for the public to evaluate leaders after they have acted, not policies before they have been put in place. See John Zaller, "Elite Leadership of Mass Opinion: New Evidence from the Gulf War," in *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, edited by W. Lance Bennett and David L. Paletz (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 201–2.

4. Janet Steele, "Experts and the Operational Bias of Television News: The Case of the Persian Gulf War," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (1995): 799–812, quote at 799.
5. Thomas Ferenczi, "The Media and Democracy," *CSD Bulletin*, 8 no. 1 (winter 2000–2001): 1–2.
6. Ralph Nader, "My Untold Story," *Brill's Content* (February 2001), 100–3, 153–4.
7. Scholars . . . have provided important explanations for this autonomy. Daniel Hallin sees autonomy provided structurally by divisions among elites. See Daniel C. Hallin, *"The Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986). Laws that make it tough to sue for libel also enhance autonomy. These explanations direct attention to structural opportunities for aggressive reporting, but they do not provide journalists with a motive to pursue challenge and critique.
8. Steven Waldman, *The Bill* (New York: Viking, 1995), 240.
9. Regina Lawrence, *The Politics of Force* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 188.
10. This is not to mention background stories that are exclusively focused on stagecraft. See, for instance, Elisabeth Bumiller, "Keepers of Bush Image Lift Stagecraft to New Heights," *New York Times*, May 16, 2003, p. 1.
11. *New York Times*, September 30, 2003, A4.
12. Heather E. Gorgura, "Lott Gets a Blogging: Did the Amateur Journalists of the Blogosphere Bring Down Trent Lott?" (unpublished paper, University of Washington, March 2003). This student paper is extremely thoughtful and well documented.
13. Email to the author from Jill Zuckman, September 20, 2003.

4

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: OLD AND NEW MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS

Michael Gurevitch, Stephen Coleman, and Jay G. Blumler

Editor's Note

The environment in which political communication operates is in turmoil. Established media are battling to retain as much of their influence over news production as possible. They are merging well-seasoned practices of the past with new ways of news dissemination made possible by evolving communications technologies. Meanwhile, professional and lay competition for audiences for political news is escalating. The future of news broadcasting is murky. Current structures may not survive. Gurevitch, Coleman, and Blumler shed much-needed light on the moving scene, explaining the role of televised news in the past, the ongoing changes, and the implications for democratic politics in the twenty-first century.

When this essay was written, Michael Gurevitch was an emeritus professor at the Phillip Merrill College of Journalism of the University of Maryland, Stephen Coleman was a professor of political communication and the codirector of the Centre for Digital Citizenship at the Institute for Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, and Jay G. Blumler was an emeritus professor of public communication at the University of Leeds and an emeritus professor of journalism at the University of Maryland. Gurevitch and Blumler are among the leading, internationally recognized founders of the political communication field. All three authors have published numerous important studies about the mass media's political influence.

. . . But as the new medium became settled, ubiquitous, and seemingly invulnerable, it came to seem as if politics in electoral democracies—a game

of power, persuasion, mobilizing support for policies and politicians, and aggregating votes—could not take place without or beyond the mediating gaze of television. Thus, television and politics became indeed complementary institutions, existing in a state of mutual dependence. Politics provided the raw materials and television packaged it, subtly reconstructed it, and delivered it to audiences. The rules of the journalistic game precluded any major repackaging of political messages and hence allowed the political sources fairly wide latitude if not full control of their messages. But over time, the rules of the game began to gradually shift. A series of historical events (e.g., the Vietnam War, Watergate) as well as political and technological changes moved television reporters, editors, and executives to adopt more skeptical, less deferential, and often more adversarial stances toward politics and politicians and hence a more actively interventionist role in the presentation of political issues and stories. The balance of power between the two began to shift gradually toward a more even situation.

The changing rules of the game had some significant consequences, both for the political players as well as for the terrain of television's coverage of politics. It thus had several long-range effects on the political processes and their outcomes. First, television moved into the center of the political stage, assuming a "coproducer" role of political messages instead of the earlier sanctioned "reporter" role, that is, that of transmitting and relating political events to the audience as if from outside the events. Television gradually moved from the role of observer of events and provider of accounts (stories) and emerged as definer and constructor of political reality. Without necessarily breaching journalistic norms, television came to have an impact upon the events it covered.

