central in communicating terrorism. Perhaps the most central accomplishment of Al Qaeda on 9/11 was not killing several thousand people, but rather instilling fear in millions of people worldwide through the reports and images of the attacks, and the creating a blueprint for modern terrorist practices. The borderless flow of information enabled by social media has been utilized as a tool by terrorist groups to spread their messages globally, facilitate online social communities and spread fear and disruption. Terrorists have been highly adaptable to changes in how their messages are disseminated around the world. In order to keep pace with the evolution of terrorist strategy, states and social media networks must adapt their counter-terrorism measures to meet these inevitable challenges.

16 year old Singaporean detained under ISA for planning terror attacks

⇨ Concepts: Freedom of Speech, Power, Conflict of Interests, Political Polarisation

Article 10: "Cancel culture" seems to have started as an internet joke. Now it's anything but.

Christopher Brito I CBS News I 5 April, 2021

Getting "cancelled" frequently plays out the same way: A person — whether famous or not — says or does something controversial and the backlash on social media follows swiftly.

Whether the public punishment corresponds to the act that sparked it may be up for debate, but the growing number of such incidents has fuelled controversy over what's become known as "cancel culture." Critics of cancel culture say the process stifles free expression, inhibits the exchange of ideas and keeps people from straying from their comfort zones. Others, however, argue that it has empowered people to challenge the status quo and demand accountability from those in positions of power or wealth.

What does "cancel culture" actually mean?

The term itself is vague and has become a catch-all for various situations with different degrees of severity and impact. Professor Anne H. Charity Hudley, an expert on African American culture and linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, broke down the idea into two distinct definitions.

The first is essentially a boycott. "It is the withdrawal of financial support, political support, social, economic support, often in pop culture in the form of attention of a particular media star, a political figure, a business figure," Hudley told CBS News. "And withdrawing publicly your support in a way that informs other people that should withdraw their support as well."

"The second definition, that is silencing something or somebody," she added. "And they overlap, but it's a little bit different because one is more about withdrawing your attention and the other is actively seeking to stop someone else from speaking."

Depending on your view, she added, it can be perceived as the same thing.

Who gets cancelled?

Over the last few years, the term became more mainstream as prominent figures and brands became targets. But Meredith Clark, a media studies professor at the University of Virginia, told CBS News that getting — and remaining — cancelled "depends on who you are."

Clark said people who do not have "access to power" are the ones likely to face real consequences of cancel culture, while celebrities and people of wealth are often able to ride it out.

"They can buy their way out of the noise," she said. "They could donate their way out of the noise. So, there are a number of different avenues that they have for protecting, upholding or defending their reputation, that poor folks, that working class folks, that even middle-class folks don't have."

For example, Kevin Hart dropped out of hosting the 2019 Oscars after public outcry over his old homophobic tweets resurfaced. But after some time away from the spotlight, he continued performing stand-up and getting cast in movies. The popular food writer Alison Roman was the subject of online fury after making disparaging comments about Chrissy Teigen and Marie Kondo in an interview this spring, and the New York Times put her column on hiatus. After an apology and a period of social media silence, she re-emerged with a newsletter and is using her experience to try to educate others.

This pattern of re-emergence after being "cancelled" is not uncommon for people with certain levels of privilege. But for private citizens, a mistake caught on social media can follow them for years to come.

In a viral incident from May 2020, a White woman named Amy Cooper was caught on camera calling the cops and making false accusations against Christian Cooper, a Black man who was birdwatching in Central Park. She lost her job in finance and even temporarily surrendered her dog to a shelter as the internet called out her actions as racist. Mr. Cooper later expressed reservations about the extent of the public vitriol directed at her. "I don't know whether she's a racist or not," he told "CBS This Morning" co-host Gayle King. "I don't know her life. I don't know how she lives it. That act was unmistakably racist even if she didn't realize it in the moment."

"I'm not sure someone's life should be defined by 60 seconds of poor judgment," he added.

These are just a sampling of some of the vastly different scenarios that all fall under the umbrella of "cancel culture." And critics worry that responding to each perceived instance of wrongdoing with the same punishment — social outcasting — ignores important distinctions while still upholding a culture of privilege when it comes to who suffers lasting consequences.

What does cancel culture accomplish?

Clark told CBS News that cancelling can serve a purpose when it gives underrepresented groups the ability to hold the powerful to account. To her, it should be about "punching up."

"I would say that cancel culture can be effective in terms of its ability to demonstrate the perspectives of people who otherwise don't have their voices heard or their perspectives recognized," Clark said. "If you are not a person who has access to hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars, if you're a person who doesn't have access to a major public platform... if you're not any of those people, then calling someone out via social media is one of the few tools that you have to hold them to account for any harm or damage that they may have done to you or people within your community," she continued.

However, she does think it falls short of the goal many times.

"Too often, I do think that cancel culture gets into its own obsession with the purity of someone or an idea, that if an idea or a person doesn't completely align with a set of values, then they are essentially disposable," she said.

Hudley also believes people need to be allowed to make mistakes, learn lessons and grow from the experience.

