

LESSON 6:

The Role of Media in Elections

OBJECTIVE

Students will learn about different types of media used in elections and its role in election campaigns.

KEY WORDS

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

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE 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

1. People consume 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.
2. 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 to be 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 generally divided into three main types: paid, earned and owned.
 - Paid media: Publicity or awareness gained through paid advertising.
 - Earned media: Publicity or awareness gained through efforts other than advertising, such as news coverage or external blogs/websites.
 - Owned media: Internally managed promotional platforms, such as a 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) and print format (newspaper, magazines, 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 refers to content that is easily accessible, such as online sources and social media platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, borderless, functions in real-time and does not always adhere to journalistic standards and ethics.

4. In most cases, the news media provides factual and informational coverage to inform the public without letting opinions (biases) interfere. However, the news media may also produce opinion pieces or editorials, where the editorial team and/or their columnists or pundits will openly share their opinions or analysis.

5. Some media actually align themselves with a particular side of the political spectrum, which can impact their reporting. Therefore, as a news consumer, it is important to be aware of these leanings.

6. 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. During campaigns, the media report on the developments of an election, provide a platform for parties/candidates to get their message out, provide a way for citizens to communicate their concerns and opinions, help foster debate between parties and candidates, advertise the logistics of the election process to voters and report on the results.

Discussion: 10-15 min

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

Activity: 30 min and homework

1. 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 development for their tracking and analysis. Students should collect the following:

- Two news articles from different sources
- One editorial
- One piece by a regular columnist
- Three social media postings from different authors/accounts

2. Using Worksheet 6.1, students should summarize each piece and identify the following:

- The news source or author
- Type of media
- Key information highlighted or emphasized
- Detected bias
- Reach/readership

3. Afterwards, have students share their findings from the research assignment. Which source did you find the most credible and why? What was the most

interesting to read and why? Did any media piece help shape your opinions?

Debrief: 5-10 min

Have a closing discussion about media and elections. Alternatively, ask students to write a reflection for their election scrapbook (see *Assessment Opportunities*).

- 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 detect opinion from fact?
- How does 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 choose a statement and use it as the inspiration to write a short newspaper article about the campaign in their constituency. Have students share their articles the next day and identify fact or opinion-based statements. Did students choose more fact or opinion-based statements for their articles?

B. Political parties use various types of advertising and media to promote themselves and win votes. Some of these ads are positive and speak to their own party's platform, while others are negative and focus on attacking the other leaders or platforms. Compare the advertising campaigns of several political parties. Encourage students to analyze the strategy of each party's campaign. Discussion questions: What messages are the parties trying to get across? What methods are they relying on most? Who are the parties targeting with their advertising? Which party's ads are most effective and why? Is election advertising effective?

C. As a class or in groups, have students read through a recent print edition of a provincial or 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. Towards the end of the election campaign, many newspapers will endorse a leader and/or party and explain why they support them in an editorial. As a class, individually or in groups, compare different endorsements by newspapers. Which do you agree with the most and why? Has one of the editorials shifted your own voting intentions?

E. Create a classroom social media account (e.g., Twitter) to track campaign news, the parties and the candidates in your constituency. You can follow CIVIX (@CIVIX_Canada) and Student Vote (@studentvote), Elections Saskatchewan (@ElectionsSask), major news outlets and particular journalists or pundits. Each day you can review the news coming through a personalized or classroom Twitter feed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

What are the different types of media?

Media can be generally divided into three main types: paid, earned and owned.

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- New media refers to content that is easily accessible, such as online sources and social media platforms. New media is typically interactive, user-driven, borderless, functions in real-time 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 provide factual coverage to inform the public without letting their opinions (biases) interfere. However, some argue that the process of choosing which stories will be published or broadcast, and where or when they appear, is also a form of bias.

The news media also produce editorials, where news organizations and their columnists or pundits will openly share their opinions or offer their analysis. These pieces are different than traditional news stories.

What is the role of media during elections?

The news media plays an important role in elections and in ensuring a well-functioning democracy. Overall, the news media is responsible for ensuring accountability and transparency, informing citizens and adhering to journalistic standards.

The key activities undertaken by media during an election include:

- Reporting on the developments of an election campaign
- Providing a platform for parties/candidates to get their messages out
- Providing a platform for the public to communicate their concerns and opinions
- Fostering debate between the parties and candidates
- Advertising the logistics of the election process to voters
- Reporting on the results

Most news organizations remain officially neutral during elections. These organizations will balance the amount of coverage given to any party or candidate, so no one gains a real or perceived advantage. However, some media organizations will endorse a candidate or party and explain why they believe the leader and party should form government in an editorial.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Examples of provincial, regional and local media websites:

- CBC News Saskatchewan — www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan
- The Leader Post — www.leaderpost.com
- The Star Phoenix — www.thestarphoenix.com
- Prince Albert Daily Herald — www.paherald.sk.ca
- The Estevan Mercury — www.estevanmercury.ca
- Humboldt Journal — www.humboldtjournal.ca
- The Melfort Journal — www.melfortjournal.com
- Meridian Booster — www.meridianbooster.com
- Weyburn Review — www.weyburnreview.com
- The Yorkton News — www.yorktonnews.com

National news organizations also dedicate some coverage to provincial elections:

- The Globe and Mail — www.theglobeandmail.com
- The National Post — www.nationalpost.com
- CBC News — www.cbc.ca/news
- CTV News — www.ctvnews.ca
- Global News — www.globalnews.ca

Aboriginal news sources:

- CBC News Aboriginal — www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal
- Aboriginal Peoples Television Network — www.aptn.ca
- Saskatchewan Sage — www.ammsa.com/publications/saskatchewan-sage
- First Perspective — www.firstperspective.ca
- First Nation Drum — www.firstnationsdrum.com
- SAY magazine — www.saymag.com
- Windspeaker — www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker