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# MEDIA EVOLUTION AND THE INVERSION OF INFLUENCE CONTROL IN THE UNITED STATES

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JCSP 45

*Exercice Solo Flight*

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**MEDIA EVOLUTION AND THE INVERSION OF  
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By Major James Barker

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## **MEDIA EVOLUTION AND THE INVERSION OF INFLUENCE CONTROL IN THE UNITED STATES**

The democratic foundations of American society mean that media (for its tie to public opinion) is the glue that bonds the American people with their government.<sup>1</sup> Within the United States (US) and other Western societies, the media has continually evolved, changing the way people receive and consume information with each new technological stride. In turn, this has changed the ways in which government seeks to influence and manage its relationship with the public. Traditional forms of media (such as print) offered institutions the opportunity to work closely with content-creators to carefully curate and edit whatever messages they chose to convey while distribution techniques ensured a limited number of sources and thus minimal competition between them. Overall, this afforded political institutions and practitioners a high degree of influence over the people who would consume the distributed information. While newer forms of old media (beginning with the telegraph and continuing through the introduction of radio and television) grew from this dynamic, they also laid the ground work for a looming shift from which new media would develop. This paper will discuss how the advent of new media (from 1990 onward) has fulfilled the inversion of media control, shifting influential power from government to people through a competitive abundance of emotionally-driven content, and will also discuss the widespread implications of this change, ranging from the stability of career politicians to a political institution's ability to act in its nation's best interest.

As a roadmap, this essay will be tackled in six parts. Part one will discuss the relationship between politics, the people, and media. Part two will establish a baseline of key terms, as well

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Gainous, Kevin Wagner, *Tweeting to Power: The Social Media Revolution in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 96.

as an understanding of how old media was leveraged in the past. Part three will address the foundations of new media, as well as the inversion of influence to set the stage for part four, which specifically addresses this inversion. Part five deals with new media consequences in relation to politics, politicians, and people whereas part six will offer considerations for other pertinent concepts outside the scope of this essay.

## **PART I: MANAGEMENT OF PEOPLE, THE GLUE OF DEMOCRACY**

By its founding constitution, the American government is established as an agent of the people.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the people are not subjugated by inherent governmental authority, rather the government derives its power from the people with the purpose of carrying out the collective peoples' will. This dynamic gives critical importance to the relationship between the American people, politicians, and political institutions, and necessitates a conduit of communication between them.

Since government power is ultimately granted by the public, governmental institutions cannot act against public opinion without consequence and the risk of irreparable damage to institutional legitimacy and personal politicians' careers. However, the public does not generally possess the expertise and experience required to make decisions in the nation's best interest. As Evgeny Morozov stated, "it seems naïve to expect ordinary citizens to have well informed views on how to restructure Greece's euro debt or regulate nanotechnology."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, politicians and political institutions are entrusted to make policy decisions (often accounting for both internal and external factors outside their control) while simultaneously adhering to the whims of public opinion. In reference to this (in regards to the American Civil War) President Abraham

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Brooks, Douglas L. Koopman, J. Matthew Wilson, *Understanding American Politics: Second Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2013), 105.

<sup>3</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013), 105.

Lincoln said, “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me”<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, US founding father Alexander Hamilton used the term “great beast” to describe this powerful (but not always wise) will of the people and to imply the challenge that comes with balancing it against the actual needs of the nation<sup>5</sup>.

Considering that national requirements and the will of the people don’t always align, the government has long sought ways to educate public opinion toward matters it deems in the nation’s best interest. Forcing strict obedience, though possibly the simplest answer, is distinctly anti-American, as evident through the previously described structure of governance.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the government must have a means of dialogue with the public through which it can both influence and understand its’ people. This is where the media comes into play.

The media functions as a necessary conduit of information between the people and government, allowing for the communication of ideas which can sway public opinion and, in turn, influence governmental policy. It is central to shaping issues for public opinion, and is of particular importance to political practitioners. But, media itself comes in many forms, and each one functions differently. Accordingly, the government must continually adapt its use of the media tool as technology presses it further and further into unprecedented territory.