"If you made a mistake, we need to make a space for that," Hudley said. 'That's what I say to my friends who've been previously incarcerated, like you don't want to be judged on the one bad act. That's what people are nervous about."

What about the impact of social media on our physical, mental and socio-emotional health? Scan the QR code on the right to watch why much of our obsession (as well as its consequences) with social media might be beyond our control.

Application #3: Social Media Empowers or Disempowers?

Based on the material you have read/watched in Reading Set 3, summarise how the media can empower or disempower societies in the table below. Do your own research to add in more examples as well.

The social media revolution ***empowers***	The social media revolution ***disempowers***

Inquiry Questions:
1. Is regulation of the press desirable? (GCE 2017)
2. How far should a state have the right to censor the media? (MJCJC1PE11Q5)

At the end of this section, students will be able to:
- ✓ Understand the power transfer from the state to media companies with regard to censorship, and why censorship occurs.
- ✓ Explain **why the media and users of social media need to be responsible** for what they say/report/share, in light of how new media is used.
- ✓ Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of media censorship.

• Censorship •

Reading Set 4

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. However, in reality, it is important that freedom of expression needs to be exercised with social responsibility and this ideal is often compromised through censorship of what is considered to be harmful, offensive or sensitive.

Common forms of censorship include deletion of materials and restriction of circulation. It can be determined by a government, media companies, or religious authorities. On the other hand, self-censorship is the act of censoring one's own work in consideration of the sensibilities of others, without overt pressure from any specific party or institution of authority.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Why do some countries have stricter censorship laws than others?

Why is it important to be able to discuss controversial issues or have access to controversial material?

Article 1: On the Role of Censorship

The School of Life

"We believe in censorship. Sometimes." Of course, that's a very unpopular view these days; censorship looks small-minded, defensive and the enemy of a hard-won freedom to express oneself without interference. People associate censorship with book burning, political repression and ignorant intolerance. The heroic events which ended censorship in Europe seem only to bear this out. For instance, the censorship of Diderot's Encyclopedia in 1752 was a petty attack by the Church on a sophisticated and deeply useful intellectual project. The ban on D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover was a comparably idiotic step. When the publishers, Penguin, were tried in 1960 under the Obscene Publications Act, the prosecution appeared dowdy and dim, while the defence was passionate and intelligent. In the history of censorship, it always seems as if it is something of real value – profound, earnest and true – that is condemned and someone vile, corrupt and absurd who is trying to do the censoring.

But maybe that's no longer always true. Maybe, just maybe, that phase of history (in which the censored were always good and the censors always bad) has, in the developed countries at least, passed in many ways. The real threat nowadays is perhaps not that wonderful truths are in danger of being repressed by malign authorities but rather that we will drown in chaos produced by aggressive and uncontrolled commercial interests, that we will be overwhelmed by irrelevant, greedy, noxious and unhelpful trivia, and that we will be left unable to concentrate on what is genuinely important and good.

A key argument of those who attack 'censorship' today is to claim that we all need to hear all the messages all the time. But do we? Take TV, for instance. Television broadcasts have long been censored on grounds of violence and sexuality – and there is widespread agreement that this is an acceptable, and even welcome, restriction on liberty. We know perfectly well that images of an extreme kind are readily available elsewhere if one really wants to go and hunt for them; but an important distinction exists between what people do completely in private and what is acceptable more or less 'in public' over the airwaves. But the insight which leads us to censor images because they are too graphic or gory actually applies more broadly than these two usual categories. For the problem is not primarily to do with sex or violence; the real concern is that some scenes that are paraded before us are humiliating to our collective dignity. They give us a shameful view of human nature.

Censorship is not necessarily about making it impossible to view such material. What it does insist on is the private and personal character of the interest: it refuses public endorsement. The most sinister programmes and adverts are those that are confident about their own merits when they are in fact spectacularly unworthy of regard.

In a democratic, market-oriented society, public culture is hugely important. It guides our collective ideas about what is admirable or shocking, what counts as normal or weird. It generates a shared perception of status. All public things shape our individual lives, and they make their way into politics and the economy. Censoring the odd message deserves to be considered not always as an unenlightened suppression of crucial ideas, but occasionally as a sincere attempt to organise the world for human flourishing.

Big Tech is more powerful than ever. Using the internet today inevitably means engaging with their products and services. Tech companies have a lot of control over what we say and share online. But what happens when so few set the rules of the web for so many?

Article 2: Big Tech Censorship - A Debate Around Internet Free Speech

Neeva.com | 16 July 2021

Big Tech censorship is the idea that major tech companies can have gatekeeper power over what we do on their platforms.

More than ever, we post, debate, promote, and critique our ideas online. Digital communication platforms—like Facebook or Twitter—act as modern-day public squares. But they don't belong to the public. They're built and run by tech companies, using their digital infrastructure.

Under pressure to reduce the spread of violent and exploitative content, social media companies began employing moderators to remove inappropriate material from their platforms. While pornography and hate speech are protected by the first amendment, public sentiment was that this content—along with content depicting graphic violence—does not belong in digital "public squares" like social media. Tech companies prohibit this content in their terms of service.

