



A Virtuous Circle?

The Impact of Political Communications in Post-Industrial Democracies (*)

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Abstract

During the last decade a rising tide of voices on both sides of the Atlantic has blamed the news media for growing public disengagement, ignorance of civic affairs, and mistrust of government. This idea has developed into something of an unquestioned orthodoxy in the popular literature in the United States. A related viewpoint more common in Europe regards the growth of professional political marketing by parties, including the mélange of spin, packaging and pollsters, as also contributing towards public cynicism.

But is the conventional wisdom correct? This paper, based on a systematic examination of the role of political communications in post-industrial societies, argues that the process of

political communications by the news media and by parties is not responsible for civic disengagement.

Part I summarizes the core assumptions in different theories of media malaise. **Part II** examines some of the key structural trends in the news industry that many believe are responsible for media malaise. **Part III** examines evidence for the impact of attention to the news media on selected indicators of civic engagement.

The conclusion develops the theory of 'a virtuous circle' to explain the pattern we find. Rather than mistakenly 'blaming the messenger', the study concludes that we need to understand and confront more deep-rooted flaws in systems of representative government.

Recent years have seen growing tensions between the ideals and the perceived performance of democratic institutions¹. While there is no 'crisis of democracy', many believe that all is not well with the body politic. Concern in the United States has focused on widespread cynicism about political institutions and leaders, fuelling fears about civic disengagement and a half-empty ballot box². The common view is that the American public turns off, knows little, cares less and stays home.

Similar worries echo in Europe. Commentators have noted a crisis of legitimacy following the steady expansion in the power and scope of the European Union despite public disengagement from critical policy choices³. The growth of critical citizens is open to many explanations, explored in a previous study⁴.

One of the most popular accounts attributes public disengagement to political communications. The political science literature on 'media malaise' or 'videomalaise' originated in the 1960s, developed in a series of scholarly articles in the post-Watergate 1970s, and rippled out to become the conventional wisdom in the popular culture of journalism and politics following a flood of books in the 1990s. The chorus of critics is loudest in the United States but similar echoes can be heard in Europe.

These accounts claim that common practices by the news media and by party campaigns hinder civic engagement, meaning learning about public affairs, trust in government, and political activism⁵. Media malaise theories share two core assumptions: (i) that the process of political communications has a significant *impact* upon civic engagement; and, (ii) that this

impact is in a *negative* direction. The core analytic model is outlined schematically in Figure 1.

(Figure 1 about here)

There is nothing particularly novel about these claims. Many critics expressed concern about the effects of the popular press on moral decline throughout the nineteenth century as newspapers became more widely available⁶. The phenomenon of the 'yellow press' in the 1890s caused worry about its possible dangers for public affairs. In the 1920s and 1930s, the earliest theories of mass propaganda were based on the assumption that authoritarian regimes could dupe and choreograph the public by manipulating radio bulletins and newsreels⁷.

Recent decades have seen multiple crusades against the supposed pernicious influence of the mass media, whether directed against violence in movies, the 'wasteland' of television, the impact on civic engagement of watching TV entertainment, the dangers of tobacco advertising, or the supposedly pernicious effects of pop music⁸.

While hardly new, what is different today is the widespread orthodoxy that has developed around this theory. Let us first outline the American and European accounts of media malaise and then consider some evidence surrounding this thesis.

I. Theories of Media Malaise

American theories of 'media malaise' emerged in the political science literature in the 1960s. Kurt and Gladys Lang were the first to connect the rise of network news with broader feelings of disenchantment with American politics. TV broadcasts, they argued, fuelled public cynicism by over-emphasizing political conflict and downplaying routine

policymaking in DC. This process, they suggested, had most impact on the 'inadvertent audience', who encountered politics because they happened to be watching TV when the news was shown, but who lacked much interest in, or prior knowledge about, public affairs⁹. The Langs proved an isolated voice at the time, in large part because the consensus in political communications stressed the minimal effects of the mass media on public opinion.

The idea gained currency in the mid-1970s since it seemed to provide a plausible reason for growing public alienation in the post-Vietnam and post-Watergate era. Michael Robinson first popularized the term 'videomalaise' to describe the link between reliance upon American television journalism and feelings of political cynicism, social mistrust, and lack of political efficacy. Greater exposure to television news, he argued, with its high 'negativism', conflictual frames, and anti-institutional themes, generated political disaffection, frustration, cynicism, self-doubt and malaise.¹⁰ For Robinson this process was most critical during election campaigns, where viewers were turned off, he argued, by TV's focus on the 'horse-race' at the expense of issues, analysis rather than factual information, and excessive 'bad news' about the candidates¹¹.

Many others echoed these claims over the years¹². According to Samuel Huntington, in a widely influential report for the Trilateral Commission, the news media had eroded respect for government authority in many post-industrial societies, contributing towards a widespread 'crisis' of democracy evident on the streets of Washington DC, Paris and Tokyo¹³.

During the 1990s the trickle of complaints about the news media became a popular deluge. For Entman, the free press falls far short of its ideals,

leaving too much of the American public ignorant and disconnected from politics¹⁴. For Neil Postman the major networks, driven by their hemorrhage of viewers to cable, have substituted tabloid television for serious political coverage¹⁵. For Roderick Hart, television produces an illusion of political participation, while encouraging passivity, thereby seducing America¹⁶. Neil Gabler argues that the political process has been repackaged into show business.¹⁷

Larry Sabato warns of the dangers of pack journalism producing a 'feeding frenzy'¹⁸. For Thomas Patterson, the press, in its role as election gatekeeper, has become a 'miscast' institution, out of order in the political system¹⁹. Cappella and Jamieson stress that strategic news frames of politics activate cynicism about public policy²⁰. Dautrich and Hartley conclude that the news media 'fail American voters'²¹.

