

# Impact of media on politics



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Impact of Media on Politics The role media plays in politics is undeniable. Our soundbite culture with its inherent limited attention span dictates a “McNugget” of information. Unfortunately this often leads to misrepresentations being accepted as fact. A glaring example of this was the Killian documents controversy. In September 2004, the CBS program 60 Minutes Wednesday aired a report critical of President George W.

Bush’s service in the United States National Guard. The four documents included criticisms of Bush’s service in the Guard during the 1970s. These documents were supposedly created by Bush’s commander, the late Lieutenant Colonel Jerry B. Killian. It was also reported that the documents were obtained by a CBS News producer from Lt.

Col. Bill Burkett, a former officer in the Texas Army National Guard (TexARNG). During the report, Dan Rather asserted the documents had been authenticated by experts hired by CBS News. Within hours of the broadcast, several internet forums and blogs were bombarded with postings from forensic document examiners. Assertions were made questioning the discrepancies in the typography and the content.

For instance, one of these experts recreated the exact text of one of the memos on a Microsoft Word document. He ran a copy on the copier, then copied that copy. He continued this process 13 times with the final blurred result being an exact match to the supposedly authentic memo. Eventually, a number of these experts concluded that the memos were indeed forged documents.

For two weeks, Dan Rather and CBS defended the authenticity of the documents. Finally on September 20, 2004, Rather stated, “ If I knew then what I know now – I would not have gone ahead with the story as it was aired, and I certainly would not have used the documents in question. ” (Wikipedia, 2006). This whole event occurred less than two months before the incredibly contentious 2004 Presidential Election, which leads one to believe this was a deliberate attempt to undermine the credibility of the President and thusly cause him to lose the election. Additionally, many Republicans made allegations of political bias on the part of CBS staffers. On a lighter note, presidential candidate Bill Clinton made a surprise appearance on The Arsenio Hall Show during the 1992 Presidential Campaign.

He was trailing in the polls at the time so it was a very savvy attempt to capture the young voter. Mr. Clinton wore dark sunglasses and played “ Heartbreak Hotel” on his saxophone. In the end, Bill Clinton easily defeated George Bush and Ross Perot with 43 percent of the vote. Some pundits have suggested that this appearance turned the race around. Easily the most polarizing force in media today is talk radio.

In 1987 the FCC repealed the Fairness Doctrine. This regulation had required that stations provide free air time for responses to any controversial opinions that were broadcast. Now the opportunity was available for a level of flatly partisan programming. As referenced by Wikipedia, “ Talk radio provided an immediacy and a high degree of emotionalism that seldom is reached on television or in magazines.

Pew researchers found in 2004 that 17% of the public regularly listens to talk radio. This audience is mostly male, middle-aged and conservative. Among those who regularly listen to talk radio, 41% are Republican and 28% are Democrats. Furthermore, 45% describe themselves as conservatives, compared with 18% who say they are liberal. " Rush Limbaugh was the pioneer in the 1990s talk radio movement.

Rush's unprecedented success demonstrated a thirst for conservative Republican commentary that was delivered with a sense of credibility and, in many cases, a sense of humor. Rush continues to espouse daily on contemporary news, events, and social trends. Several other conservatives radio talk show hosts have ridden Rush's coattails to success of their own, including Sean Hannity, G. Gordon Liddy, Laura Ingraham, Neal Boortz, Michael Savage, Bill O'Reilly, Glenn Beck, and Michael Reagan (adopted son of former President Ronald Reagan). On the other side of the political spectrum, liberal talk radio has also emerged, albeit to lower ratings.

The Air America Radio network was founded in 2004 with the promise of being a " progressive alternative" to the conservative talk radio. Since signing on, Air America has been beset by legal and financial problems. There are also critics who believe that the long-format news programming on National Public Radio is presented with a liberal bias. A looming threat on the horizon for the dominant conservative talk radio format comes from the U. S. Congress. The recently elected Democratic majority has threatened to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine. Effectively, this would mean that a three hour Rush Limbaugh program would have to be followed by a three hour Al

Franken program. This would present a challenge to broadcasters and their respective companies, specifically from a revenue standpoint as liberal talk radio is not a money-maker.

The new media of the internet is turning into a political force as well. Many candidates have webpages and paged on Myspace, a popular social networking website. In addition, the advent of blogs and viral video content has hastened the amount of time a seemingly innocuous event can become a “ news” story. In 2006, Virginia Republican Senator George Allen was at a campaign stop. A “ tracker” named S. R.

Sidarth from the opposing campaign of Democrat Jim Webb was filming Allen, as he had done at every stop the Senator had made. Sidarth was of Indian ancestry, but was born and raised in Fairfax County, Virginia. Upon spotting Siddarth, Allen twice used the word “ macaca”, a slur meaning “ monkey” in francophone African nations. Within days the video was posted by the Webb campaign on Youtube, a popular video sharing website. From there, many national news organizations picked up the story.

Allen later apologized by saying he did not know what the word meant, but it was asserted that he did know, as his mother was a Francophone raised in French-colonial Tunisia. Although Allen did end up losing the election, the evidence is not conclusive as to the impact the “ macaca” incident had on the outcome. If nothing else, he was seen as a racist by some bloggers and comedians, who came to refer to him as “ Senator Macaca”. Media does have an almost immediate impact on politics. A very important example of this will be on display next summer in Denver at the 2008 Democratic

National Convention We will be able to observe the first-hand reporting and the predictable media spin to follow. References <http://www.>

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