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She wrote this essay for Andrea Fryling’s English 104 class.
The media has overstepped its boundaries in coverage of politics and elections. It is unreasonable that we should accept such poor-quality of information. The media is hardly providing information anymore; rather, they are providing entertainment. The personal, intimate details they share of a political candidate’s life are unnecessary. It is our right to have access to unbiased information. Our nation thrives upon a democratic system that is dependent on the people being informed. But how can we form stable opinions when our information is skewed? Comedians provide information by means of entertainment, while news sources are providing entertainment by means of information. Jaeho Kang, author of “The Media and the Crisis of Democracy” shares his thoughts on how media has affected the reach of politics and democracy. “Media Malaise or a Virtuous Circle? Exploring the Causal Relationships Between News Media Exposure, Political News Attention and Political Interest” by Jesper Strömbäck and Adam Shehata discusses the relationship between politics and the media. Ahmet Ötzürk writes of the various forms of the press and their roles in society in “International Politics and the Media: The Case of the Press/Media in the War on Terror.” Natalie Stroud details the points of selective exposure in “Media Use and Political Predispositions: Revisiting the Concept of Selective Exposure.” These authors each have their own information, sources, and opinions that excellently debate the way our country receives its information.

How our society seeks information is rapidly changing. Our technology is advancing, the culture is changing, and demographics are maturing and changing with the times. The group of society most affected by technology is the youth, especially those who participate in social networks. Strömbäck and Shehata argue that not enough attention has been paid to what effects these new sources have on us. There has not been enough research that clarifies what the psychological impact is. Our society has blindly jumped into a whole new method of communication and community without being fully aware of what we were getting ourselves into. Kang would agree with him, arguing that there has been too much focus on how many people are being reached rather than what
is reaching them. Both parties agree that new technology has a critical impact on democracy; however, neither are sure how. Strömbäck and Shehata claim that a clear relationship has not been established between the newer channels of media and the political system they convey. They explain that the younger age group that is widely reached by the media is becoming less interested in politics. This is another point that Kang would agree with. His belief that the types of research being done are too quantitative and less qualitative are congruent with this thought. Now that accurate information on how far social networks reach is available, it is time for detailed research on what is reaching whom.

The rise of popularity in social networks is a powerful resource for reaching a younger audience. Online relationships are being formed in this new electronic era and changing the way we interact with real-life ones. The digital generation is most accessible on social networks, and politicians are taking advantage of that. Strömbäck and Shehata might argue that because the relationship between politics and social networks is so fresh and unstudied, there is no solid evidence that this is the case. Kang would agree that there has not been enough research to clearly decipher an answer. As I mentioned before, there needs to be serious study examining what information is being relayed on these networks. Once data is collected on this matter, steps can be taken to further develop the link between networks, politics, and the public.

In his essay “International Politics and the Media: The Case of the Press/Media in the War on Terror,” Ötzürk explains the features of the various types of media under specific governments. He argues that the government and society have—and always will—share a wariness of free press and the power that idea possesses. Libertarian media supports the premise that the media is free to print whatever it pleases. This concept is one that Strömbäck, Shehata, and Kang would be in favor of; however, they would be concerned of the effects it would have on its audience, being so uncensored. All would disagree with Soviet media, where the media is a servant to the government. Our society is accustomed to free speech and press, and such an approach would likely cause an uproar. Ötzürk also stated that the press had two “motifs,” educating the public, and later, commercialization. The latter has overtaken the media, and the information being given to us is altered in this way. This reflects my thesis that the media has abandoned the ways of education for sensationalism, which has no place in our news sources.

Stroud argues in her essay that selective exposure has become a problem. She ascertains that our society is not opening itself to new ideas. With the accessibility we are granted to the internet, the vast amount of
information it contains is at our fingertips. The only thing stopping us, is us. Stroud describes selective exposure as seeking only information that agrees with our already existing beliefs. Psychologically, we do not seek out cognitive dissonance. We prefer to not have our thought process challenged. This is now affecting our democratic system, as our society is maintaining this habit on a political level. Voters will not be exposed to the other side of an argument if they only research their side. If one considers the potential impact of this information, s/he realizes entire elections could have had different results.

Stroud claims that where we get our news is equally important. Various news sources are biased, and by only watching one viewpoint, we limit our knowledge. In reference to the war, Stroud notes, “In particular, those viewing FOX News were more likely to believe in both the link and the weapons while those watching PBS and listening to NPR were less likely” (p. 342). She continues to explain the consequences of this finding when she claims, “Different patterns of news exposure may lead people to develop different impressions of what is happening in the world around them” (p. 342). This has a massive political impact. Because the media alters the news they give us, there is no way to retrieve unbiased, reliable information. The public is unable to form their own ideas about information when opinion is handed to them with the news. Ötzürk might argue that this is a Soviet approach to the press, that the media is doing the government's bidding by manipulating the news. Stroud continues to define how selective exposure works on an individual level. The more personal the belief, and therefore more emotionally charged, the less likely one is to seek out contrasting information. Political views fall under this category.

Public, media, and government interactions are ever-changing. With these changes our technology and our interests in the world around us change as well. Our understanding of the world around us is reliant on how it is presented to us by the media. The media has the opportunity to manipulate what we believe. However, we also hold the power to be exposed to new ideas if we so choose. The new technologies of today are allowing us to access more information than ever before. Social networks and other internet resources are among the top channels for media for the youth of today. This remains largely unstudied as a resource. The media holds much power over us, a power that has terrible consequences if abused. We deserve a nation where the media remains unbiased and free of manipulation.
References