James Fallows is concerned that down-market trends have produced the relentless pursuit of sensational, superficial, and populist²². All this breathless flim-flam, Schudson argues, comes at the expense of detailed and informed debate about policy issues²³. Hachten complains that public affairs journalism has been trivialized and corrupted²⁴. The role of public television in the US, long under-funded as a poor cousin, has been unable to compensate for the relentless drive for ratings of network and cable TV²⁵.

The list of complaints go on and on and on. The news media – particularly TV news - is blamed for a host of political ills. Criticisms have moved well beyond the halls of academe: many U.S. journalists share the belief that something is badly wrong with their profession²⁶ and the Committee of Concerned Journalists, led by Tom Rosensteel and Bill Kovach, has debated potential reforms to the profession²⁷.

In Europe similar voices can be heard although these accounts emphasize structural developments in the news industry and in party campaigning. Jay Blumler suggests that a 'crisis of civic communication' has afflicted Western Europe²⁸. Many fear that growing competition from commercial channels has undermined the quality and diversity of public service television²⁹. Dahlgren argues that the displacement of public service television by commercial channels has impoverished the public sphere³⁰. During the 1980s, the public sector experienced a massive program of privatization throughout Western Europe. During the same era, the growth of alternative commercial channels, breaking down the monopoly of public service broadcasting, undermined the rationale for subsidizing television through state resources. Schulz argues that in Germany the decline of public service broadcasting and the rise of commercial channels, the latter emphasizing the more sensational and negative aspects of political news, may have increased public cynicism³¹. Kaase fears that these developments may produce audiences segmented according to the amount of political information to which they are exposed, possibly reinforcing a 'knowledge gap'³².

In the print sector, there is widespread concern that increased competition for readers has increased the pressure on traditional standards of news, leading to 'tabloidization' or 'infotainment'. 'Yellow journalism' in the 1890s routinely highlighted the moral peccadilloes and sexual proclivities of the rich and famous. Sensationalism, crime and scandal in newspapers are hardly new, providing a popular alternative to the dull business of politics.³³ But today routine and daily front-page news about government scandals appears greater than in previous decades - whether sleaze in Britain, Tagentopoli in Italy, Recruit and Sagawa in Japan, or l'affaire

Lewinsky in America³⁴. This coverage is believed to corrode the forms of trust underpinning social relations and political authority). The process of 'tabloidization' may have gone further in Europe than in the American or Japanese press, with papers like *The Sun* or *Der Bild* leading the pack, each with many millions of readers. But similar phenomenon are evident in the chase for ratings in local TV news and 'all talk, all the time' cable news magazines in the U.S.

Many hope that the Internet can escape these problems, but others fear that this media may reinforce political cynicism. Owen and Davis conclude that the Internet provides new sources of information for the politically interested, but given uneven levels of access there are good grounds to be skeptical about its transformative potential for democratic participation³⁵. Murdock and Golding³⁶ argue that the new medium may merely reproduce, or even exacerbate, existing social biases in conventional political participation. Hill and Hughes believe that the Internet does not change people; it simply allows them to do the same things in a different way³⁷. Moreover the pace of breaking headlines on the net may in turn undermine journalistic standards in the old media, like the way *The Drudge Report* on the web scooped *Newsweek* in breaking the first Lewinsky story. The net also provides a platform that may exaggerate the voice of those well outside mainstream democratic politics, from white supremacy racists to bomb-making terrorists.

A related stream of commentators attributes the problems of political communications primarily to the practice of professional marketing. One of the most striking developments in many countries has been the declining importance of the 'pre-modern' campaign involving local party meetings, door-to-door canvassing and direct

voter-candidate contact. The rise of the 'modern' campaign is characterized by the widespread adoption of the techniques of political marketing³⁸. Strategic communications is part of the 'professionalization' of campaigning, giving a greater role to technical experts in public relations, news management, advertising, speech-writing and market research³⁹.

The rise of political marketing has been widely blamed for growing public cynicism about political leaders and institutions. The central concern is that the techniques of 'spin', selling and persuasion may have undermined the credibility of political leaders⁴⁰. If everything in politics is designed for popular appeal then it may become harder to trust the messages or messenger. Although lacking direct evidence of public opinion, Bob Franklin provides one of the clearest statements of this thesis, decrying the 'packaging of politics'⁴¹. Many others have expressed concern about the 'Americanization' of election campaigning, in Britain, Germany and Scandinavia, and the possible impact this may have had upon public confidence in political parties⁴². The use of 'negative' or attack advertising by parties and candidates has also raised anxieties that this practice may demobilize the electorate⁴³.

Therefore, to summarize, American and European accounts differ in the reasons given for media malaise.

Structural perspectives emphasize institutional developments common to many post-industrial societies, such as economic pressures moving the news industry down-market, the erosion of public service broadcasting, and the emergence of a more fragmented, multi-channel television environment.

Cultural accounts stress historical events specific to journalism in the United States, notably the growth of a

more adversarial news culture following Vietnam and Watergate.

Campaign accounts focus on the growth of political marketing with its attendant coterie of spin-doctors, advertising consultants and pollsters, reducing the personal connections between citizens and representatives.

Multiple interpretations therefore cluster within this perspective. Irrespective of these important differences, what all these accounts share, by definition, is the belief that public disenchantment with the political process is due, at least in part, to the process of political communications.