## **PART II: MEDIA BASELINE AND OLD MEDIA DYNAMICS**

Before discussing specifics about the media and how it relates to the management of relationships within a democracy, key terms must be established. These terms range from

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy: Partisan Ambition and American Statecraft* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 129.

<sup>5</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 5

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

media<sup>7</sup>, the medium<sup>8</sup> and if it is old<sup>9</sup>, new<sup>10</sup>, mass<sup>11</sup>, social<sup>12</sup>, or digital<sup>13</sup>. Additionally, fake news<sup>14</sup> will be discussed both historically and currently. Other terms will be defined throughout.

Old media's place between people and government was largely determined by the significant control its mediums allowed creators to have over content, and the comparably inefficient distribution techniques and literacy requirements that limited its reach (Figure 1). With print, for instance, there was a necessary production lag between an occurrence and subsequent news of the event reaching an audience. This meant that there was generally time for arguments to be carefully constructed, reviewed, and edited before being disseminated to the public. Beyond that, the laborious methods of production (especially in the early days of print) along with the expense of both production and distribution naturally limited the number of content sources available. This kept competition between sources to a minimum and meant that individual sources were consumed slowly and more deliberately by the public, who didn't have a plethora of material vying for their attention.

These factors, along with the one-way nature of print which did not allow for an immediate response from the consumer, contributed to a skewed dynamic of influence between the people and government in regards to the media. Under this model, content creators were positioned as speakers, and consumers as listeners. Accordingly, governmental institutions and politicians could utilize the media from a one-sided position of influence to sway the public. This not only allowed opportunities to thoroughly inform the public on matters of national interest,

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<sup>7</sup> Media: primary means of mass communication.

<sup>8</sup> Medium: means through which something is communicated or expressed.

<sup>9</sup> Old Media: communication technologies and techniques from 1776-1980; includes print, radio, and television.

<sup>10</sup> New Media: communication technologies and techniques from 1990-now; includes all previous media with the inclusion of cable news, digital, and social.

<sup>11</sup> Mass Media: communicating medium that is able to reach local and abroad audiences.

<sup>12</sup> Social Media: networks through which millions of people receive and broadcast simultaneously.

<sup>13</sup> Digital Media: communicating medium involving the internet.

<sup>14</sup> Fake News: information presented as factual but is false or misleading.

but also to take shortcuts that utilized misinformation and/or emotions to sway opinions. In other words, it made the use of propaganda easy. As early as the Revolutionary War, pamphlets containing dubious facts or outright lies about adversaries were disseminated, arguably impacting the nation's very founding.<sup>15</sup> This early example of "fake news" serves as proof of the power media can wield.

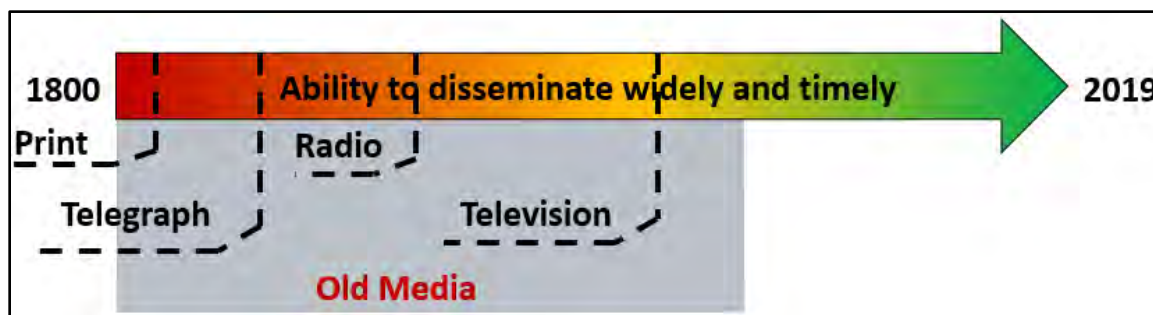


Figure 1.

