

THE FOUR-STEP FLOW OF COMMUNICATION:  
THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND THE  
MASS MEDIA IN INFLUENCING  
PUBLIC OPINION

by

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B.A., Wichita State University, 1969

Submitted to the Department of  
Speech and the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of the University  
of Kansas in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts.

Redacted Signature

Instructor in charge

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For the department

For my mother, who cares.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who have helped me. Their interest has encouraged me to work and learn.

Dr. David Berg, for his suggesting the four-step flow as a productive research project. As a beginning graduate student I had an overpowering lack of familiarity with research being done in this field; Dr. Berg pointed my efforts at that time when I needed help.

Robert Hamlin, for his help with my writing. I hope someday to be able to inspire students to think, as he can.

Dr. John Sullivan and his wife, for letting me use their copy machine at odd hours.

And several friends who helped proofread when time was short.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Government and public opinion has been of interest to scholars in America since the nation was infant. The Founding Fathers, De Tocqueville and Bryce wrote on the nature and importance of public opinion in democracy. Their works remain in the philosophical groundings of contemporary orientation. At the time of those writings, however, about all that connected "government" and "public" was an occasional newspaper or public speech. Today the powerful forces of mass media—radio and television as well as print—extend in a two-way pattern between government and public.

This subject has recently come to the foreground because of popularization of concepts such as McLuhan's analysis of the media, McGinniss' scrutiny of political use of the media and Agnew's criticism of the media's handling of political messages.

The medium is the message, Marshall McLuhan tells us, because message "content" is secondary upon society to the medium employed. Joe McGinniss has recently popularized the notion in his book Selling of the President 1968, that the image projected over television is more important to government or a political candidate than what words are said; what counts is the received impression, depending most upon how the medium is handled.

Vice-President Agnew has criticized both the mass media and their message. More specifically, he has made media coverage of government a prominent issue. His charges of bias and editorializing aroused

counter-charges of government-control and manipulation of the media. After all the debates, what appeared most obvious was that the press and the government operate with conflicting goals; what must not be lost sight of is that both must serve the public.

Research upon government and public opinion, government and media, media and public opinion, and even some combining all three factors is in abundance. Both historical and empirical studies have been done from the viewpoints of political science, journalism, history, rhetoric and public address or communications theory, and mass media. In fact, there is a variety of research that is in need of synthesis to give focus to a broader understanding of the role of government and mass media in influencing public opinion. A broadly-based, multidisciplinary integration of available knowledge about governmental communications would be helpful in giving organization to further research efforts.

In 1961, James Rosenau articulated a "pre-theory" of communication flow which may be useful as an hypothesis for a study on the relationship of government and the mass media to public opinion. In his book Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, Rosenau outlined four steps of a communication flow:

The news and interpretation of an event are first carried by say, a newspaper; this is then read and adapted by opinion-makers, who assert (step 2) their opinions in speeches on the subject that are reported (step 3) by the press and thereupon picked up by 'opinion leaders' in the general public who in turn pass (step 4) on the opinions through word-of-mouth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James N. Rosenau, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 8.

An August 15, 1969, personal letter from James Rosenau contained the following statement in response to my question concerning the amount of research that has already been conducted on the four-step theory: "Aside from the sources cited in my book (particularly the Katz and Lazarsfeld), not much has been done on this theory. Certainly no one has specifically investigated the four steps that I suggested and I would think it most appropriate for you to do so without fear of duplication."

### Purposes of the Study

The general focus of this thesis will be to promote a clearer understanding of the influence of government and the mass media on public opinion. Specifically, the purpose is to search out appropriate literature in order to determine what evidence can be found to support or refute the four-step theory.

The method of study is to review and synthesize relevant literature on a multidisciplinary basis. Of "all communications" potentially reported by the mass media, I have selected out for this thesis only those studies on what is written by government, about government, or that directly affects government.

### Definition of Terms

These definitions give direction to the intended usage, but should not be considered to be in final form. In several cases, terms will receive further delineation when they are used in the context of a chapter.

Attentive public refers to citizens who are relatively aware of

important public affairs issues. They are distinguished from other citizens of the public in that while their inclination and interest in public affairs is high, their opportunity for participation in forming public policy is low.<sup>2</sup> Members of this group occasionally "come alive" when some particular image affects them. In general, however, their opportunity to engage in policy-making is low, often because of the job they hold.