Second, while television became an integral part of the political process, it ironically contributed to its depoliticization. The accusation that television has shifted the focus of the political discourse from issues to personalities is by now quite familiar. Policy issues and concerns are more often associated with the faces of political leaders rather than with their political, ideological, and philosophical underpinnings. The educational value of election campaigns, which was once regarded as a key benefit of televised politics, was allegedly diminished by this focus on spectacle rather than ideas. It is, perhaps, an inevitable product of the visual character of the medium, in which faces are more easily recognizable by and accessible to mass audiences than abstract arguments about policies. The democratic ideal of conducting election campaigns as platforms for national debates, as an opportunity for societies to discuss their present and future directions (and indeed to examine their past), has been replaced by the familiar notion of the campaign as a horse race or political beauty contest.

Third, television transferred politics to the living room. Since, by definition, politics takes place in the public domain, involving societies in discussions, negotiations, and struggles over public issues and concerns, its natural locus must be in the public arena. Yet, television imported it into the living room and turned it into a parlor game played by small and quasi-intimate circles. The societal aspect of politics was thus diminished and the bonding effects of public debates attenuated. The public/private, outdoor/indoor dualities of the conduct of politics had ironically contradictory consequences. On one hand, by bringing politics into the home, television undoubtedly contributed to the expansion of the audience for politics. It incorporated into the political process individuals and groups in society that in pretelevision times did not regard themselves as participants in the political process, since their exposure to it was at best minimal and marginal. At the same time, the multiplication of television and other media outlets offering diverse contents has allowed viewers to escape from political content into a vast range of diversionary offerings.

Next, while changes in the scope and composition of television audiences require further documentation, the conventional wisdom is that one of the effects of television's forays into politics has been a dilution of the level of partisanship among audience members. The argument hinges on the assumption that changes in the formats of political television, first among them the introduction of televised debates between political leaders, have limited the ability of viewers to exercise selective exposure to political messages. The familiar format of side-by-side presentation of partisan positions, designed, among other things, to display and preserve the medium's claim for balance and impartiality, resulted in "forced exposure" of viewers to both sides (occasionally three or more sides) of political arguments.

Finally, television's entry into the political domain inevitably led to the formation of professional cadres working for the political parties, designed to fashion the parties' messages and the public personae of political actors in ways that are compatible with the medium. Thus, the communicative activities on both sides of the political-media relationship were handed over and conducted by professionals working within and deploying the same set of professional journalistic practices. The professionalization of politics thus constitutes a response and an adaptation to the challenges of professionalized political media.

New Media: Displacement or Reconfiguration?

Does "the end of television" as we know it imply that the intimate relationship between television and politics that has dominated the past half century is fading away? There are some indications that this might indeed be the case.

The most significant change has been the encroachment of the Internet on the terrain hitherto dominated by television. Audiences for television, as well as for other mass media, are on a downward trend. Newspapers are losing readers and the main television outlets are losing viewers. While this is the case for mass media use generally, it is strikingly visible in the figures for audiences relying on television for political news. . . .

. . . Pew researchers note that "while mainstream news sources still dominate the online news and information gathering by campaign internet users, a majority of them now get political material from blogs, comedy sites, government web-sites, candidate sites or alternative sites." Moreover, the survey data show that younger people are more heavily represented among new media users, suggesting that the trend will accelerate (Pew 2008).

Rather than seeing these changes as a process of displacement, with new, digital media becoming dominant as analogue, print-broadcast media atrophy, they may be interpreted as evidence of an ecological reconfiguration, recasting roles and relationships within an evolving media landscape. As citizens gain access to inexpensive communication technologies through which they can interact with the media, generate their own content, and create alternative networks of information dissemination, the gate-keeping monopoly once enjoyed by editors and broadcasters is waning. While never merely passive recipients of television's account of political reality, audiences are increasingly becoming active participants in public communication, as senders as well as addressees of mass-circulating messages. This profound role change is taking place alongside the continued presence of professional media production aimed at traditional mass audiences. But everywhere, from interactive news Web sites that receive tens of thousands of comments from the public each day to YouTube videos challenging government policy, it is apparent that media producers can no longer expect to operate within an exclusive, professionalized enclave. Media audiences are now able to intervene in political stories with a degree of effectiveness that would have been unthinkable ten or twenty years ago.