This sentiment also applied to content meant to incite violence. But this gets murky when a call to violence is more subtle—neither graphic nor explicit—but still results in violent activity. It gets even murkier when political figures are involved. Suddenly, one person's moderation is another's suppression.

The issue was brought to the fore after January 6, when a violent mob of President Donald Trump's supporters, urged by the outgoing president to "stop the steal," stormed the US Capitol. The next day, Facebook issued Trump an indefinite suspension. The day after that, Twitter, where Trump tweeted more than 25,000 times during his presidency, issued him a permanent suspension, and over the following week, barred more than 70,000 other users. Snapchat, Youtube, Twitch and other platforms followed, while Apple and Google cut Parler, a small social network popular with far-right users, from their app stores, and Amazon removed it from its cloud computing service, forcing the network offline. The tech companies claimed Trump and his supporters' "incitement to violence" and "hate speech" violated their terms of service.

Some were relieved by Big Tech's actions. Some even celebrated them, pointing to research showing that online misinformation had fallen after the president was deplatformed. Elsewhere the moves drew fierce backlash from conservatives and free speech activists, who argued that Big Tech's selective enforcement suggests political motives, and that their power over the digital landscape had gone too far. The image of a few Silicon Valley tycoons deciding what we can say online has prompted many to raise the alarm on free speech and Big Tech censorship.

But more telling were the reactions from other prominent figures like Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, who called the ban "problematic," or Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, who labeled it an "unacceptable act of censorship," or perhaps most surprisingly, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, who spoke of a "dangerous precedent."

In the US, the First Amendment says that Congress shall not pass a law bridging the freedom of speech, or of the press. But it doesn't apply to private companies, like Amazon, Apple, Facebook or Google. A social media company's ability to moderate content isn't limited by the First Amendment. A private company can stop you from saying what you want on their platform. Your freedom to submit an article to The Washington Post for example, is as important as their freedom to not publish your words. That much is relatively clear.

What isn't as clear is whether Big Tech companies, by banning users and posts, are exercising their rights to set editorial policy, or whether, given their immense power, they're engaging in internet censorship in favour of certain interests.

Nobody could have predicted the unstoppable rise of Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google. Never in the history of democracy has a handful of companies held such sway over the lives of so many.

Because they're neither public square nor publisher, tech companies are able to play by both sets of rules. On the one hand, like a public square, they can't be held accountable for what's said on their platforms; on the other hand, like a publisher, they have the right to moderate content. And letting them exist in this middle ground has arguably allowed them to reach unprecedented scale and influence—to the point that we rely on their products and services to function.

In January 2021, Australian officials demanded that Google pay news publishers for content it displays in its search results. The company responded by threatening to shut down its search engine in the country. It isn't hard to imagine a similar scenario happening again elsewhere.

While there's no perfect consensus, there are growing calls for a better approach to dealing with freedom of speech online, one that doesn't let Big Tech dictate fundamental civil liberties; one, ideally that doesn't permit internet censorship by Silicon Valley tech giants.

Article 3: The other George Floyd story - How media freedom led to conviction in his killer's trial

Michael J. Socolow| The Conversation| 22 April 2021

When 17-year-old Darnella Frazier started recording video of Minneapolis policeman Derek Chauvin murdering George Floyd, she initiated a series of historic events that led to Chauvin's conviction. But for all the discussion of technology following her actions – how cellphones enable video recording of police abuse and how social media encourages instantaneous mass distribution – the key factor in George Floyd's name becoming globally famous may not be Frazier's cellphone. It may not even be social media.

It was the culture and tradition of U.S. civil liberties and media freedom that played an essential role in protecting Frazier's ability to record and retain possession of the video, and the capability of commercial corporations to publish it. Had the same events transpired in China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Singapore or elsewhere, nobody might ever have learned of Floyd's fate. The constitutional protections enjoyed by U.S. citizens empower and encourage everyday Americans to discover, record, expose and distribute evidence of governmental malfeasance. This freedom to publicize crimes committed by state actors creates the possibility of improving policing and making the administration of justice more sensitive, effective and responsive. But it also threatens to undermine state authority, which is why so many U.S. politicians remain wary of such freedoms.

The expansive media freedoms originating in the First Amendment would continue into the internet age with Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. That's the law that allows people to post freely on internet sites while protecting the internet companies from legal jeopardy caused by those materials. So, for example, defamatory accusations, negligent misrepresentation, intentional nuisance, dangerous misinformation and even content intended to incite emotional distress can be posted without Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other companies being sued or held civilly liable. For better or worse, Section 230 establishes media freedom across the internet in the U.S. And it is this law, built on the traditions of media freedom, that allowed Darnella Frazier – and all citizens who follow in her footsteps – to stand up to the government in ways previously unimaginable.

But some stand ready to abandon these long-established legal and cultural protections. Those very same images from Frazier's video could easily have been deemed "obscene," or a "malicious" or "scandalous" incitement to violence.
But U.S. states can't outlaw media organizations as "public nuisances." Yet tensions over media freedom now exist that have the potential to lead to limits on the public's ability to record and distribute police crimes.
Critics who want to get rid of Section 230 regularly blame it for the plethora of "fake news," misinformation, and hate speech that infects our web and social media. Because Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok and others can't be held liable for users' content, the companies have felt little pressure, until recently, to moderate the blizzard of material they publish every second.

The cost of limiting the press

But media freedom is always a double-edged sword. Without Section 230 protection, social media companies would likely behave cautiously to minimize even the hint of legal jeopardy. Frazier's video, in such a world, might be deemed too risky to distribute.

The immunity provided by Section 230 encourages YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and others, to stimulate users to post pretty much any news, information or video their users deem newsworthy or interesting.

The repeal of Section 230 could result in a system in which inflammatory or provocative news or images that might outrage or incite people could be deemed too socially destructive or disturbing of the peace by internet companies. And this could include images and video such as the murder of George Floyd.

The idea that U.S. citizens can report, publish, print and disseminate information that might be terribly damaging to authority is a radical one. Even within the United States, this freedom is often considered too expansive. In Oklahoma, for example, a new bill criminalizing the filming of police officers recently passed both houses of the state legislature, and elsewhere the rights of citizens and journalists to record police behavior occurring in public are regularly violated. Yet, it cannot be denied that protecting people's rights promises to foster an active, aware and engaged citizenry – and that violating those rights by repressing or censoring information is deeply anti-American.

Article 4: To publish or not to publish? The media's free-speech dilemmas in a world of division, violence and extremism

Deni Muller | The Conversation | 20 January 2021

Terrorism, political extremism, Donald Trump, social media and the phenomenon of "cancel culture" are confronting journalists with a range of agonising free-speech dilemmas to which there are no easy answers.

Do they allow a president of the United States to use their platforms to falsely and provocatively claim the election he has just lost was stolen from him? How do they cover the activities and rhetoric of political extremists without giving oxygen to race hate and civil insurrection? How do they integrate news-making social media material into their own content, when it is also hateful or a threat to the civil peace? Should journalists engage in, or take a stand against, "cancel culture"? How should editors respond to the "assassin's veto", when extremists threaten to kill those who publish content that offends their culture or religion?

The West has experienced concrete examples of all these in recent years. In the US, many of them became pressing during the Trump presidency. When five of the big US television networks cut away from Trump's White House press conference on November 6 after he claimed the election had been stolen, they did so on the grounds that he was lying and endangering civil peace.

Silencing the president was an extraordinary step, since it is the job of the media to tell people what is going on, hold public officials to account, and uphold the right to free speech. It looked like an abandonment of their role in democratic life. Against that, television's acknowledged reach and power imposes a heavy duty not to provide a platform for dangerous speech.

Then on January 6 – two months later to the day – after yet more incitement from Trump, a violent mob laid siege to the Capitol and five people lost their lives. The networks' decision looked prescient. They had acted on the principle that a clear and present danger to civil peace, based on credible evidence, should be prioritised over commitments to informing the public, holding public officials to account and freedom of speech.

This case also raised a further dilemma. Even if the danger to peace did not exist, should journalists just go on reporting – or broadcasting – known lies, even when they come from the president of the United States?

Newspaper editors and producers of pre-recorded radio and television content have the time to report lies while simultaneously calling them out as lies. Live radio and television do not. The words are out and the damage is done. So the medium, the nature and size of the risk, how the informational and accountability functions of journalism are prioritised against the risk, and the free-speech imperative all play into these decisions.

Similar considerations arise in respect of reporting political extremism.

The ABC's Four Corners program is about to embark on a story about the alt-right in the US. Having advertised this in a promotional tweet, the ABC received some social media blow-back raising the question of why it would give oxygen to these groups. The influence of the alt-right on Western politics is a matter of real public interest because of the way it shapes political rhetoric and policy responses, particular on race and immigration. Yet to not report on this phenomenon because it pursues a morally reprehensible ideology would be to fail the ethical obligation of journalism to tell the community about the important things that are going on in the world.

It is not a question of whether to report, but how. Journalists are under no obligation to report everything they are told. In fact they almost never do.

Motive matters

Whether the decision to omit is censorship comes down to motive: is it censorship to omit hate speech or incitement to violence? No. Because the reporter doesn't agree with it? Yes.

Integrating social media content into professional mass media news presents all these complexities and one more: what is called the news value of "virality". Does the fact something has gone viral on social media make it news? For the more responsible professional mass media, something more will usually be needed. Does the subject matter affect large numbers of people? Is it inherently significant in some way? Does it involve some person who is in a position of authority or public trust?

Trump's use of Twitter was an exploitation of these decision-rules, but did not invalidate them.

Social media is also the means by which "cancel culture" works. It enables large numbers of people to join a chorus of condemnation against someone for something they have said or done. It also puts pressure on institutions such as universities or media outlets to shun them. It has become a means by which the otherwise powerless or voiceless can exert influence over people or organisations that would otherwise be beyond their reach.