### PART III: OLD MEDIA AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF INFLUENCE INVERSION

There was no sudden change concerning media and the manner in which it was used by politicians in old media. However, several technological developments affecting techniques of media production and distribution demonstrate a gradual evolution that set the stage for what would eventually become new media. One of the first crucial steps in this transition was the rise of electricity and subsequent development of the telegraph in the mid-1800s.<sup>16</sup>

No longer reliant on the physical transportation of materials (a fundamental change to media at the time), the telegraph allowed for much timelier distribution of information over greater distances.<sup>17</sup> However, the methodology made brevity paramount, therefore making the telegraph incompatible with the long and thought-out arguments print could allow. Interestingly,

<sup>15</sup> Cailin O'Conner, James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 152.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Flew, Richard Smith, *New Media: An Introduction, Third Canadian Edition* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2014), 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

some of the concerns that arose with the arrival of the telegraph are similar to those being raised today. Primarily, due to the fast paced and snippet nature of electronic communication, many intellectually minded people worried the telegraph would lead to a degradation of public discourse.<sup>18</sup> This also highlights another challenge that is relevant today; the ability to balance broader access with content depth. Both concerns remain pertinent topics because new developments in media following the telegraph furthered these trends.

The bridge from written content to sound, achieved with radio, was another crucial milestone in media development. Radio broadcasts increased the capacity for both speed and quantity of dissemination even more than the telegraph, but it also brought personality and emotion into the media equation like never before. Hearing someone's actual voice, along with the emotion conveyed through their message in real-time, added a personal element to media that made it more relatable to the consuming public. In 1928 Collier's magazine commented on this impact by stating, "radio makes politics personal and interesting and therefore important."<sup>19</sup> As radio became more popular and widespread, the strength of an emotionally charged and well orated statement began to cement its place. It was the difference between reading an argument on paper and hearing the same content delivered in a rousing speech. Not only did the ability to deliver content in this manner give content with high emotions an edge, it also began to place emphasis on the personality of the content creator alongside the actual argument they delivered. For this reason, it may be considered the first hint of social media, foreshadowing the impact personality and emotion would later have in new media.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 277.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Flew, Richard Smith, *New Media...*53.



While not quite two-way communication, radio also brought the consumer's closer in terms of response. With the ability to call in to radio stations (and sometimes be broadcast on air) the consumer gained a limited ability to voice their own opinions and reactions through media for others to hear. Additionally, as available sources of media increased (from print, to telegraph, and radio, etc.), competition between forms began to increase as well. With more options to choose from, media consumers began to exercise their opinion through choice. In such a way, the foundations were laid for the public to gain control in the media dynamic.

The last and largest impact within old media was the television, which saw widespread use by the 1950s.<sup>21</sup> Following the pattern of development established by telegraph and radio, television brought new considerations to media through the merging of picture with sound. This changed the way in which politicians and political institutions governed due to the pervasive way in which the television could shape a story.<sup>22</sup> By working closely with content creators, politicians could still influence what would be aired, but the personal element and emotional impact popularized by radio was only increased with the addition of picture, prompting creators to purposefully appeal to these elements. This, in turn, further increased the public's control over media, since the content was now being tailored with the public's interests (though not exclusively) in mind.

Additionally, live broadcasts in both radio and television made communication instant (though still mostly one-way). With competition for viewership between sources already increasing, those who could get the message out first would earn an advantage. This desire and ability by content creators to disseminate news in a timely fashion contributed to a new level of transparency with less time for messages to be tailored, and similarly furthered the pattern of

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<sup>21</sup> Terry Flew, Richard Smith, *New Media*...57.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 13.

trading depth of content for swift brevity. Furthermore, live broadcasts opened up the possibility for unforeseen happenings or messages to reach the public entirely unfiltered. While this did not necessarily increase the public's control over media, it represented an overall decline in control of media content.

An example of this challenge is the live broadcast of President John F. Kennedy's motorcade procession on 22 November 1963. Though now regarded as a point of major historical and political significance, the events that occurred that day were unanticipated. Thus, an unprepared public watched the President's assassination in real-time, right along with the equally shocked politicians and institutions that would be expected to organize a national response. With earlier forms of media (such as print, and even radio to a certain degree) these politicians would have been given the opportunity to craft their message before (or very shortly after) news reached the public. But in this case, their response was inherently limited by an existing baseline of public knowledge. Before politicians even had the opportunity to consider a reaction, the public already knew what had happened and had begun to speculate.

### **Old Media to New Media; A Shift in Techniques and Expectations**

By the mid-twentieth century, the role television had in affecting the US audience's opinion was undeniable. However, while a few key events (such as the aforementioned assassination) would temporarily invert the relationship of control between people and political institutions, most of the time content creators still dictated what was shown, therefore the nexus of content control still rested with them. For the latter half of the century the mediums of old media, including radio and television, would remain relatively unchanged from a technological perspective, but traditional journalists and organizations like National Broadcast Company

(NBC) continued to change the mechanics of information communication until the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> The techniques they introduced would begin to reach a level of mass media never before seen and lay the foundations for the multi-directional dialog that new media would later cement.

As competition between media sources continued to increase, content creators were forced to develop new ways of garnering consumer attention if they wished to remain relevant. Building off the foundations of live television broadcast, organizations such as Ted Turner's Cable News Network (CNN), which launched in 1980<sup>24</sup>, responded to this competition by bringing round the clock live global news to American audiences. This had both spatial and temporal impacts as news from remote corners of the world could now be brought to the viewer almost instantaneously.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, it created what is known as the CNN effect, wherein "news media acts as a force that drives foreign policy decisions".<sup>26</sup> Similar to the impact sound and emotion had on radio, compelling images of human suffering in other parts of the world could evoke a strong response from the public who would then demand government response to issues that might not benefit national interests. In the 1990s Dick Cheney voiced this the importance of the CNN effect on public emotions by stating (in reference to military efforts in the Gulf War), "The military is finished in this society, if we screw this up."<sup>27</sup> While the media couldn't, and still can't, change policies by itself, given the right conditions it has a profound effect on the process of developing policies.<sup>28</sup>

Aside from geographic expansion of coverage, many televised news networks also began opting for brief snippets of attention-grabbing information more and more over complete stories.

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<sup>23</sup> Terry Flew, Richard Smith, *New Media...*56.

<sup>24</sup> Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1997), vii.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, viii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

This technique, dubbed “churnalism” came in direct response to the abundance of informational content quickly becoming available, and served multiple purposes.<sup>29</sup> First, the brief nature of this material allowed the source to disseminate the info almost instantly (since it required very little prep-work), serving a competitive function against other news coverage sources. Additionally, it offered the viewer key facts while demanding very little of their actual attention. Furthermore, these snippets (characterized as developing stories) promised regular updates, prompting viewers to return their attention to the source repeatedly.<sup>30</sup> In terms of content control, however, this technique was a departure from earlier models which allowed numerous takes to get the phrasing exactly right. With this newer form of fast-paced live coverage, there were no re-dos. While a 24/7 news network could allow for a politician to get an additional message in later in the day, that first response had already been broadcast to the masses.<sup>31</sup> This presented a challenge for politicians to balance the competitive requirement for timely information with the need to develop and hone proper messaging.

#### **PART IV: MANAGEMENT OF POLITICS, THE NEW GLUE OF DEMOCRACY**

As old media evolved into new media, spurred by gusts of technology and competitively-driven innovation, the power of influence over media content creators had already begun to shift from the hands of politicians and political institutions to the people. With the advent of internet and digital media, this inversion seems to have been completed. Much like live TV and radio, the internet allows for the instantaneous distribution of information, but it has also spawned a practically infinite number of sources, unprecedented content volume, and ground-breaking consumer participation. While these factors have greatly increased the breadth and speed of

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<sup>29</sup> Glenn W. Richardson Jr, *Social Media and Politics: A New Way to Participate in the Political Process* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2017), 103.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>31</sup> Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy...* 83.

media's reach, they've also "impacted the ways in which political concerns are expressed, conducted, depicted, and reflected upon."<sup>32</sup> contributing to a steep decline in quality, depth of discussion, and content creator control over their evolving message (Figure 2).