By gatekeeper, this study refers to any person or group that regulates the flow of opinion or flow of news at any point. At each potential stopping point, the communication is either stopped, changed, or passed on by a "gatekeeper." Regardless of how he decides to communicate (or not communicate) an event, he has affected the flow of opinion.

Mass media are the impersonal instruments for communication. The classification includes both printed and electronic media.

News refers not only to an event, but to anything which is reported in the mass media. News, then, includes reactions to events which are not events in themselves, interpretations of events, and human interest stories which are "news" because of their special appeal to humankind.

Opinion-leaders are persons both in and out of government who exert influence upon those with whom they are in direct contact in regard to decisions from at least one area of life. Independent of the occupation a person happens to hold, his personal influence is

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-41.

based on the reliance people have for information and opinions from him because of certain personal traits.

Opinion-makers occupy prestigious positions giving them the opportunity to transmit opinion (1) about any issue to unknown persons outside their occupational field or (2) about more than one type of issue to unknown persons within their occupational field. They do not necessarily wield personal influence in their face-to-face contacts, but often their role naturally draws the type of person whose personal influence is strong.

There are four recognized types of opinion-makers: (1) Governmental—federal officials responsible for decision-making, often functioning as opinion-makers; (2) Associational—involved in both special-interest associations and civic-interest associations; (3) Institutional—derive their access to the opinion-making process from the prestige attached to their organizational position; (4) Individual—some personal quality or achievement has earned their access to the process.<sup>3</sup>

Personal media refers to interaction by direct contact between speaker and receiver. It is usually face-to-face in nature, and differs from mass media because of its personal tailoring.

The public refers to the mass of citizens that lacks any special organization. Public opinion is defined in many ways. V.O. Key, Jr. defined public opinion as those opinions held by private persons which government finds it prudent to heed.<sup>4</sup> In a footnote, Key adds, "The

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-73.

<sup>4</sup>V.O. Key, Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 14.

conception of public opinion advanced here, it is cheerfully conceded, is difficult to apply in research." The dictionary definition is just as difficult to apply: "the collective opinion that is formed around an issue of difference."<sup>5</sup> The question is, what is the collective opinion?

C. Wright Mills' discussion of "public" and "mass" is most applicable to this thesis. Extracted from his observations,<sup>6</sup> I use "public" as follows: the collectivity of persons whose impressions of public affairs are formed on the basis of contact with opinion-leaders and whatever they extract from popular mass media.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study is intended to contribute to communication theory by discovering and synthesizing those data which tend to support Rosenau's "four-step flow" concept. It is not designed to "prove" or "disprove" the four-step flow in an empirical fashion, although this would be an appropriate endeavor at a later time.<sup>7</sup> A field test of the theory is a necessary follow-up of this development of the four-step flow.

There is another significant limitation to this study which is not as easily explained. I have made no attempt to evaluate who influences decision-makers in the policy-making process. Theories on

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<sup>5</sup>C.L. Barnhart (ed.), The American College Dictionary (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964), p. 979.

<sup>6</sup>C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 303-315.

<sup>7</sup>A replication of an empirical test on the two-step flow would be an interesting way to begin: Verling Trolldahl, "A Field Test of A Modified 'Two-Step Flow of Communication'," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXX (Winter, 1966-67), 609-22.

how the public influences decision-makers are different from theories on the flow of information and opinion back and forth between the government, the media, and the public. For example, just because information and opinion flows from John Doe to President Nixon does not mean that there was an equivalent flow of influence that effects policy. As long as the two types of theories are kept distinct in the reader's mind, this study will not be taken for something it is not.

### Organization of Research

Each chapter is a development of one step of the four-step flow theory. Following is a preview of the division of material into chapters.

#### Step 1

##### "Communication Stimulus"

Communication usually occurs as a response to some stimulus which we call the "exigence." This chapter is a development of that beginning of the communication flow. The general notion is that government opinion-makers often become aware of an event ("news") through the mass media, and that they respond to others about that happening on the basis of what they read or heard. In other words, they are stimulated to communicate in response to the reality created for them by communications they have received.

In view of the general ideas suggested above, the chapter is developed in the following way. First, the underlying assumption that

government opinion-makers depend upon the mass media is shown; dependence exists for receiving information, receiving an image of other government opinion-makers and for giving out the information they feel will maintain their own favorable image.

