

## LESSON 6:

# Messages in the Media

### OBJECTIVE

Students will examine different types of media used in elections and learn to distinguish between opinion and factual news coverage.

### KEY WORDS

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

### QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE DURING THIS LESSON

- 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?
- Why is it important to know the difference between opinion and fact?

### SUPPLEMENTARY TOOLS

- PowerPoint 6: Messages in the Media
- Worksheet 6.1: Analyzing Media
- Worksheet 6.2: Facts vs. Opinions

### TEACHING STRATEGIES

#### Hook: 25-30 min

1. Review the concept of media. Media is the communication of information and messages to people.
2. Collect and share one or more examples of media related to the election (e.g., newscast summary or news article, candidate's blog, party's campaign ad on TV or in the newspaper, campaign flyer). For each piece, initiate a discussion related to the following:
  - Who is the writer or source?
  - Who is the audience?
  - Who paid for it?
3. Have a closing discussion: Which type of media did you find to be the most effective and why? Which type of media did you find to be the most credible and why?

#### Instruction: 10-15 min

1. Media can be generally divided into three main types: paid, earned and owned.
  - Paid media: Publicity or awareness gained through paid advertising, such as TV commercials or newspaper ads.
  - Earned media: Publicity or awareness gained through efforts other than advertising, such as news coverage.
  - Owned media: Self-managed promotional platforms, such as a website, blog, Facebook page, YouTube channel and Twitter feed.
2. Media is often 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 geographic reach and strives to maintain journalistic 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.

3. The news media plays an important role in elections. News media reports on the events of an election campaign, provides a way for parties and candidates to get their message out, encourages debate between the parties and candidates and provides a way for citizens to communicate their concerns and opinions.

**Discussion: 5-10 min**

Do you read any newspapers or watch the news? What type of news media do you consume and how often?

**Activity: 20 min and homework**

1. Explain to students that in most cases, the news media provides factual coverage without letting its opinions (biases) interfere. However, the news media also produces articles which are an analysis or reflection of a particular situation, event or person. These are called editorials or opinion pieces because they share opinions.
2. Share an example of a news story and an editorial related to the election. As a class, distinguish between the two examples and help students understand the difference between opinion and fact.
3. For homework or in class, ask students to read through a newspaper and analyze four stories related to the election using Worksheet 6.1.

**Debrief: 5-10 min**

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

- What have you learned about the different types of media?
- What is the role of news media in election campaigns?
- Why is it important to read multiple sources of news?
- Why is it important to know the difference between opinion and fact?

**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. 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. Create a classroom social media account (e.g., Twitter) to track campaign news, the parties and the local candidates running for election 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 classroom Twitter feed.

C. As a class, have students analyze a campaign commercial for one or more of the political parties. Ask them to determine whether the advertisement promotes the political party’s platform, or whether it attacks another party. They should identify the main message of the ad, what images are shown to support that message, and analyze whether they believe the ad is effective or achieves its goal.

D. 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? Why might this be important?

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

*What are the different types of media?*

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, Twitter feed, Facebook page and YouTube channel.

The various types of media can also be 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.

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

In most cases, the news media provides 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 produces 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 message 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](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan)
- The Leader Post — [www.leaderpost.com](http://www.leaderpost.com)
- The Star Phoenix — [www.thestarphoenix.com](http://www.thestarphoenix.com)
- Prince Albert Daily Herald — [www.paherald.sk.ca](http://www.paherald.sk.ca)
- The Estevan Mercury — [www.estevanmercury.ca](http://www.estevanmercury.ca)
- Humboldt Journal — [www.humboldtjournal.ca](http://www.humboldtjournal.ca)
- The Melfort Journal — [www.melfortjournal.com](http://www.melfortjournal.com)
- Meridian Booster — [www.meridianbooster.com](http://www.meridianbooster.com)
- Weyburn Review — [www.veyburnreview.com](http://www.veyburnreview.com)
- The Yorkton News — [www.yorktonnews.com](http://www.yorktonnews.com)

National news organizations also dedicate some coverage to provincial elections:

- The Globe and Mail — [www.theglobeandmail.com](http://www.theglobeandmail.com)
- The National Post — [www.nationalpost.com](http://www.nationalpost.com)
- CBC News — [www.cbc.ca/news](http://www.cbc.ca/news)
- CTV News — [www.ctvnews.ca](http://www.ctvnews.ca)
- Global News — [www.globalnews.ca](http://www.globalnews.ca)

Aboriginal news sources:

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