There are those who are worried about the effects on free speech. In July 2020, Harper's magazine published a letter of protest signed by 152 authors, academics, journalists, artists, poets, playwrights and critics. While applauding the intentions behind "cancel culture" in advancing racial and social justice, they raised their voices against what they saw as a new set of moral attitudes that tended to favour ideological conformity.

In the aftermath of the police killings of black people in 2020 and the law-and-order response of the Trump administration, "cancel culture" began to affect journalism ethics. Some journalists on papers such as The Washington Post and The New York Times began taking public positions against the way their papers were reporting race issues.

It led to a lively debate in the profession about the extent to which moral preferences should shape news decisions. The riposte to those who argued that they should, was: whose moral preferences should prevail?

This was yet another illustration of the complexities surrounding free speech issues arising from the social media phenomenon, the Trump presidency and the combination of the two.

Terrorism has also added its contribution. Over the decade 2005-2015, what became known as the Danish cartoons confronted journalists and editors with life-and-death decisions. In 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten (Jutland Post) published cartoons lampooning the Prophet Mohammed. It was a conscious act of defiance against "the assassin's veto", violent threats to free speech by Islamist-jihadis. In 2009, a Danish-born professor of politics wrote a book, The Cartoons that Shook the World. Yale University Press, which published it, refused to re-publish the cartoons after having taken advice from counter-terrorism experts about the risks. In November 2011, the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo published an issue called Charia Hebdo, satirically featuring the Prophet as editor. The real editor was placed on an Al-Qaeda hit list and in January 2015, two masked gunmen opened fire on the newspaper office, killing 12 people, including the editor. The world's media were confronted with the decision whether to re-publish the cartoons again in defiance of "the assassin's veto". Some did, but most – including Jyllands Posten – did not.

The necessary limits of free speech

The social media platforms, having for years proclaimed themselves extreme libertarians, have in recent times begun to recognise this is indefensible, and strengthened their moderating procedures. While we can agree that free speech is an indispensable civil right that is often under assault, none of the philosophers whose names we immediately associate with free speech have claimed it to be absolute.

Most famously, Voltaire is often quoted saying something that he never actually said: the famous line that while he disagreed with what someone said, he would defend to the death his right to say it. It was a fabrication put into Voltaire's mouth by a biographer more than 100 years after his death.

Voltaire, Milton, Spinoza, Locke and Mill have not regarded free speech as an absolute right.

So while the media face some extremely difficult decisions in today's operating environment, they do not need to burden themselves with the belief that every decision not to publish is the violation of an inviolable right.

Censorship in Singapore

Singapore regulates the media through a variety of legislation and licensing schemes that prohibit the media from publishing offensive or undesirable material.

1. General laws that can affect the media – Sedition Act, Internal Security Act, Official Secrets Act.
2. Media specific regulations and licensing schemes – Newspaper and Printing Presses Act, Broadcasting Act, Films Act, Undesirable Publications Act, Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act (FICA).
3. Indirect forms of censorship – funding restrictions from NAC, self-censorship from various organisations.

Singapore's new Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill (POFMA) has generated much controversy. Here is one such instance.

Article 5: XBB strain WhatsApp messages: POFMA correction notices can be issued to those who forward falsehoods, say lawyers

Justin Ong | Today Online | 14 Oct 2022

SINGAPORE — Even if the Government may not be able to pinpoint the original sender of viral WhatsApp messages carrying falsehoods, it would still be able to issue correction directions under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) to people who have forwarded such messages, legal experts told TODAY. All it takes could be a screenshot showing that the message was forwarded by a person for him or her to be issued a POFMA notice.

This means that the person who forwarded the false viral message might have to send a follow-up message to all recipients, clarifying that the original message sent was false, and include a link to where a statement of fact can be found, such as on a government website.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) said on Tuesday (Oct 11) that it was initiating POFMA action against falsehoods spread through a viral WhatsApp message, which claimed that there is a rapid and large increase in Covid-19 cases here with severe illness and deaths due to the circulating XBB strain of the Omicron variant.

Lawyers who spoke to TODAY said that this case is the first of its kind involving a POFMA direction issued for falsehoods circulating on the WhatsApp application. TODAY has reached out to the POFMA Office to confirm this.
However, the move by MOH has been a possibility since the law was introduced late in 2019. Mr Edwin Tong, then-Senior Minister of State for Law, said in 2019 — before POFMA had taken effect — that the law also covers closed platforms such as chat groups and social media groups.

Legal experts said that it may be difficult to find the original sender of a viral message, but a correction notice can be sent to anyone who forwards a viral message with falsehoods. Associate Professor Eugene Tan from the Yong Pung How School of Law at Singapore Management University (SMU) said: "The law doesn't require the public body issuing the POFMA direction to go after the original sender. If it's in the public interest and what you're spreading is a falsehood, it doesn't matter if you're the last spreader."