With the realization that government does depend upon mass media in several important ways, the next task of the chapter is to show how the rhetoric that occurs on television or in the newspaper is responsible for stimulating response from government. The media-produced rhetoric creates a "reality" which becomes the basis upon which further communication is stimulated.

## Step 2

### "Government Response"

With the understanding from chapter one that government opinion-makers respond to rhetorical exigences created by the mass media, it is appropriate to examine more closely the nature of the response. The mechanics of the response for conveying intended messages include such matters as handouts, news conferences, trial balloons, and news leaks. It is significant that by those same means the government also communicates unintended images. If they communicate ambiguity to a reporter, for example, he is likely to relay on to the public something as unintended by the opinion-makers as a "credibility gap." Knowing this problem of the unintended message, government is likely to take more and more advantage of public relations and media specialists; but in so doing, the message communicated to the public is affected. This time, although the message is intended, it can be

so selective of the facts the "reality" is again questioned. The kind of effect the mass media have upon government image must be questioned, both in terms of pursuing questions in this thesis, and in terms of the effect such variance has upon what information the public knows.

### Step 3

#### "Media Treatment"

With the information that government opinion-makers perceive some kind of reality from mass media, to which they respond with messages intended for dissemination to the public, the next step is to investigate how the media treat the story. This is important to the public because whatever they do with information about government is generally what the public ultimately "knows" about government. Three basic concepts are discussed in this chapter. First, the reporter's perception of his role in the government-public information flow is developed; is the reporter an arm of the public that protects the public interest? Or is he concerned only with providing enough uncontroversial material that will be "approved" by his boss even if it be no more in depth than the one-sided view that government hands to the reporter.

The gatekeeper theory is explored in this chapter to give the reader a feel for what can happen to a story on its pathway to the public. All along, it can be modified in ways that reflect any gatekeeper's biases, consciously or subconsciously. When this is done, the story content is affected. There are at least three

different ways the content can be changed: possible omission, word choice and emphasis. Each of these areas is developed—does the editor omit a certain story or a certain point of view so that the public's chance of knowing some aspect of reality is diminished? Does he word phrases so selectively that the original intent is modified? What part of the story does he put in the first paragraph? Where does he place a story in the newspaper, and where does he place it on the page?

#### Step 4

#### "Opinion-Leaders Influence"

However the media treat a story, the opinion-leaders in the general public interpret the information and pass on their opinions to others who ask them for information. According to the two-step flow of communication, the opinion-leader uses his personal influence to give weight to whatever opinions he passes on by word-of-mouth. With the overwhelming access the mass public has to media, it is significant to discuss just what influence people obtain from mass media and what influence people obtain from opinion-leaders.

As the four-step flow is completed, the public has received its image of government. Most of the belief system people have about their government is as "removed" as what certain informed persons tell them is true on the basis of what they know from having read and heard extensive information that is nothing more (usually) than a journalist's perception of what government is and what government is doing. All

along the way there is opportunity for less-than-accurate transfer of meaning, because at every level people can do nothing more than pass on a perception of what the preceding person meant or what is "behind" his message.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Communication Stimulus

"The news and interpretation of an event are first carried by, say, a newspaper; this is then read and adapted by opinion-makers . . ."

Rosenau's first step in the four-step flow theory is concerned with that part of the communication situation which stimulates rhetoric. Specifically, this step is the beginning of the communication flow, when someone in government (or an opinion-maker from the general public) becomes aware of an event to which he responds. His means of awareness is confined, for purposes of simplification in this chapter, to what he reads or hears in the mass media. He could also become aware of an event by first-hand experience or by word-of-mouth from others. Although those means of awareness are not included in the development of this chapter, the reader should realize that they are also possible. The opinion-maker might later supplement what he knows first-hand with information from mass media. At any rate, when he responds to an event, a communication flow has begun.

To say that the communication flow begins by, say, a government worker's response to the mass media implies that government pays some attention to the media. Thus, the first task of this chapter is to show how government does depend upon the media. A second implication of saying that a flow generates from opinion-makers responding to the media is that media structures some kind of a reality about which people communicate. Thus, the second task of the chapter is to show the nature of media-structured reality. How media structures reality by what it communicates as "news" is the final question for this

section. By the end of the chapter it should be clear how the communication flow gets underway and how not only an event, but also a media-report of an event or any media-rhetoric stimulates communication.