Of course there are counterclaims in the literature and the number of skeptics questioning the evidence media malaise has been growing in recent years. Earlier studies by the author found that, contrary to media malaise, although TV watching was related to some signs of apathy, attention to the news media was associated with positive indicators of civic engagement, in the United States and Britain, as well as other countries⁴⁴. Kenneth Newton showed that reading a broadsheet newspaper in Britain, and watching a lot of television news, was associated with greater political knowledge, interest, and understanding of politics⁴⁵. Christina Holtz-Bacha demonstrated similar patterns associated with attention to the news media in Germany⁴⁶, while Curtice, Schmitt-Beck and Schrott reported similarly positive findings in a five-nation study from elections in the early 1990s⁴⁷. The most recent examination of the American NES evidence, by Stephen Earl Bennett and his colleagues, found that trust in politics and trust in the news media went hand-in-hand, with no evidence that use of the news media was related to political cynicism⁴⁸.

So far, however, counterclaims have been published in scattered scholarly

studies, and thereby drowned out by the Greek chorus of popular lament for the state of modern journalism.

Before we all jump on the media malaise bandwagon, what is the solid evidence supporting this thesis? Here we can briefly outline two sources of data that throw skeptical light on some of the core claims, namely aggregate indicators of the major structural trends affecting the news media's political coverage in the post-war era, and survey evidence about the individual-level impact of attention to the news media on civic engagement.

Part II: Trends in the News Industry:

In examining the evidence for media malaise we need to distinguish between the *production, contents* and *effects* of political communications (as shown in Figure 1). While the production process has undoubtedly been transformed during the last fifty years, the impact of this upon the contents has not been well established, still less the influence upon the general public.

(Figure 1 about here)

The news industry has certainly changed in response to major technological, socio-economic and political developments in the post-war era. Since the 1950s, the printed press has seen greater concentration of ownership and a reduction in the number of available independent outlets. At the same time, however, many media malaise accounts fear that newspaper sales have declined in postindustrial societies and this is not the case. As shown in Figure 2, in the post-war era TV viewing surged but at the same time newspaper sales across OECD countries have remained stable. During the 1980s public television, which had enjoyed a state monopoly throughout much of Western Europe, faced increased competition from the proliferation of new terrestrial, cable,

satellite, digital and broadband television channels. Since the mid-1990s, the explosion of the Internet has challenged the predominance of television, a pattern most advanced in Scandinavia and North America.

(Figure 2 about here)

The net result of these developments is greater *fragmentation* and *diversification* of formats, levels and audiences in the available news outlets. The available comparative evidence suggests five important trends, each with important implications for structural claims of media malaise.

First, *overall news consumption is up*. During the last three decades the proportion of Europeans reading a newspaper everyday almost doubled, and the proportion watching television news everyday rose from one half in 1970 to almost three quarters in 1999 (see Table 1). Social trends, including patterns of higher literacy, affluence, and leisure, have probably contributed towards these developments.

(Table 1 about here)

Second, the *structure of the news industry varies widely across OECD states* and TV has not necessarily displaced newspapers as an important source of news in many societies. We often generalize based on the American literature but compared with other post-industrial societies, the U.S. proves exceptionally low in consumption of newspapers and TV news (see Figure 3 and Table 2). Other countries like Sweden, Austria and Germany are far heavier users of the press while there are far higher users of both newspapers and TV news in Finland, the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent the UK.

(Table 2 and Fig.3 about here)

Moreover *news formats and outlets have diversified*. In the 1960s viewers

normally got the news from the standard flagship evening news programs and current affairs programs. Today these have been supplemented by 24-hour rolling news, on-the-hour radio headlines, TV magazines and talk shows, as well as the panoply of online news sources. Access to the Internet has been exploding in many post-industrial societies. By the late-1990s, about a fifth of all Europeans, and half of all Americans and Scandinavians, surf online. Getting news is one of the most popular uses of the Internet in the US and Europe. As a result of all these developments in the news environment it has become easier to bump into the news, almost accidentally, than ever before.

In part as a result, recent decades have *broadened the social background of the news audience*, especially for the press. Tables 3 and 4 show regression models predicting the social background of regular newspaper readers and TV news viewers, using Eurobarometer surveys in five countries in 1970 and 1999. The results of the standardized coefficients show that readership has widened in terms of education, gender and class, with no shift in the age profile of readers.

(Tables 3 and 4 about here)

Lastly, the new information environment has greatly *expanded the opportunities to learn about public affairs* in different channels, programs, formats and levels. Since the 1970s, the amount of news and current affairs broadcast on public service television in OECD countries more than tripled (see Table 5). And of course this does not count the development of new commercial 24-hour news services like Sky and CNN.

(Table 5 about here)

But have structural trends eroded traditional standards of political coverage? Many commentators have

expressed concern about a decline in long-term 'hard' news, such as coverage of international affairs, public policy issues, and parliamentary debates. In its place, many suggest, news has 'dumbed down' to become 'infotainment', focusing on human-interest stories about scandal, celebrities and sex. 'Tabloid' papers in Britain, the 'boulevard press' in Germany, and local television news in the US, share many common characteristics.

Rather than an inexorable downwards erosion in the standards of serious journalism, it seems more accurate to understand trends during the 1980s and 1990s as representing a *diversification of the marketplace in terms of levels, formats and topics*. Soft news and 'infotainment' has undoubtedly grown in some sectors of the market, but serious coverage of political events, international affairs, and financial news has also steadily expanded in availability elsewhere. Endless Senate debates shown on *C-Span* coexist today with endless debates about sex and personal relationships on the *Jerry Springer Show*. *The Sun* sits on the same newsstands as *The Economist*. News.bbc.co.uk is as easily available as Amsterdam pornography sites.