Agreeing, Mr Marcus Teo, a Sheridan Fellow from the law faculty of the National University of Singapore (NUS), said that anyone who passes on a false statement of fact may be subject to a correction direction, because the point of POFMA is "precisely to stop falsehoods from spreading throughout the community".

He added that many people may regard WhatsApp as a "private" platform, but this is not always the case with viral messages. "WhatsApp may seem like a 'private' setting, but the boundary between 'private' and 'public' settings becomes blurred when the message spread becomes viral and is spread quickly through multiple channels," Mr Teo said.

HOW DOES A CORRECTION DIRECTION WORK ON WHATSAPP?
Mr Alex Woon, a lecturer at Singapore University of Social Sciences' School of Law, said that the correction direction could "technically" be issued to each and every individual who circulates the rumour in Singapore to stop communicating it or to forward it along with a correction notice. The procedure could be like what is commonly seen

on other correction notices that accompany posts on social media platforms. Instead, the sender may be required to send the correction notice to all the people who had received the false message from him.

Assoc Prof Tan from SMU said: "It's certainly possible within the law for those who are 'POFMA-ed' to require them, for example, to send the notice that the message was false, and if they want to read the facts, to go to this (link)."
However, Mr Woon said that this approach may not be feasible or effective. "This is unlikely to be practical as it would be difficult to both identify targets for the directions and to enforce the directions, if the rumour has already become widespread."

POFMA Office issues warning to woman, 47, over false claims on vaccines' efficacy in curbing Covid-19 spread
He added that forwarding a false viral message in itself is not a chargeable criminal offence, but ignoring the correction direction would be. "It is only if the recipient of the direction fails to comply with the direction without any reasonable excuse that it becomes an offence."

HOW CAN THE AUTHORITIES PROVE THAT SOMEONE SENT THE FALSE MESSAGE?
Given that WhatsApp is seen as a "private" platform, how would the authorities prove that someone had sent a false message?

Legal experts said that such evidence can come in the form of screenshots from the message recipients. Mr Teo from NUS said: "Usually, when someone reports the false statement of fact to the POFMA Office, that person will also provide the message he received from the communicator, which will itself be evidence that the communicator sent it.
"The recipient of a private message generally has no legal duty to keep it private, unless the message contains confidential information — which should not be the case for WhatsApp chain messages."

Agreeing, Assoc Prof Tan said that people who have received a message with falsehoods may have forwarded it to the authorities "because of their concerns about the falsehoods". "They may have also cooperated with MOH and are willing to let MOH have access to those messages," he said. "And MOH would minimally know that the recipient got this message from person 'A'."

Assoc Prof Tan added, however, that the chances of reaching every person who forwarded the viral message is slim, and this is ultimately not the goal of the authorities. "I think (the authorities) are wanting to make the message clear, that this is a falsehood, and equally important, that people should exercise responsibility before forwarding messages that will unnecessarily cause public alarm."

Application #4: Free Speech vs Censorship

Article 1: Big Tech Censorship	**Article 2: The other George Floyd story**
What are the benefits of Big Tech Censorship? What are its dangers and criticisms?	What are the benefits of media freedom? What are its dangers and criticisms?
Article 3: To publish or not to publish?	**Article 4: POFMA**
What are the benefits of media freedom? What are its dangers and criticisms?	What are the benefits of POFMA? What are its dangers and criticisms?

Based on the trends across the articles, what are some generalisations that reflect the patterns that you have identified?

Free speech is beneficial because _____.

Free speech is dangerous because _____.

Censorship is necessary when _____, but not when _____.

After completing the above tables, consider the following question:

'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on the freedom of speech.' Discuss. (GCE 2020)

• Glossary of Media Terms •

Advertising: The act or practice of calling public attention to one's product, service or need, especially by paid announcements on various media platforms. It often involves sending certain messages which are intended to inform or influence people who receive them.

Branding: The process by which a commodity in the marketplace is known primarily for the image it projects rather than any actual quality.

Censorship: The suppression of speech, public communication or other information which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, politically incorrect or inconvenient as determined by governments, media outlets, authorities or other groups or institutions.

Cyber Vigilantism: Online actions in pursuit of what is seen as justice by self-appointed individuals or groups lacking legal authority, typically when they see legal action as grossly inadequate.

Deconstruction (of a text or image): A method of critical analysis which seeks to understand the reason behind the creation of a certain text or image by looking into the assumptions or implicit meanings of the author.

Desensitisation: The process where anxiety or fear towards a certain thing/situation is reduced by gradually getting used to the said thing/situation.

Doxxing: The action of finding or publishing private information about someone on the internet without their permission, especially in a way that reveals their name and other personal details.

Hegemony: When dominate groups persuade subordinate groups that the dominate ideology is in their best interests. The media's role in this process is to encourage maintenance of the status quo.

New Media: Platforms which provide content that can be assessed, usually on a digital platform, anytime and anywhere. It also allows for instantaneous, bi-directional interaction among users, unlike the unidirectional feedback of some forms of traditional media.

Normalisation (of an issue): A process where an issue is made to seem normal, common or usual when in fact it is not necessarily so.