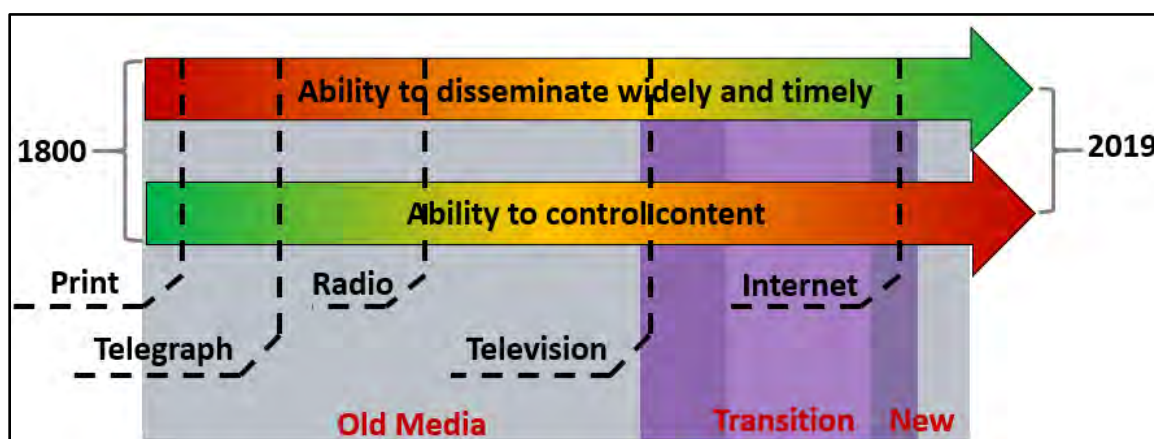


Figure 2.

One of the most fundamental changes the internet brought to media was multidirectional communication between content consumers and creators. Print, radio, and television had all been essentially one-way, with few-to-no avenues for direct consumer response, or two-way at best, limiting response to a singular interaction (like a listener calling into a radio station). With the rise of digital media, however, information could now flow in innumerable ways between people, institutions, professionals, and the like. With access to a public library computer, the public not only gained access to the tremendous content of the internet, but also the ability to contribute content themselves via a number of social media platforms with increasingly wide audience reach. Within a fraction of the time it took old media techniques and technologies to develop new, people went from bystanders to active participants.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Glenn W. Richardson Jr, *Social Media and Politics: A New Way to Participate in the Political Process* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2017), 79.

<sup>33</sup> Jason Gainous, Kevin Wagner, *Tweeting to Power...*6.

As the technology required for this became the norm, hopes were high that an unprecedented level of discourse and political transparency would result.<sup>34</sup> However, while it is clear that citizens can and should be involved in deliberations on a variety of issues presented in the media, the fear that intellectuals had with the rise of the telegraph remains. Easy access to digital media and the resulting bloom of available content has contributed to an overwhelming abundance of information all vying for consumer attention. Consumers are bombarded with so much information from every direction, that it has become (ironically) more difficult for a single source to garner any attention.<sup>35</sup>

Resultantly, both media creators and politicians who rely on new media mediums are essentially forced to cater content toward whatever will gain and maintain audience attention, regardless of quality, if they hope to get any message out at all. This is similar to an old aphorism in journalism, “If a dog bites a man it is not news, but if a man bites a dog it is.”<sup>36</sup> In essence, nobody reads the news to learn about disasters that didn’t happen, chemicals that aren’t harmful, or the humdrum actions of day to day policy creation. This abundance in new media mediums only furthers the power of novel or emotionally-compelling content for its ability to quickly grab consumer’s attention without demanding much effort from them. As Malcolm Gladwell states, “Social networks are effective at increasing participation – by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires.”<sup>37</sup> As such, the churnalism developed by 24/7 television networks has become the norm, giving consumers bite-sized chunks of information one at a time. While these tactics may help information reach the public amidst an overwhelming abundance of content, it

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<sup>34</sup> Jacob Silverman, *Terms of Service*...22.

<sup>35</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything*...xii.

<sup>36</sup> Cailin O’Conner, James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 155.