Diversification does not mean that the whole of society is being progressively 'dumbed down' by trends in the news media. By focusing only on excesses in the popular end of the market, such as the wasteland of endless punditry on American cable TV talk shows or 'if it bleeds it leads' on local American TV news, we overlook dramatic changes such as the ability to watch live legislative debates, to witness natural disasters like Mozambique floods in real time, or to find online information about local government services. Potentially diversification may lead to another danger, namely greater divisions between the information haves and have-nots. But as we have seen the

audience for news has greatly expanded in size and broadened socially during the last quarter-century, not narrowed.

The evidence for other assumed long-term changes in the news culture remains limited we need more systematic data to establish whether, for example, there actually has been a growth in negative coverage of politicians during election campaigns, or whether a more adversarial relationship has developed between journalists and governments. The available studies, however, strongly suggest that developments in political coverage observed in particular countries are often highly particularistic and contextual, rather than representing trends common across post-industrial societies⁴⁹. For example, the most comprehensive comparison of news cultures in twenty-one countries, based on surveys of journalists, found almost no consensus about professional roles, ethical values and journalistic norms⁵⁰. Rather than the emergence of a single prevalent model of journalism, based on American norms, this suggests considerable diversity worldwide.

In the same way, without being able to discuss this in detail in this paper, there is little doubt that political campaigns have been transformed by the diversification in the news industry and also by the widespread adoption of political marketing techniques. Countries have not simply imported American campaigning practices lock, stock and barrel but politicians in states like Israel, Argentina and Britain seem to be paying more attention to formal feedback mechanisms like polls and focus groups, with an expanding role for campaign professionals from marketing and public relations. Comparative surveys have found that in a 'shopping' model, parties adopt whatever techniques seem well suited for their particular environment, supplementing but not discarding older forms of electioneering⁵¹. Even in

America, traditional forms of grassroots voter contact have been maintained, for example in New Hampshire, alongside newer forms of campaign communications like web sites.

Rather than decrying the 'black arts of spin doctors', the professionalization of political communications can be regarded as an extension of the democratic process *if* these techniques bind parties more closely with the concerns of the electorate. The key issue is less the increased deployment of marketing techniques per se, which is not in dispute, than their effects upon politicians and voters, which is⁵².

III: The Impact on Civic Engagement

This brings us to the issue at the heart of the debate: whether there is solid evidence that changes in political communications have contributed towards civic disengagement. Theories of media malaise argue that exposure to the news media discourages learning about politics, erodes trust in political leaders and government institutions, and dampens political mobilization. The net result, it is argued by proponents, has been a decline in active democratic citizenship.

Extensive evidence cannot be presented within the space of a brief paper, but other work by the author (Norris 2000) demonstrates that there is extensive evidence from a battery of surveys in Europe and the United States, as well as experiments in Britain, that cast strong doubt upon these claims.

The results of the analysis show that, contrary to the media malaise hypothesis, use of the news media is positively associated with a wide range of indicators of political knowledge, trust, and mobilization.

People who watch more TV news, read more newspapers, surf the net, and pay attention to campaigns, are consistently

more *knowledgeable*, *trusting of government*, and *participatory*.

This relationship remains significant even after introducing a battery of controls in multivariate regression models. For example, Table 6 shows the model predicting campaign activism in the US, based on the 1998 NES. The results confirm that attention to newspapers, network TV news, and campaign news on the Internet is significantly associated with campaign activism even after controlling for social background. Similar positive relationships are evident in Europe and the US using multiple indicators of civic knowledge and political trust (for full details see Norris 2000).

(Table 6 about here)

Far from a case of 'American exceptionalism', this pattern is found in Europe *and* the United States. Repeated tests using different datasets, in different countries, across different time-periods during the last half-century, confirm this positive relationship, even after controlling for factors that characterize the news audience like their education and prior political interest.

The evidence strongly suggests that the public is not simply passively responding to political communications being presented to them, in a naive 'stimulus-response' model, instead they are critically and actively sifting, discarding and interpreting the available information. A more educated and literate public is capable of using the more complex range of news sources and party messages to find the information they need to make practical political choices. The survey evidence shows that news exposure was not associated with civic disengagement in America and Europe.

IV: Conclusions: A Virtuous Circle?

Why should we find a positive link between civic engagement and attention to the news media? There are three possible answers, which cannot be resolved here.

One interpretation is *selection effects*. In this explanation, those who are most predisposed to participate politically (for whatever reason) could well be more interested in keeping up with current affairs in the news, so the direction of causation could be one-way, from *prior attitudes to use of the news media*. This view is consistent with the 'uses and gratification' literature, which suggests that mass media habits reflect prior predispositions in the audience: people who love football turn to the sports results, people who invest in Wall Street check the business pages, and people interested in politics read editorials about government and public policy⁵³. But if we assume a purely one-way selection effect, this implies that despite repeatedly turning to the news about public affairs, we learn nothing whatever from the process, a proposition that seems inherently implausible.

Another answer could be *media effects*. In this explanation, the process of watching or reading about public affairs (for whatever reason) can be expected to increase our interest in, and knowledge about, government and politics, thereby facilitating political participation. The more we watch or read, in this interpretation, the more we learn. News habits can be caused by many factors such as leisure patterns and broadcasting schedules: people may catch the news because it comes on after a popular sit-com, or because radio stations air headline news between music clips, or because the household subscribes to home delivery of a newspaper. In this view, the direction of causality would again be one-way, but in this case running *from*

prior news habits to our subsequent political attitudes.

Both these views could logically make sense of the associations we establish. One or the other could be true. It is not possible for us, any more than for others, to resolve the direction of causality from cross-sectional polls of public opinion taken at one point in time.

But it seems more plausible and convincing to assume a two way-interactive process or *a virtuous circle*. In the long-term through repeated exposure, like the socialization process in the family or workplace, there may well be a 'virtuous circle' where the news media and party campaigns serve to activate the active. Those most interested and knowledgeable pay most attention to political news. Learning more about public affairs (the policy stances of the candidates and parties, the record of the government, the severity of social and economic problems facing the nation) reduces the barriers to further civic engagement. In this interpretation, the ratchet of reinforcement thereby moves in a direction that is healthy for democratic participation.