Politicians have also become aware of these altered roles and, ever sensitive to shifts in their audiences' media use, have adapted the channels of their message delivery to connect with Internet users wherever they may surf. Already twenty or so years ago, political operatives attempted to reach voters directly by mailing video cassettes containing political messages, thus attempting to supersede the mediation of television. Now they see the Internet as offering a new way of detouring the mass media. In the United States, Barack Obama's presidential campaign relied considerably upon the viral capabilities of social networking sites as a way of overcoming perceived mass-media obstacles. . . .

As well as destabilizing the traditional roles of analogue political communication, digital technologies have modified the communicative balance of power by reconfiguring "access to people, services, information and technology in ways that substantially alter social, organizational and economic relationships across geographical and time boundaries" (Dutton et al. 2004, 32). As access broadens to provide an extensive choice of media platforms, channels, and content, and unprecedented opportunities to store and retrieve media content, new patterns of media use are emerging with distinct sociocultural advantages for some groups. For example, the young, the housebound, and diasporic minorities are three groups that have in many cases benefited from the reconfigured social connections that the Internet affords. In the context of political democracy, voters who go online to seek information, interact with campaigns, and share their views with other citizens are likely to feel better informed, more politically efficacious, and more willing to participate in the democratic process (Shah, Kwak, and Holbert 2001; Johnson and Kaye 2003; Kenski and Stroud 2006; Xenos and Moy 2007; Shah et al. 2007).

However, traditional forms of political communication persist. Television remains dominant as the most highly resourced and far-reaching medium of mass communication; it thus continues to be the locus for "media events" (Dayan and Katz 1992) and the main source of political information for most people (Graber 1990; Chaffee and Frank 1996; Sanders and Gavin 2004; Jerit, Barabas, and Bolsen 2006). But the media ecology that surrounds television is being radically reconfigured with major consequences for the norms and practices of political communication. What exactly has changed?

Channel Multiplication; Audience Fragmentation

The mass television audience is in decline. Viewers are faced with more choices than ever before about what to watch, when to watch it, and how to receive it. . . . The collapsing centrality of terrestrial-based television channels coincides with significant changes in the spatial arrangement of domestic viewing (most homes now have several sets) and growing technological convergence between television and other, once separate technologies, such as telephones and computers. Watching television is a much less distinctive cultural activity than it was in the days when families gathered around the box to watch the same programs as most of their neighbors. As Livingstone (2004a, 76) has observed, "The activity of viewing . . . is converging with reading, shopping, voting, playing, researching, writing, chatting. Media are now used anyhow, anyplace, anytime." In the face of intensified competition for public attention and information, political news and analysis that might in the past have reached most people in the course of a week's viewing can be easily missed.

Channel choices and time-shifting options lead not only to fragmentation of the mass audience but to the emergence of distinct issue publics: people who only want to be addressed on their own terms in relation to issues that matter to them. For example, MTV or Sky Sport viewers might not want to hear about crises in the global economy or the causes of international tensions; they can exclude themselves from exposure to issues and forms of address that they find unappealing, disturbing, or bewildering. Television's role as a public sphere is diminished by these easy opt-outs, and democracy suffers from the absence of socially cross-cutting exchanges of experience, knowledge, and comment.

"Publicness" Transformed

Television emerged as a mass medium at a time when cultural boundaries between public and private life were unambiguous. Constituting a new kind of communicative space in which the debates, dramas, and decisions of politics could be played out daily, television brought the vibrancy of the public sphere to the domestic intimacy of millions of private homes. At the same time, it made public hitherto private lifeworlds through documentaries, plays, and dramatized serials that allowed the public to witness its own multidimensionality. . . .

