

6 The Role of Media in Elections

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about different types of media and their role in election campaigns.

KEY WORDS

media, paid media, earned media, owned media, old media, new media, social media, news media, reporter, columnist, pundit, editorial, bias, opinion

QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED DURING THIS LESSON

- Is it important to pay attention to the news?
- What are the different types of media?
- How is media used by candidates and political parties?
- What is the role of news media in an election?

SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 6: The Role of Media in Elections
- Worksheet 6.1: My Media Analysis
- Worksheet 6.2: Facts vs. Opinions

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Hook: 5-10 min

People get their news in different ways. Some people watch a nightly newscast, listen to news radio, or read the newspaper in the morning. Others use computers, smartphones or tablets to gain instant access to the latest news through websites, apps or social media platforms. The rapidly evolving technological landscape and the rise of digital consumption have changed the way information reaches the public.

As a class, have students discuss their news consumption habits.

- Do you read the newspaper? If so, which one(s)? Do you read them in print or online?
- Do you watch the news on TV or listen to the news on the radio? If so, which news programs?
- Where do your parents/guardians get their news from? What about your grandparents or other older relatives?
- Do you have the same habits as your parents/guardians? Why or why not?
- What do you consider the most trusted source of news? Why?
- Do you think it is important to follow the news? Why or why not?

Instruction: 10-15 min

1. In general, media refers to the communication of information and messages to the masses through various channels.
2. Media can be divided into three main types: Paid, Earned and Owned.
 - Paid Media: Awareness gained through paid advertising.
 - Earned Media: Awareness gained through efforts other than advertising, such as news coverage or external blogs/websites.
 - Owned Media: Internally managed promotional platforms, such as your website, blog, Facebook page, YouTube channel and Twitter feed.
3. The various types of media can be further defined as Old (or Traditional) or New media.
 - Old media encompasses traditional sources in broadcast (television or radio) or print format (newspaper, magazines and pamphlets/flyers). Old media is typically one way communication, delivered at a specific time, has limited jurisdictional reach and strives to maintain journalistic integrity and standards.
 - New media includes content that is easily accessible, such as online sources and social media platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, functions in real-time, is borderless and does not always adhere to journalistic standards and ethics.
4. The news media play an important role in elections and in ensuring a well-functioning democracy. Overall the news media are responsible for ensuring accountability and transparency, informing citizens and adhering to journalistic standards. Media reports on the developments of an election campaign, provides a platform for parties/candidates to get their message out, provides a platform for the public to communicate their concerns and opinions, helps foster debate between parties and candidates, advertises the election process to voters and reports on the results.
5. In most cases, the news media provides factual and informational coverage without letting their opinions (biases) interfere. The news media also

produces opinion pieces or editorials, where news organizations and their columnists or pundits will openly share their opinions or analysis. Some argue that the process of choosing the stories that will or will not be published or broadcast is also a form of bias.

Discussion: 10-15 min

What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of media?

Activity: 30 min and homework

- In groups or individually, have students collect and/or analyze different forms and sources of media from the election campaign. If possible, have students focus on a single event, particular issue or one development for their tracking and analysis. Students should collect the following:
 - Two news stories
 - One editorial
 - One opinion piece by a regular columnist
 - One blog post
 - One social media posting
- Using Worksheet 6.1, students should summarize the piece and identify the following:
 - The source
 - Type of media
 - Key information highlighted or emphasized
 - Detected bias
- Afterwards, have students share their findings from the research assignment. Which source is the most credible and why? What was the most interesting to read and why? Did any media piece help shape your opinions? Explain.

Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about the role of media in elections.

- What have you learned about the different types of media?
- Why is it important to read multiple sources of news?
- Why is it important to differentiate between opinion and fact?
- How do the media influence the health and strength of our democracy?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A. Assign Worksheet 6.2 to your class. Ask students to determine which of the ten fictional statements provided could be fact or opinion-based. How might each be used in a news article? Have each student pick a statement and use it as the inspiration to write a short newspaper article. Have students discuss their articles the next day. Did they choose a fact or opinion-based statement? How was it incorporated into their article?

B. Political campaign strategies have shifted recently with more of a focus on new media. Where in the past, the goal would be to advertise or promote the party's message widely and use traditional sources, now there is a greater focus on micro-targeting where parties and candidates focus on communicating to specific groups of voters they believe will support their message. Compare the advertising campaigns of several political parties. Encourage students to analyze the strategy of each party's campaign. What messages are the parties trying to get across? What methods are they relying on the most? Who are the parties trying to target? Which party's ads are most effective and why?

C. As a class or in groups, have students read through a recent print edition of the local newspaper and ask them to locate as many articles as possible about the provincial election. Once all relevant articles have been found and clipped from the paper, have students determine whether each is fact or opinion-based. Have a follow-up discussion. How many are there of each article type? Is there a balance, or are there more of one type? What position do most of the opinion articles seem to take? What does this say about the newspaper? To what degree is this news organization biased or unbiased?

D. Create a classroom social media account (e.g., Twitter) to track campaign news and your local candidate and/or the parties running candidates in your electoral division. You can follow CIVIX (@CIVIX_Canada) and Student Vote (@studentvote), major news outlets, and particular journalists or pundits. Each day you can review the news coming through your classroom's personalized Twitter feed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What are the different types of media?

Media can be divided into three main types: Paid, Earned and Owned.

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platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, functions in real-time, is borderless and does not always adhere to journalistic standards and ethics.

What is the difference between factual and opinion-based news coverage?

In most cases, the news media provides factual and informational coverage to inform the public without letting their opinions (biases) interfere.

The news media also produces opinion pieces or editorials, where news organizations and their columnists or pundits will openly add their opinions or offer their analysis.

How does the news media operate during an election campaign?

Most news organizations remain officially neutral during elections. These organizations will balance the amount of coverage given to any party or candidate, so that no one gains a real or perceived advantage.

During an election, some newspapers will endorse a candidate or party and explain their decision in an editorial.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Provincial, regional and local media websites. Major examples include:

- Calgary Herald — www.calgaryherald.com
- Edmonton Journal — www.edmontonjournal.com
- Edmonton Sun — www.edmontonsun.com
- Calgary Sun — www.calgarysun.com
- Lethbridge Herald — www.lethbridgeherald.com
- Red Deer Advocate — www.reddeeradvocate.com
- Medicine Hat News — www.medicinehatnews.com
- Grande Prairie Daily Herald-Tribune — www.dailyheraldtribune.com
- Fort McMurray Today — www.fortmcmurraytoday.com