In contrast, the news media has far less power to reinforce the disengagement of the disengaged, because, given the easy availability of the multiple alternatives now available, and minimal political interest, when presented with news about politics and current affairs this group is habitually more likely to turn over, turn off, or surf to another web page. If the disengaged do catch the news, they are likely to pay little attention. And if they do pay attention, they are more likely to mistrust media sources of information. Repeatedly tuning out political messages inoculates against their potential impact. This theory cannot be proved conclusively from the available cross-sectional survey evidence, any more than can

theories of media malaise, but it does provide a plausible and coherent interpretation of the different pieces of the puzzle found in this study.

Claims of media malaise are methodologically flawed so that they are at best unproven, to use the Scottish verdict, or at worse false. As a result too often we are 'blaming the messenger' for more deep-rooted ills of the body politic. This matters, not just because we need to understand the real causes of civic disengagement to advance our knowledge, but also because the correct diagnosis has serious implications for public policy choices. This is especially important in newer democracies struggling to institutionalize a free press in the transition from authoritarian rule. 'Blaming the messenger' can prove a deeply conservative strategy, blocking effective institutional reforms, especially in cultures that idealize protection of the press from public regulation.

This paper does not seek to claim that all is for the best in the best of all possible political worlds. If not 'broken', there are many deep-rooted flaws embedded in the core institutions of representative democracy; we are not seeking to present a Panglossian view. The important point for this argument is that many failings have deep-seated structural causes, whether the flood of dollars and lack of viable third parties in American elections, the wasteland of corruption and malfeasance in Russia, or the lack of transparency and accountability in Brussels. If we stopped blaming the news media's coverage of politics, and directed attention to the problems themselves, perhaps effective remedies would be more forthcoming.

Figure 1

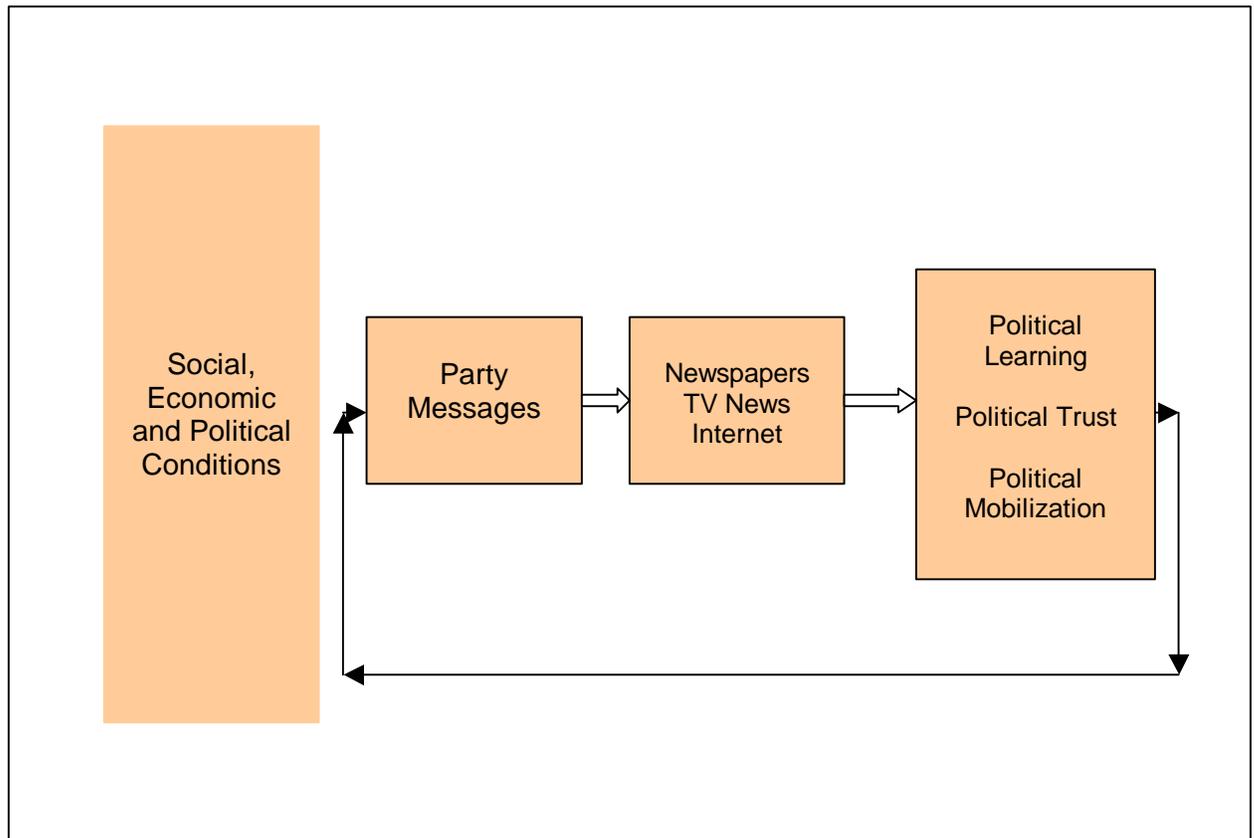
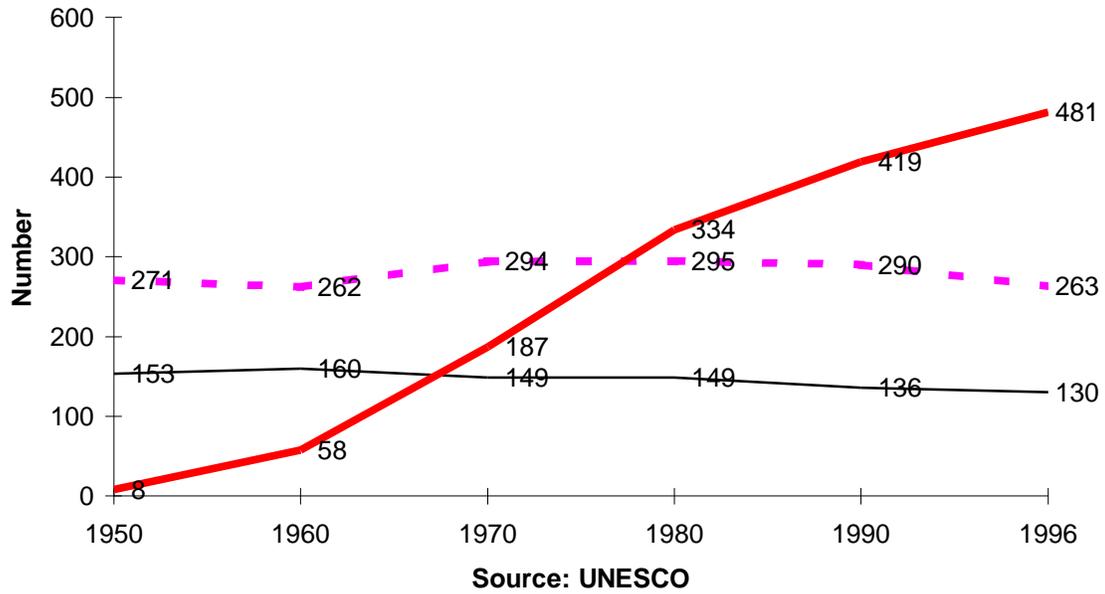