<sup>37</sup> Glenn W. Richardson Jr, *Social Media and Politic*...30.

largely eliminates room for deep discussion and analysis. The resulting “novelty bias” essentially omits topic, facts, and arguments that don’t happen to be new, emotionally potent, or even particularly interesting, regardless if they are vitally important.<sup>38</sup>

The broad range of new media medium choice coupled with the manner of emotionally charged snippet information has also deepened ideological divides amongst the public. New media has made it easy to ignore displeasing content in favor of that which reaffirms existing views. Furthermore, “social media allows us to construct and prune our social networks to surround ourselves with others who share our view and biases and to refuse interaction with those that don’t”.<sup>39</sup> Over time, this has created nearly impenetrable echo chambers that corrupt true education and understanding, and make it increasingly harder to facilitate meaningful discussion.

## **PART V: CONSEQUENCES OF INFLUENCE INVERSION**

While media and its place as a conduit of communication between the public and government has evolved drastically throughout the past century, its importance in this position has not changed. Similarly, the government still draws its power from the American people and must therefore stay attuned to matters of public opinion and balance them with national interest. For politicians and governmental institutions, this means new media has required new tactics for reaching and communicating with the public.

The primary challenge for politicians with old media was reaching a critical mass of the population. However, once this was achieved the argument presented was generally absorbed slowly and with great consideration (as previously discussed in relation to print). Historically, content creators afforded a level of trust and reverence to high levels of political office. As

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<sup>38</sup> Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*...156.

<sup>39</sup> Cailin O’Conner, James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age*...16.

Hodding Carter stated during President Carter's administration, "The mass media in America have an overwhelming tendency to jump up and down and bark in concert whenever the White House – any White House, snaps its fingers."<sup>40</sup> This idea was used and notably highlighted through what President Teddy Roosevelt called the "bully pulpit",<sup>41</sup> which gave senior politicians the ability to sway the opinions of the people through media. Essentially, the respect afforded their position gave presidents the leverage required to articulate arguments for due consideration. Specifically addressing the presidency, Jeffrey Tulis states, "...presidents have a duty to constantly defend themselves publicly, to promote policy initiatives nationwide, and to inspire the population."<sup>42</sup>

By contrast, today's new media based on fast-paced snippets does not afford such a luxury. Not only has the way in which consumers absorb information changed to a degree that deep-seated arguments struggle to find an audience, the emotional power of personality has also shifted the focus to the person in office over the actual office itself.<sup>43</sup> In 2004 Cornell Belcher, a political poll expert who worked President Obama's campaign quoted a famous hip-hop musician to articulate this point by saying, "I'm not the businessman, I'm the business, man. You're not the message man, you're the message, man."<sup>44</sup> With new media, politicians' own personalities and their emotional appeal determines the merit of their message as much (or sometimes more) than the actual content.

Overall, this focus on personality destabilizes the security of career politicians. Though public image has always been of concern to elected officials, new media's wide and

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<sup>40</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival...* 117.

<sup>41</sup> Dan Pfeiffer, *Yes We (Still) Can: Politics in the Age of Obama, Twitter, and Trump* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2018), 99.

<sup>42</sup> Laura Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure...* 9.

<sup>43</sup> Jeffery Cohen, *The Presidency in the Era of 24-Hour News* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Dan Pfeiffer, *Yes We (Still) Can...* 52.



instantaneous reach has increased this. This creates tension between politicians, political institutions, and news outlets because the outlets will immediately attempt to capitalize on political agent's misstatements or gaffes in order to keep their viewership alive.<sup>45</sup> Social media and churnalism have the ability to magnify relatively small errors on the part of a politician by sharing them over and over again for as long as the "scandal" will draw attention. Once disseminated, this information cannot be recalled and is capable of causing reputation damage without accounting for understandable human error. This not only exacerbates the lack of meaningful dialogue by drawing focus away from true political issues, but also hamstring politicians' effectiveness by forcing them to spend more time and energy maintaining their own reputations than might otherwise be due. While traditional styles of political communication such as press releases or press conferences are still used, the cultural challenge of adapting to new media mediums the public would rather consume content from is daunting.<sup>46</sup>

Political effectiveness has also been affected by the increasing polarization (previously discussed) new media has caused. The public's ability to use media simply to reaffirm their own views rather than considering multiple arguments, coupled with an emerging focus on politicians' personalities over their office has created a deep divide between opposing viewpoints (and against the politicians that represent them). Supporters of each side simply dive further into their own camps, often refusing to listen to a particular argument simply because they don't like the politician who presented it (or vice versa). Inevitably, this inability to sway opinions results in high levels of dissatisfaction from both sides during a debate, and even more so when the other side is perceived to have gained ground through office or policy.