Medium: The singular form of media, the term usually describes individual forms such as radio, Internet, television etc.

Objectification Theory: Treating a person as a commodity or an object without regard to their personality or dignity.

Popular Culture: The ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given culture.

Privacy: Freedom from unauthorized intrusion (by the government, corporations or individuals etc.) or public attention. It includes one's right to control access to his or her personal information and express themselves selectively.

Propaganda: information that is not objective and is used primarily to influence an audience and further an agenda. Often associated with the psychological mechanisms of influencing and altering the attitude of a population toward a specific cause, position or political agenda in an effort to form a consensus to a standard set of belief patterns.

Self-censorship: The act of exercising control over what one says and does, especially to avoid criticism. It can also involve classifying one's book, film or other forms of media out of fear of, or deference to, the sensibilities or preferences (actual or perceived) of others and without overt pressure from any specific party or institution of authority.

Sexualisation: A process where individuals are regarded as sex objects and evaluated in terms of their physical characteristics and sexiness.

Social Media: Such platforms form a subset of the new media and usually feature higher degrees of interaction among people. These interactions result in the creation and exchange of information and ideas. Like new media, social media heavily relies on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities create and disseminate information.

Stereotype: A form of media representation by which instantly recognized characteristics are used to label members of social or cultural groups, often in a negative manner.

Stigmatise: To mark and disapprove of a particular social group or individual as different, even dangerous to others.

Traditional media: Platforms which disseminate information involving largely one-way communication. Examples of traditional media include television, film, radio, newspapers, books and magazines.

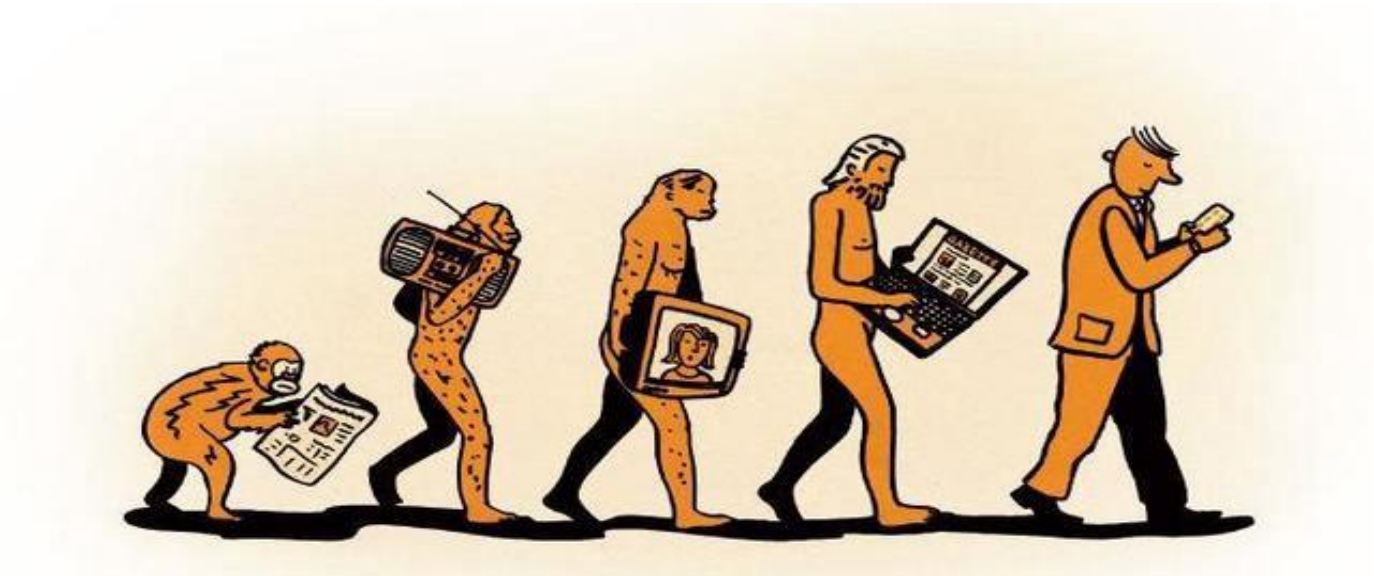


image from: https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/evolution-of-media-traditional-media-to-new-media