### Government Depends on Mass Media

There are several ways in which government workers depend on mass media: for receiving information; for obtaining an image of other government opinion-leaders, and for portraying a favorable image to the public and to other parts of government. Each of these three ways of dependence on mass media is related to Rosenau's government-public communication flow; the general statement that government depends on mass media is assumed by his pre-theory. Since it is necessary that some dependence actually occur for the theory to work, it is appropriate that this point be developed and substantiated.

Government reliance on mass media for information has been evident since Abraham Lincoln's administration. Often after granting an interview with a press representative, he is said to have asked the reporter what the people were thinking; he told them that they were in a better position to know public thought than he. Today, governmental leaders are known to obtain information not only from reporters, but from their morning newspaper at home over coffee, from the press wire services at work, and from the evening television news. As former Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles related to a New York Times reporter in response to the question, "Do you know anything we don't today?": "Of course not, where do you think we get our information?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 210.

The press and other mass media are generally conceded to be the major source of news that cannot be obtained first-hand. Thus, its function as an intelligence medium varies with the individual's access to alternative sources of knowledge. Yet even for top decision-makers in government, the press provides much material that is not available so quickly from any other source. Some senators and representatives follow news tickers closely and have staff members send them clippings throughout the day, because they are available almost instantly. One State Department official said that his office's sources run about twenty-four hours behind the press. He added that after office hours when he is away from the tickers, he relies on the radio news over newspapers because of its competitive time advantage. Another official Cohen interviewed stated, "Your vision of the world comes to you from the paper, it hits you at breakfast."<sup>2</sup>

For most officials, the mass media provides information about world happenings in areas other than the one with which their work is primarily concerned. Although many official reports would be available to them on every national and world problem, they could never devote the time it would take to read them, in addition to the scope of official reports they must be familiar with in their specialty. Cohen concluded his analysis by suggesting that the greater the distance between a man and the staff level in the State Department, for example, the greater is his dependence on the press for his larger view of the world.

The press serves an especially important function to congressmen whose alternative sources of information are fewer than in the

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

executive. Committee members regularly use news clippings to authenticate points or to provide material for questioning witnesses in testimony. But particularly, newspapers serve the function of keeping them abreast of their state constituents' problems and issues. Local papers are read for state political news, other new developments, and editorial comment upon congress and national policy. As Cohen stated,

There is great incentive, consequently, for the policy makers to turn to the newspaper to make sure that they know what is about to become important to them because people elsewhere think it is important—after their newspaper implicitly told them it was.<sup>3</sup>

Cohen found that most men in Washington read the New York Times, but when pressed for why, it was usually because they knew that others read it for information on what was important. Sheldon Appleton, in his text on foreign policy, put it this way, "The interested public ordinarily looks to the media to define policy problems and to formulate alternative means of dealing with them."<sup>4</sup>

Presidential reliance upon the media for information is characterized by differences from other government workers' reliance. Richard Neustadt's book Presidential Power, explains that while most governmental officials rely on the press for information about world events and for information on other governmental agencies, the president has ready access to the same data from virtually any source before it is mediated by a journalist. Furthermore,

One difficulty with the press as an adviser to a President is that he has enough to crowd his calendar and mind without attending closely to debate on prospects which for him are

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>4</sup>Sheldon Appleton, United States Foreign Policy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), p. 297.

past. . . .Not even readers of New York Times—not even its columnists—move in precisely the same time-dimension as the man who [is President.]<sup>5</sup>

What this means for Rosenau's theory is that when a president or top official reacts to mass media content, he is reacting to reports he interprets as feedback directed towards him or his policies. Unlike opinion-makers from the public, he is seldom responding with awe to something new he has learned about current events; he is reacting to comments and journalistic reports on events with which he is already familiar.

The type of dependence upon media described above is relative to a president's desire to recognize the press as representative of the public, and relative to his desire for feedback from persons other than close trusted advisers. President Eisenhower revealed a general indifference to his coverage at a May 11, 1960, news conference when he was asked how he felt about unfriendly cartoons and columns; he replied that he really could not be bothered with them. He stated that he studied only the "important" sections of the Sunday papers that review world events. On the other hand, President Kennedy said that he read at least five newspapers thoroughly each day to keep him informed of the mood of the country and what others were regarding as the most important issues.<sup>6</sup> What Kennedy felt was an interest in accuracy, many journalists felt was over-sensitivity to everything except laudatory comments.