. . . [T]here is a sense in which other public spaces are now encroaching upon television's historic management of public visibility. It is no longer only television cameras, studios, and formats that politicians need to focus upon as they seek to promote their messages and control their images. The viral energy of the blogosphere, social network sites, and wikis constitutes a new flow of incessantly circulating publicity in which reputations are enhanced and destroyed, messages debated and discarded, rumors floated and tested. From Senator Trent Lott's incautiously disparaging remarks about the civil rights movement at what he thought was a private gathering, to Senator George Allen's offensive mockery of an Indian opponent at a campaign rally, the slips, gaffes, indelicacies, insults, and errors that were once confined to relative invisibility are now captured and circulated through online media in ways that can disrupt elite agendas and ruin political reputations. The ubiquity of media technologies, from mobile phone cameras and pocket recorders to always-on Internet connections, are eradicating traditional barriers between public and private. As Meyrowitz (1985, 271) has observed, "When actors lose part of their rehearsal time, their performances naturally move toward the extemporaneous." As a consequence, mediated publicity has become a 24/7 presence; from reality TV (in which the private is publicized) to political interviews (in which the impersonal is increasingly personalized), the contours of the public sphere are being reshaped in ways to which political actors must learn to adjust.

Interactivity and Remixing

Television is the quintessential broadcast medium: it transmits messages to a mass audience expected to receive or reject what it is offered. The inherent feedback path of digital media subverts this transmission ethos by allowing message receivers to act upon media content. The digital text is never complete; the fluidity of bits and bytes makes digital communication radically different from broadcasting. In the context of political communication, this has entailed a profound shift in the process of message circulation. Whereas political actors were once concerned to produce polished, finished performances for public consumption, contemporary politicians are compelled to think about interactive audiences and their capacity to question, challenge, redistribute, and modify the messages that they receive. In the era of digital interactivity, the production of political messages and images is much more vulnerable to disruption at the point of reception. . . .

The Internet has expanded the range of political sources. On one hand, agenda setting is no longer a politician-journalist duopoly; on the other, the commentariat is no longer an exclusive club. This has led to a radical expansion of the political realm to include aspects of the mundane and the popular, such as celebrity behavior, football management, domestic relationships, and reality TV conflicts. Beyond the subject matter, the style of public interest content has tended to depart from the professional forms that once dominated "high politics." And yet it cannot be ignored by political elites, who are increasingly engaged in efforts to monitor the blogosphere, control the content of wikis, and make their presence felt in unfamiliar environments such as Facebook and YouTube.

As well as the need to respond to the buzz of media interactivity, political actors must consider the possibility that their messages will be modified once they are launched into mediaspace. The digital media environment does not respect the integrity of information; once it has been published online, others are at liberty to remix content, in much the same way as music fans are able to reorder and reconstruct beats, melodies, and lyrics. . . .

Television and Politics—A More Ambivalent Relationship

In the digital era, the relationship between television and politics has become less clear-cut and more ambivalent. While television remains the principal constructor and coproducer of political messages, the systemic entanglement between journalistic and political elites is threatened by new players in the media game. This "fifth estate" (Dutton 2007) sees itself much more in the position of the eighteenth-century fourth estate: reporting, scrutinizing, and commenting from a critical distance, rather than entering

into the portals of institutional power. In contrast, broadcast journalists, having become political insiders capable of shaping agendas, find themselves handicapped by their closeness to power.

At the same time, television's emphasis upon political personalization continues unabated. Political leaders who do not look right on television and do not understand its implicit grammar face major disadvantages. In the new media ecology, political actors are under greater pressure than ever to construct rounded media images, not only on television and in the press, but across a range of outlets. In doing so, however, they have to compete with many others who are in search of public attention, on far more equal terms than previously. In Italy, the radical comedian Beppe Grillo has established the country's most popular blog, attracting far more public comments than those sent to the major political parties. Politicians, parties, and governments cannot expect to attract public attention simply because of the legitimacy of their positions; authority within the new media ecology has to be earned by demonstrating commitments to interactive and networked communication that do not come easily to elite political actors.