Figure 2

Trends in Newspapers and Television: 1950s to mid-1990s



— N. of Newspapers - - - Circulation of Newspapers per 1000 — N. of TVs per 1000

Figure 3

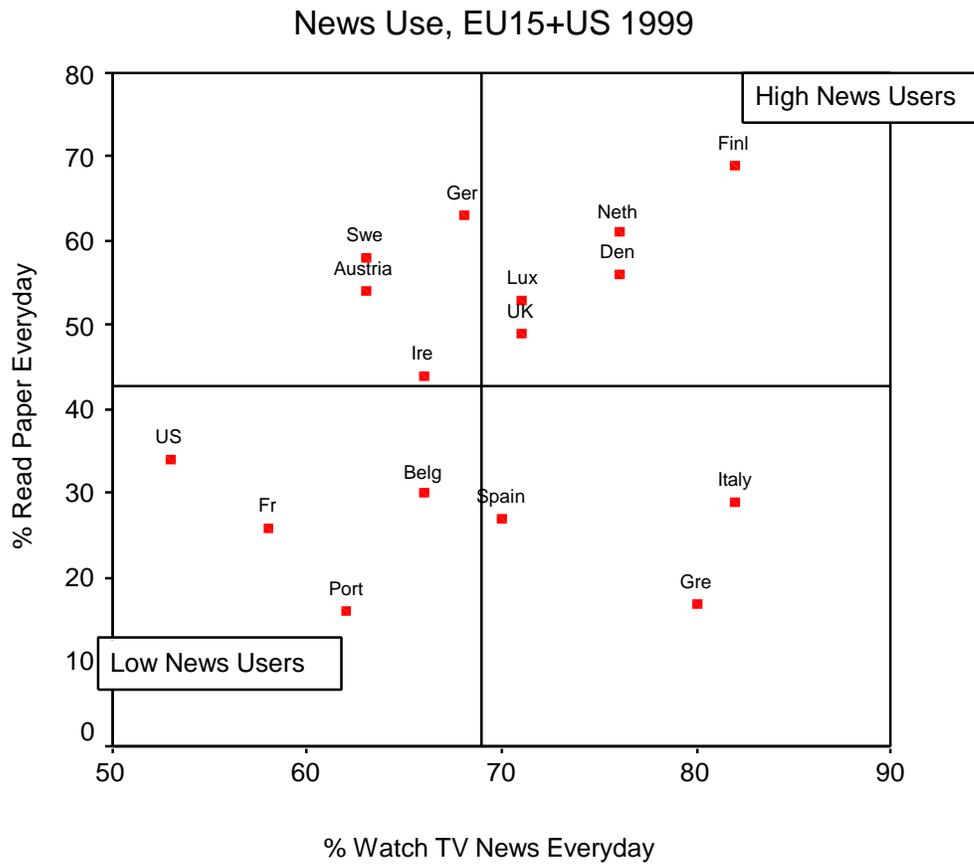


Table 1: The Growth in the Size of the News Audience, EU-5

<i>% Everyday</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Read newspaper	27	45	+18
Watch TV News	49	72	+23
Listen to radio news	44	46	+2

Note: For consistent comparison over time media use is compared only in Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany. Media use in all EU-15 member states in 1999 was about 5-8 percentage points higher than these figures.

Source: Eurobarometer surveys 1970, 1999.