In addition to obtaining information from the mass media,

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<sup>5</sup>Richard E. Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York: The New American Library, 1964), p. 130.

<sup>6</sup>James E. Pollard, "Eisenhower and the Press: The Final Phase," Journalism Quarterly, XXXVIII (Spring, 1961), 182.

government agencies and individual workers obtain an image of governmental activities with which they are not directly associated. Occasionally a freshman senator has more "dialogue" with the president through newspaper interviews than he ever could have face-to-face. Furthermore, his image of the president, obtained in part from what he hears and sees in the mass media, determines his manner of communication, just as people adjust themselves to the other's personality when in direct contact. Most Americans and most "lower" government officials felt like they "knew" Eisenhower or Kennedy or Johnson because television made the men a part of their total image of public affairs. Similarly, government workers depend upon the media to communicate their own image. Some image will always be conveyed to others just by virtue of having air time; most people's concern is in seeing that their own image is as accurate or favorable as possible. Putting forth a favorable image with appropriate information is essential for the survival of government programs in democracy. Douglass Cater wrote that often publicity consciousness must guide the course of a program. He cited two clear examples in which the importance of publicity for the survival of the programs was so great that news was purposefully generated by supporters.<sup>7</sup> That type of action has been generated by a felt need for communicating through the mass media which is significant to Rosenau's first step because it supports the assumption of dependence upon the mass media.

The first example Cater mentioned is George C. Marshall's claim

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<sup>7</sup>Douglass Cater, The Fourth Branch of Government (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), pp. 5-15.

that the publicity of favorable response by European leaders to his speech at Harvard in June, 1947, saved his program (the Marshall Plan to aid Europe's recovery from the War). Otherwise, he feared that negative reactions to his program from leaders with publicity in the Middle West would have saturated the press and possibly brought the Plan to defeat. Negative comments were largely drowned out in the press, and the program achieved the governmental support it "appeared" to have—according to what did appear in the press.

Whether there actually was a causal relation (i.e., that what appeared in the press created that result) is certainly questionable; the point, however, is that it was perceived as such by the governmental leader. When it is perceived as necessary, it shapes behavior in that the man thinks media coverage is important, and so he seeks to have favorable coverage.

In this first instance, coverage was perceived as important in influencing the Congress to approve a certain plan. In the following second example, mass media coverage was believed necessary for internal competition within the executive branch and for "winning over" the public. An Army Colonel was court-martialed for leaks to the press on the Jupiter missile. Dr. Wernher von Braun, head of the Army Missile Program, explained the leak in this way:

The Jupiter involves several million dollars of the taxpayer's money. One hundred per cent security would mean no information for the public, no money for the Army, no Jupiter. . . .The Army has got to play the same game as the Air Force and the Navy.

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<sup>8</sup>New York Times, June 27, 1957, as quoted in Cater, pp. 10-11.

Apparently it was felt that by giving the Jupiter program publicity in connection with the Army, it would then give that image (i.e., that it was Army material) to readers. The media was perceived as essential to the success of the program.

To sum up the development of Rosenau's first step, it seems clear that government does depend upon mass media and that mass media reports are read by opinion-makers in government. One can well conclude that what is read has some kind of effect by creating "reality". If the opinion-maker is stimulated to communicate, it will be in response to what he has adopted from the mass media. The next section is about how the media-message becomes reality.

#### Reality From Mass Media

For Rosenau's theory, "reality from mass media" means that an opinion-maker reads an account of some journalist's perception of reality and adapts it to his framework of understanding, so that what emerges is his perception of what the journalist was attempting to communicate, or his perception of the journalist's perception of reality.

Reality and rhetoric are closely related—what is in man's thoughts is what is reality to him, and that is both the source and the constraint of communication. The two are related to each other within the psychological constructs of the individual. On a subject such as Vietnam, an individual can be stimulated to communicate that which he sees as the reality of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Or a man communicates with his wife knowing he can trust her; for him, that is reality.