• Essay Questions on Media & Censorship •

Mass Media

1. Is news today reliable? (GCE 2021)
2. 'The media has enslaved us.' Do you agree? (MJCJC2PE18Q6)
3. Consider the argument that the main purpose of television should be to educate rather than simply to entertain. (GCE 2015)
4. In the digital age do newspapers still have a role in your society? (GCE 2011)
5. Assess the impact of foreign films or foreign TV programmes on the culture of your society. (GCE 2009)
6. To what extent do the newspapers and magazines that you read deal with what is trivial, rather than what is important? (GCE 2006)
7. How far do magazines or television programmes aimed at young people in Singapore have a positive effect? (GCE 2005)
8. 'Far too much attention is given to beauty products and treatments.' Do you agree? (GCE 2004)
9. Can the media ever be relied on to convey the truth? (GCE 2003)
10. How far is it true that people today will believe anything the media presents? (CJC Prelim 2019)
11. 'People will believe anything they read, hear, or see in the media.' Is this statement reflective of the situation in your country? (HCI Prelim 2019)
12. To what extent can news and information in the media today be trusted? (TPJC, JC1 SA1, 2015)
13. Are traditional forms of media still relevant today? (TPJC, JC2 SA1, 2015)
14. Should we rely on the media for objective news and information? (TPJC, JC1 SA1 2014)
15. Balanced reporting is an impossible task. Discuss (TPJC, Prelims 2014)
16. 'Rather than broadening the mind, the media limit it.' Do you agree? (DHS Prelim 2013)
17. To what extent do the media encourage escapism? (ACJC Prelim 2012)
18. To what extent do the media have a negative impact on youths today? (SRJC Prelim 2011)
19. Television is indeed a true mirror of modern society; unfortunately, the image it reflects is an extremely ugly one." Comment. (HCI Prelim 2007)
20. 'The media is guilty of misguiding.' To what extent is this true? (TPJC Prelim 2007)
21. How important is media literacy for your society? (TPJC, JC2 SA1, 2014)
22. The media exaggerates the plight of our planet. Discuss. (ACJC Prelim 2013)
23. How far are television programmes a reflection of trends in your society? (TJC Prelim 2013)
24. 'The mass media is too influential today.' Discuss. (IJC Prelim 2013)
25. 'Journalism should always be about the truth.' Discuss. (MJC Prelim 2012)
26. Do the media always act in the interest of the public? (VJC Prelim 2011)
27. To what extent is the media playing a destructive role in society today? (MJC Prelim 2010)
28. Would you agree that the media hold too much power in the world today? (CJC Prelim 2012)

Social Media, New Media and the Internet

1. To what extent has social media devalued true friendship in your society? (GCE 2021)
2. 'The quality of written language is being destroyed by social media.' What is your view? (GCE 2017)
3. How far do social media influence behaviour? (JJC Prelim 2013)
4. To what extent has new media changed the face of human interaction? (RI Prelim 2011)
5. Social media gives rise to conflict.' Do you agree? (PJC Prelim 2013)
6. The most divisive force in the modern world is new media. Do you agree? (RVHS Prelim 2013)
7. 'Writing is a dying art in the multimedia age.' Do you agree? (NYJC Prelim 2012)
8. Discuss the impact of new media on social cohesion in your society. (RI Prelim 2012)
9. What we say on social media has no value. Discuss. (MJC Prelim 2011)
10. The Internet promotes democracy. Is this really true? (JJC Prelim 2011)
11. To what extent has social media really empowered people? (NJC Prelim 2013)
12. To what extent do social media pose a challenge for governments? (MJC Prelim 2013)
13. Social media is a curse. Comment. (MI Prelim 2012)
14. To what extent has the new media compromised people's privacy? (NJC Prelim 2012)
15. 'The success of social media is also its problem.' Comment. (VJC Prelim 2012)
16. To what extent is the new media a revolutionary tool? (TPJC Prelim 2011)

Film & Books

1. 'Films are concerned with escaping from the problems of everyday life, rather than addressing them.' Discuss. (GCE 2021)
2. 'Any adaptation of a novel for film, television or the theatre is never as effective as the original.' Discuss. (GCE 2016)
3. "Books serve little purpose in education as technological developments become more sophisticated." How far do you agree? (GCE 2015)
4. Do films offer anything more than an escape from reality? (GCE 2014)
5. 'The book has no place in modern society.' Discuss (GCE 2010)
6. Nowadays, the pleasures of reading can never compete with the pleasures of visual entertainment.' To what extent do you agree? (GCE 2008)
7. 'A picture is always more powerful than mere words.' What is your view? (GCE 2006)
8. Does the book still have a future? (GCE 2003)
9. 'Fantasy stories and fantasy films merely serve as a means of escapism.' Do you agree? (DHS Prelim 2012)
10. 'Reading fantasy books is a form of escapism and nothing more.' Do you agree? (RJC Prelim 2007)
11. Films are never better than books. To what extent is this true? (AJC Prelim 2007)

Advertising

1. 'Advertising is largely about persuading people to buy what they do not need.' How far do you agree? (GCE 2021)
2. 'Advertisements are often entertaining, but they rarely affect consumer choice.' Is this your experience? (GCE 2007)
3. Advertising encourages a desire for products which people do not actually need. Discuss. (GCE 2004)
4. Should advertising be restricted in any way? (GCE 2001)
5. Does advertising exert too great an influence on children and teenagers today? (HCI Prelim 2013)
6. To what extent do advertisements have a negative effect on society? (RI Prelim 2013)
7. Consider the view that advertising manipulates rather than informs. (SRJC Prelim 2013)

Censorship

1. 'In a free society, there should be no restrictions on the freedom of speech.' Discuss. (GCE 2020)
2. Is regulation of the press desirable? (GCE 2017)
3. How far should a state have the right to censor the media? (MJCJC1PE11Q5)