Table 2: Variations in Regular Sources of News, Europe & the US, 1999

<i>Country</i>	<i>Regular Newspaper (% 'read everyday')</i>	<i>Regular TV News (% Watch 'everyday')</i>	<i>Regular Radio News (% Listen 'everyday')</i>	<i>Online Users (% With access)</i>
Austria	54	63	67	11
Belgium	30	66	42	11
Denmark	56	76	65	44
Finland	69	82	49	39
France	26	58	37	9
Germany	63	68	56	8
Greece	17	80	19	7
Ireland	44	66	64	14
Italy	29	82	23	14
Luxembourg	53	71	60	22
Netherlands	61	76	56	32
Portugal	16	62	27	5
Spain	27	70	32	8
Sweden	58	63	47	61
UK	49	71	45	22
US	34	53	29	49
Northern Europe	60	71	57	48
Western Europe	48	70	52	17
Southern Europe	22	74	25	9
EU15	45	71	47	20

Notes: *Regular newspaper readers:* Reads the news in daily papers 'everyday'. *Regular television news:* Watches the news on television 'everyday'. *Regular radio news:* Listens to the news on the radio 'everyday'. *Northern Europe:* Denmark, Finland and Sweden. *Western Europe:* Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and UK. *Southern Europe:* Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain.

Sources: EuroBarometer 51.0 Spring 1999; American National Election Study, 1998.

Table 3: Models Predicting Readership of Newspapers in 1970, 1980 and 1999, EU5

	Predictors of Newspaper Readership 1970	Sig.	Predictors of Newspaper Readership 1980	Sig.	Predictors of Newspaper Readership 1999	Sig.
DEMOGRAPHICS						
Education	.16	**	.16	**	.04	*
Gender: Male	.25	**	.15	**	.08	**
Age (years)	.16	**	.13	**	.15	**
Left-Right Ideology	-.04	**	-.04	**	.01	
SES	.08	**	.04	**	.08	**
Household Income	.09	**	.10	**	.12	**
Urbanization	.02		.10	**	.01	
USE OF NEWS						
TV News Use	.11	**	.19	**	.18	**
Radio News Use	.15	**	.12	**	.16	**
NATION						
Belgium	-.17	**	-.07	**	-.21	**
France	-.12	**	-.25	**	-.23	**
Italy	-.14	**	-.27	**	-.16	**
Netherlands	-.01	**	-.01	**	-.05	*
Constant	.56		.63		.74	
R2	.22		.24		.25	
N.	8567		6521		6218	

Notes: The table reports the standardized beta coefficients predicting frequency of reading newspapers based on ordinary least squared regression models. The dependent variables are the 5 point scales measuring frequency of use of newspaper and television news, where 5 = 'everyday use' and 1 = 'never use'. Sig. P. **>.01 *>.05
The German dummy variable is excluded as a predictor in these models.

Education: Age finished full-time education

L-R Ideology Scale: Coded from left (1) to right (10)

SES: Manual (0) or Non-Manual HoH

Urbanization: Rural (1), Small town (2), Large Town/City (3)

TV News and Radio News: Frequency of use on 5-point scales

Sources: European Community Study 1970; EuroBarometer 13.0 April 1980 weighted for EU6; EuroBarometer 50.1 Mar-Apr 1999 weighted for EU6.

Table 4: Models Predicting TV News Viewership in 1970, 1980 and 1999, EU5

	<i>Predictors of TV News Viewership 1970</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Predictors of TV News Viewership 1980</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Predictors of TV News Viewership 1999</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
DEMOGRAPHICS						
Education	-.07	**	-.03	**	-.03	
Gender	.04	**	.01	*	.00	
Age	.16	**	.09	**	.14	**
Left-Right Ideology	-.01		.05	**	.04	*
SES	.01		-.05	**	.01	
Household Income	.08	**	.01	**	.01	
USE OF MEDIA						
Newspaper Use	.13	**	.21	**	.21	**
Radio News Use	.01		.16	**	.08	**
NATION						
Belgium	-.13	**	-.02	*	.01	
France	-.11	**	-.06	**	-.04	*
Italy	-.18	**	.15	**	.12	**
Netherlands	.01		-.03	*	.05	*
Constant	3.3		3.25		3.65	
R²	.08		.12		.11	
N.	8567		8827		6218	

Notes: The table reports the standardized beta coefficients predicting frequency of reading newspapers based on ordinary least squared regression models. The dependent variables are the 5 point scales measuring frequency of use of newspaper and television news, where 5 = 'everyday use' and 1 = 'never use'. Sig. P. **>.01 *>.05 The German dummy variable is excluded as a predictor in these models. For details of coding see Table 3.

Source: European Community Study 1970; EuroBarometer 13.0 April 1980 weighted for EU6; EuroBarometer 50.1 Apr-Mar 1999 weighted for EU6.

Table 5 The Expansion in the News Broadcast on Public TV, 1971-96

<i>Country</i>	<i>Change in the Number of Hours of News and Current Affairs Broadcasting 1971-96</i>	<i>Change in the Number of Hours of Entertainment Broadcasting 1971-96</i>
Australia	+931	+42
Austria	+2489	+5105
Belgium	-507	+2321
Czech Rep	+2648	+5848
Denmark	+21	+1391
Finland	+1051	+2474
France	-464	+6448
Greece	+2709	+5324
Hungary	+3412	+2296
Ireland	+592	+4655
Italy	+7300	+12945
Korea, S.	+2751	+5195
Netherlands	+963	+2243
Norway	-115	+1342
Poland	+4195	+3698
Portugal	+2634	+12051
Spain	-238	+2469
Sweden	-1069	+992
Switzerland	+4251	+8315
Turkey	+7259	+14699
<i>EU15</i>	+1290	+4868
<i>OECD Total</i>	+2041	+4992

Note: For the full range of categories see Norris (2000)

Source: Calculated from *UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks* (Paris, UNESCO) 1971-1998.