Whatever a man believes is true is the way he treats his environment. Kelly's theory of impression formation explains how different people construe the same environment differently.<sup>9</sup> The theory holds that within each person's mind a set of personality constructs has developed; the constructs are the dimensions through which he views the world and sorts out the multiple stimuli communicated to him. His reality is based on the communications that reach his mind and on the interpretation he places upon those stimuli. In other words, a man's actions and thoughts are not based upon absolute reality, but upon his impression of life and society. It is upon the differing impressions of the world about us that we communicate.

Two other theories of Boulding and Lippmann help to expand application of Kelly's concepts to Rosenau's theory.

Walter Lippmann wrote that many people within a culture (or several subcultures or several cultures) actually live in the same world, but think and feel in different ones because of a third element between man and his environment. He labels it man's "pseudo-environment."<sup>10</sup> Man responds to the pseudo-environment that he himself has created. He reads a journalist's account of Vietnam, and responds to the way he construes the article from his own unique perspective brought to bear upon the article. What he thinks the article says about the real world is the "pseudo-environment" between the man and his environment.

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<sup>9</sup>George A. Kelly, A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963).

<sup>10</sup>Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1965), pp. 13-15.

The "reality" Lippmann calls pseudo-environment, Kenneth Boulding labels "the image."<sup>11</sup> His view is that every man carries in his mind an image of things (persons, places, etc.) with which he has been in contact. A person can have an image of the building he is in, as well as the whole city he is in, although at the moment he can see only the four walls of a room. Similarly, a man carries images of his life and his society, and for him they are his "reality."

A person also carries images about people and places in his society with whom he has not come in direct contact. For example, many a non-Vietnam veteran has an image of that war; most Americans have an image of President Nixon and Vice-President Agnew, even though they have not met them. Students at Berkeley have an image of the most recent student revolt on campus, even though they were far removed from "the action." Boulding's analysis is supported by Lippmann: "The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event."<sup>12</sup>

Kelly, Boulding and Lippmann have been used to demonstrate how people act and interpret events construed from the world about them on the basis of images or pseudo-environments. Images are formed from news an opinion-maker hears which influences his interpretation of an event. Similarly, his communication response is affected; literally, he is stimulated to communicate in a manner consistent with his view of reality.

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<sup>11</sup>Kenneth E. Boulding, The Image (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1956), pp. 3-18.

<sup>12</sup>Lippmann, p.9.

According to Walter Lippmann, there is a pattern of behavior that results from what is described in the paragraph above, which has further effect on how a person is stimulated to respond. According to Lippmann and many writers since his publications in the 1930's, men form images and opinions of more people and events and things than we could ever count; thus, men are forced to summarize and generalize, picking out samples and treating them as typical. In this way, reality is frozen in the minds of people. Rosenau's mention of an opinion-maker's "adapting" a message should include the notion that he brings his stereotypes to bear upon his interpretation of the message. Whatever stereotypes he holds as ways of categorizing data are projected upon information about an event before reason is applied, or before the perceiver could record raw, untouched data. He can observe his world only through his colored glasses. Since the actual sensation and the pre-conception occupy consciousness at the same time, it is as if a person looked at red through blue glasses and saw green. Lippmann explained stereotypes in this way:

They are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves. They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted. In that world people and things have their well-known places, and do certain expected things. We feel at home there.<sup>13</sup>

Stereotypes allow the perceiver economy of effort in explaining the world about him. But they are not merely "short-cuts;" they are charged with feelings and emotions because they are projections on the world of our sense of value; they are the means for our hiding

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

and feeling security in whatever position we hold; they provide order to our impressions of reality from the multiple stimuli in our environment; and they largely determine the facts a person allows himself to see, and in what light he shall see them.

Stereotyping was one of Robert Lane's observations in extensive interviews with fifteen men.<sup>14</sup> Although his subjects were "common men" rather than "opinion-makers" as referred to in Rosenau's theory, the results show human traits characteristic of any opinion-maker. Lane found two operating principles in stereotyping: (1) lack of differentiation usually made the man's stereotypes much blunter than reality and (2) constructs are shaped to fit prejudgments so that the interpretation of any message is a biased perception. Lane found that the men held blunt stereotypes ("blunted differentiation") because they operated on the basis of insufficient information, with an emotional block in some areas and with a sense of remoteness from political events in others. Regardless of what the issue is, some opinion-makers will bring those feelings (described above) to bear; and they will always employ their predispositions while reading and adapting communications about an event.