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<sup>45</sup> Dan Pfeiffer, *Yes We (Still) Can...104*.

<sup>46</sup> Ines Mergel, *Social Media in the Public Sector: A Guide to Participation, Collaboration, and Transparency in the Networked World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 58.

The idea of public dissatisfaction is also supported by the back-and forth switch the presidency has experienced between political parties over the past few decades. Historically, the presidency has changed political parties only occasionally with the election of a new candidate, typically remaining with a given party for at least two presidents in a row. However, since Bill Clinton took office after George H. W. Bush in 1992 the political party has switched with every new president. While this may not impact policy directly, the instability of politicians' careers and which political party remains in power can make it difficult to effectively enact long term policies. With such divided support, new ideas proposed by one side are often met with strong and unyielding opposition from the other. Additionally, frequent changes to the political party in power often mean that as soon as one party successfully enacts something, the other party comes behind to "fix" it, resulting in an ongoing tug-of-war that ultimately accomplishes very little.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 exemplify the power of a strong emotional message, long term public dissatisfaction, and political party transitions. As with JFK's assassination, the World Trade Center attacks became national news nearly the instant the first tower was hit, and within minutes nearly the entire nation was tuned in for live developments. The public then witnessed the attack on the second tower, and subsequent collapse of both towers in real-time. The wave of emotion and patriotism that took hold after such a publicly-experienced tragedy was magnified by the interconnected nature of modern media and even spawned hit songs like "Proud to Be an American" and "God Bless the USA" which frequented radio broadcasts for months afterward. Though this was far outside any politicians' control, the emotional fervor following this event was successfully leveraged by politicians in power to justify development of an external grand strategy based on strength as a form of dissuasion.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Trubowitz, *Politics and Strategy*...40.

Strong backing from the public for external decisions results in strong external decisions by politicians, while the inverse is also true.<sup>48</sup> However, since the initial surge of strong support the will of the people has greatly shifted in relation to the aforementioned grand strategy.

Other cases involving foreign policy and new media highlight how complicated the relationship between the two has become. The US response to the Rwandan Civil War, or more specifically its selective response to the refugees who fled Rwanda's borders in July of 1994, highlights some of these factors. As Warren P. Strobel stated,

“There seems little doubt that televised images of this flood of humanity and the refugees’ desperate condition helped propel President Clinton to announce on July 22 that the U.S. military would immediately begin a massive effort to assist the UNHCR and other relief agencies in dealing with the tragedy.”<sup>49</sup>

Televised images of human suffering appealed to the public's sympathies (in relation to the CNN effect) and created pressure for government action. While this may seem fairly straightforward (media stirs emotions, public outcry creates pressure, and government acts accordingly), Strobel also notes that earlier coverage of war atrocities in Rwanda had not created this effect or resulted in US intervention.

This discrepancy in public response highlights another, more nuanced aspect of new media's effect on foreign policy. The difference seems largely two-part. First, the refugee situation featured stirring “pictures of women and children- innocents in need”, as opposed to members of a foreign nation engaged in their own war. Second, was the assessment of whether or not US intervention could make a tangible difference without incurring undue cost to itself.

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<sup>48</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*... 11.

<sup>49</sup> Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*...143.