Table 6: Predictors of Campaign Activism, US 1998

	Campaign Activism (i)	Sig	Campaign Activism (ii)	Sig
STRUCTURAL				
Education	.13	**	.04	
Gender: Male	.09	**	.04	
Age	.08	*	.03	
Household Income	.08	*	.15	**
ATTITUDINAL				
Political discussion	.12	**	.11	**
Lib-Con Ideology	.01		.06	
USE OF NEWS MEDIA				
Media News Use	.13	**		
Newspaper			.08	*
National TV News			.11	*
Local TV News			-.01	
Radio News			.05	
Net Campaign News			.12	*
Constant			-1.01	
R2			.10	

Notes: Columns report the standardized beta coefficients predicting campaign activism based on ordinary least squared regression models. The participation variable is the 6-point scale measuring attending a candidate meeting, working for a candidate or party, donating money to a candidate or party, displaying a campaign button, and talking to others for or against a candidate. Use of news sources are measured using 7 point scales. The overall Media Use index is a 29-point scale based on use of TV news + paper + radio news Sig. P. **>.01 *>.05 For other details see Norris (2000) Table 13.5. Source: American NES 1998 N.1,281

* It should be noted that this paper is drawn from a new book Pippa Norris *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Democracies* forthcoming with Cambridge University Press, NY, Fall 2000. Full details about the book can be found at www.pippanorris.com.

¹ See Pippa Norris. 1999. *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam. Eds. 2000. *Disaffected Democrats: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

² Joseph Nye, Jr, Philip Zelikow and David King. 1997. *Why People Don't Trust Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Everett Carl Ladd and Karlyn H. Bowman. 1998. *What's Wrong? A Survey of American Satisfaction and Complaint*. Washington, DC: AEI Press; Robert D. Putnam. 2000. *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

³ Jack Hayward. 1995. *The Crisis of Representation in Europe*. London: Frank Cass; Svein S. Andersen and Kjell A. Eliassen. 1996. *The European Union: How Democratic is It?* London: Sage.

⁴ See Pippa Norris, ed. *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ This study focuses on the effects of news journalism and therefore excludes sociological theories that are concerned primarily with the impact of watching television *entertainment* on matters like social trust, community engagement and voluntary activism. For a discussion see Robert Putnam. 1995. 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America'. *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 28(December): 664-83.

⁶ James Curran and Jean Seaton. 1991. *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*. London: Routledge.

⁷ See Shearon A. Lowery and Melvin L. DeFleur. 1995. *Milestones in Mass Communication Research*. New York: Longman.

⁸ Steven Starker. 1991. *Evil Empires: Crusading Against the Mass Media*. London: Transaction.

⁹ Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang. 1966. 'The Mass Media and Voting'. In *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication* edited by Bernard Berelson and M. Janowitz. New York: Free Press. According to the Langs: "Television's style in chronicling political events can affect the fundamental orientation of the voter towards his government...The media, we contend, can stir up in individuals defensive reactions by their emphasis on crisis and conflict in lieu of clarifying normal decision-making processes."

¹⁰ Michael Robinson. 1976. 'Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of "the Selling of the President"'. *American Political Science Review*. 70(3): 409-32 P.425.

¹¹ Michael J. Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan. 1983. *Over the Wire and on TV: CBS and UPI in Campaign '80*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹² Lee Becker, Idowu A. Sobowale and William Casey, Jr. 1979. 'Newspaper and Television Dependencies: Effects on Evaluations of Public Officials.' *Journal of Broadcasting*. 23(4): 465-75; Lee Becker, and D. Charles Whitney. 1980. 'Effects of Media Dependencies: Audience Assessment of Government.' *Communication Research*. 7(1):95-120; Jack McLeod, Jane D. Brown, Lee B. Becker, and Dean A. Ziemke. 1977. 'Decline and fall at the White House: A Longitudinal Analysis of Communication Effects.' *Communication Research*. 4:3-22; Arthur Miller, Edie H. Goldenberg, and Lutz Erbring. 1979. 'Set-type Politics: The Impact of Newspapers on Public Confidence.' *American Political Science Review*. 73: 67-84.

¹³ Michael Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki. 1975. *The Crisis of Democracy*. New York: New York University Press.

¹⁴ Robert Entman. 1989. *Democracy without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ Neil Postman. 1985. *Entertaining Ourselves to Death*. New York: Viking.

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- ¹⁷ Neil Gabler. 1998. *Life the Movie*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- ¹⁸ Larry Sabato. 1988. *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism has Transformed American Politics*. New York: Free Press.
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- ²⁵ William F. Baker and George Dessart. 1998. *Down the Tube*. New York: Basic Books.
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- ²⁸ Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch. 1995. *The Crisis of Public Communication*. London: Longman. See also Jay Blumler. 1990. 'Elections, the Media and the Modern Publicity Process'. In *Public Communication: The New Imperatives* edited by M. Ferguson. London: Sage; Jay G. Blumler. 1997. 'Origins of the Crisis of Communication for Citizenship'. *Political Communication*, 14(4): 395-404.
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- ⁴⁷ John Curtice, Rudiger Schmitt-Beck and Peter Schrott. 1998. 'Do the Media Matter?' Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Mid-West Political Science Association*, Chicago. The study found that those most attentive to TV news or newspapers proved more likely to be politically interested and engaged in Britain, Germany, Japan Spain and the US.
- ⁴⁸ See Stephen Earl Bennett, Staci L. Rhine, Richard S. Flickinger and Linda L.M. Bennett. 1999. 'Videomalaise Revisited: Reconsidering the relation between the public's view of the media and trust in government.' *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 4(4): 8-23.
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- ⁵⁰ The surveys of journalists found no consensus about the relative importance of providing analytical coverage, acting as government watchdogs, serving public entertainment, and reporting accurately or objectively. For example, the proportion of journalists who thought that their role as watchdog of

government was 'very' or 'extremely' important ranged from 33% in Germany, and 67% in the US, to 88% in Britain. See David H. Weaver. 1998. *The Global Journalist: News People Around the World*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. Pp.466-7.

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