While television continues to be the principal conduit between the home and the public sphere, both of these spaces have changed since the heyday of broadcasting. Television remains central to the routines and securities of everyday life (Silverstone 1994), but domestic spaces have become more fragmented, as families disperse within and beyond them. Grand televisual events still bring people together, but the experience of media access is now much more individualized, as particularly younger people spend more time using personalized, hybrid forms of public-privatized media technologies. A negative effect of family breakdown has been the reduction of the interpersonal communication about politics that has traditionally been a key force for socializing political participation. The public sphere, as mediated through television and newer communication technologies, has taken an anti-institutional turn, focusing more earnestly upon forms of informal, communitarian, and networked public presence. In many respects, the digital media networks are more sensitive to this circulatory public sphere than television, with its *centralized* distance from the grassroots, is capable of being.

And whereas televised coverage of politics diminished partisanship by reducing possibilities for selective exposure, the new media ecology makes it easier to establish partisan patterns of media access by creating more scope for selectivity and more opportunities for group herding and opinion polarization (Sunstein 2001; Mutz 2006; Feldman and Price 2008). The absence of an online equivalent to the public service broadcasting ethos raises profound risks for democracy. Television production might have been industrially

top-heavy, unaccountable, and often authoritarian, but it was susceptible to regulation likely to generate some semblance of balanced political coverage.

In the new media ecology, communication strategists need to work harder than ever to cover the expanded media landscape and to adopt new styles in order not to seem contrived, insincere, and heavy-handed. Vast spin operations have turned political marketing from a means of conveying policies and images to a means of determining them. An emphasis upon generating apparently spontaneous discussion is now preferred to didactic declarations about policy. The cultural appeal of the media amateur, posting spontaneously, sporadically, and incompletely contrasts with the clinical efficiency of the party war room. In an age when politicians do not benefit from seeming to be politicians, affected unprofessionalism may well hold the key to successful communication. Explicitly or otherwise, politicians probably remain yet more dependent upon professional campaign and image management and under pressure to find novel ways of presenting themselves within the ever-expanding spaces of the media.

The future of this ambivalent relationship between television and politics, and of political communication more generally, entails normative policy choices. Contrary to the forceful rhetoric of technological determinism, new means of producing, distributing, receiving, and acting upon information do not in themselves shape or reshape the media ecology. Unanticipated and misunderstood, technological innovations not only disrupt settled cultural arrangements but also appear to possess teleological propensities of their own. In the early days of television—and before it, radio and the printing press—many commentators assumed that culture could not withstand their inherent effects. But this is a mistake: technologies are culturally shaped as well as shaping. In these first years of the twenty-first century, policies to shape the new media ecology in a democratic direction are still in their infancy. It is high time for such a policy to be devised, debated, and implemented. . . .

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5

LOSING THE NEWS: THE FUTURE OF THE NEWS THAT FEEDS DEMOCRACY

Alex S. Jones

Editor's Note

Alex S. Jones is a renowned news professional who is passionate about the quality of news. He has practiced all kinds of journalism at small newspapers and big metropolitan papers such as the *New York Times.* He has worked in radio and television, including its Web versions, and he has written books and articles. The excellence of his work has been recognized with a Pulitzer Prize. As the director of Harvard University's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, he can view and assess news developments from exceptionally deep and broad perspectives.

Jones worries that the vigor of American democracy is declining because fact-based professional news reporting is shriveling. Citizens lack essential information that they need to make sound political judgments. The Web spews out flood tides of information in a variety of formats each day, but much of it is unidentifiable and unverifiable opinion. It fails to perform the essential functions of the free press, which is the "Fourth Branch" of American government at all levels. High-quality news alerts the public about crucial political events, putting them into meaningful contexts. The press informs government about public opinions and holds officials accountable by investigating and assessing their policies and behaviors. Without this type of news, democracy withers.

. . . I believe that journalism is important. That it matters. For over a century, Americans have had as a birthright a remarkably good—though far from perfect—core of reported news that is as essential to our freedom