Highly aware of the media coverage that would result (along with other factors), policy makers feared backlash if they engaged in efforts that would result in US casualties. This serves to illustrate that even in light of the CNN effect, images and media simply help to “shape the environment in which (foreign policy) decisions are made, rather than dictating the policy outright.”<sup>50</sup>

Even if new media cannot shape policy directly, the drive-by impact of public pressure on policy is still undeniable.<sup>51</sup> And “if government officials stray too far from their public mandate, the news media will sooner or later make this apparent,”<sup>52</sup> provoking public backlash and damage to politicians’ careers. Accordingly, politicians and government institutions are learning to use the media to reach the American public in the way it has come to prefer. Examples of this include President Barak Obama when he became the first sitting president to appear as a guest on a late-night comedy show<sup>53</sup>, and current President Donald Trump’s use of the social media platform, Twitter. Aside from social media, politicians have begun utilizing other tactics popularized by new media, most particularly bullet-point “churnalism” with emotional appeal. Amidst the abundance of modern media, this may be the only way to reach the public, which is still a critical factor necessary for connecting the will of governed with the governors. The irony, however, lies in the fact that while new media came with hopes of increased transparency and dialogue, it has essentially forced a resurgence of propaganda.

The use of propaganda is uncannily similar to the concept of churnalism, or the use of emotionally-compelling content. Though propaganda or “fake news” is nothing new, and has

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<sup>50</sup> Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*...142.

<sup>51</sup> Chara De Franco, *Media, Power, and the Transformation of War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 11.

<sup>52</sup> Warren P. Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy*...9.

<sup>53</sup> Dan Pfeiffer, *Yes We (Still) Can*...75.

indeed had a long history in the United States, the danger it poses in new media is found in its unprecedented ability to spread and adapt. As already described, social media platforms and ease of internet access allow members of the public to propagate information unchecked based largely on emotional or view-affirming grounds and without the need to verify its veracity.<sup>54</sup>

## **PART VI: NEW MEDIA, WHAT ELSE?**

One issue of vital importance that is outside the scope of this essay is the concern that institutions use social and digital media to conduct surveillance on citizens. David Lyon states the US population already lives within an, “emerging culture of surveillance” and simplifies it into three types; by government, by companies, and by us.<sup>55</sup> While there is undeniable benefit to this through the identification of security threats, the ability to receive advertisements of interest, and the social connective tissue that comes from staying informed with an individual’s community, it is impossible to deny the impact on intellectual or opinion freedom that could arise.

New media technologies that can reach any person with an internet connection will continue to shape the relationship dynamic between media, people, and institutions. Since these technologies rely heavily on the propaganda-like churnalism previously discussed, the door is open for continuing polarization and a cemented development of “us vs them” mentalities. However, technology platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have also created an unprecedented web of global interconnectivity, allowing someone in Wisconsin to meet, get to know, and chat daily with someone from Hong Kong (or almost anywhere in the world).<sup>56</sup>

Contrary to polarization, this humanizes individuals and fosters a sense of global community

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<sup>54</sup> Cailin O’Conner, James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age*...152.

<sup>55</sup> Jacob Silverman, *Terms of Service*...129.

<sup>56</sup> Danny Hayes, Matt Guardino, *Influence from Abroad: Foreign Voices, the Media, and U.S. Public Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 136.

which could impact future policy in a positive way. In a world that is constantly digitally connected it is difficult to truly separate humanity from itself, regardless of the state the individual belongs to. Additionally, fostering conversations that take place across a wide range of nationalities help shape activist and social movements through the creation of diverse and original content with global dissemination.<sup>57</sup>

Conversely, awareness of the dangers new media presents could help find ways to overcome them. In an effort to assist with the credibility of media content on the internet, for instance, several technology institutions have implemented tools which are open for the public to use. One such tool which can directly counter fake news is the, “Truth Goggles Project” developed by a graduate student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This software will scan media articles on public websites for factual claims against a database of pre-input facts. Any media content of a factually dubious nature will then be highlighted and the consumer can see the degree to which it is assumed to be true.<sup>58</sup> If the public develops responsible habits of information consumption (that tools like the Truth Goggles Project promote), new media’s potential to exponentially increase meaningful dialogue could be realized.

Evgeny Morozov has made the observation that the internet and new media matters, we just don’t know how, and that fact paradoxically makes it matter more.<sup>59</sup> Though new media developed from the historically familiar dynamics of old media, the unprecedented technologies and techniques it has introduced have contributed to new (and continually evolving) models of communication we are still working to understand.

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<sup>57</sup> Glenn W. Richardson Jr, *Social Media and Politics*...81.

<sup>58</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything*... 119.

<sup>59</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*...30.

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