The information presented so far in this section has shown how men do carry an image of their world which is their "reality." In words more parallel to Rosenau's, news and interpretation of an event are carried by, say, a newspaper which is read and adapted by an opinion-

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<sup>14</sup>Robert E. Lane, Political Ideology (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), pp. 359-63.

maker whose view of the world has been affected by communications in the mass media. The next question is how mass media affect one's image of the world.

C. Wright Mills developed a theory in the 1950's which suggests an approach to the question of media's effect upon an individual's image of the world.

Very little of what we think we know of the social realities of the world have we found out first-hand. Most of the "pictures in our heads" we have gained from (these) [mass] media—even to the point where we often do not really believe what we see before us until we read about it in the paper or hear about it on the radio.<sup>15</sup>

He developed a characterization of mass media recipients, which he intended to refer to all persons in society except the few "power elite" (decision-makers in large corporations or the military, or with excessive wealth). First, Mills said that the social meaning of mass media is found in the ratio of receivers of opinion to givers of opinion; mass society, which would include Rosenau's opinion-makers, he said is a mere media market, including far more who receive opinions than who give them. His second point was that public communications are so organized that there is little chance for the public to answer back immediately or effectively. Even if it could be given, he said it is doubtful that the opinion would be effective in shaping any decisions of powerful consequence. Lastly, he said that there is a structural problem which allows "elitist" control over public channels of communication.

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<sup>15</sup>C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 311.

All of these points are consistent with Rosenau's theory, with the possible exception of the first. If Mills' idea would be carried to extreme, one could say that structural problems of society would make it so that even though a person received a message from mass media, he could not respond. However, I believe Mills is accurately interpreted by adding "effectively" . . . when a person receives a message, he can respond to his friends and fellow opinion-makers, but he will not necessarily have effect upon decision-makers. Nevertheless, as long as political structure allows some response, the communication flow has begun; from chapter one, we recall that the flow of influence is different from the communication flow, and that the four-step theory concerns only the latter. Thus, there is no conflict between Mills' theory and Rosenau's four-step flow.

Mills carried his argument another step further in showing how mass media affects one's view of reality. He wrote that the media facilitate a psychological illiteracy: "We do now have reason to believe that these media have helped less to enlarge and animate the discussions of primary publics than to transform them into a set of media markets in mass-like society."<sup>16</sup> There are certain stereotypes of loyalty, experiences of meaning, and underlying beliefs that are so engrained in mass media news treatment and network pleasure-programs that people slowly begin to accept those things as their own. Daily repetition of media-content becomes a form of media control, according to this theory.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 311.

This whole aspect of how media affects one's view of reality brings to mind the stories of Californians who stay home to watch the Rose Bowl on television because they can "see it better". Or the witness to an accident who rushes home from work to watch the news on television so he can see "what really happened". Or the Chicagoan who watched Democratic National Convention television coverage because he did not want to see the riots first-hand. Or the employee in the Governor's outer office who listens to the six o'clock news to hear the "true story" on the sit-in in the Governor's inner office.

For Rosenau's theory, the above implies a dependence upon the media for information, often when television or newspapers are the only source of information for the opinion-maker. There are some obvious restrictions to that statement. For example, the president of a labor union is less likely to receive his opinions on labor activities from the media than a car salesman not associated with unions. But the union man will probably rely more on the media for information on a new model car than the car salesman who has literature from the manufacturer. In other words, a person with a close, authoritative information source usually relies less on the mass media for information on that particular topic.

Media - Produced Rhetoric As An  
Exigence for Further Rhetoric

If the mass media creates reality for its public, and if that reality is a kind of image or stereotype, then what type of event is reported by mass media? In other words, what makes news? One might

begin to answer by thinking of everything that makes an event newsworthy—timeliness, novelty, humor, conflict, human interest, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Lloyd Bitzer cautions that the critic must be aware of what is a "real" event reported in the media: "Real situations are to be distinguished from sophistic ones in which, for example, a contrived exigence is asserted to be real."<sup>18</sup> In terms of Rosenau's theory, real events need to be distinguished from others for critical purposes to show how media structures and creates an individual's reality. An opinion-maker, or recipient of any media message, should be able to distinguish the events in his environment that are real from those that were created to seem real.

Boorstin's book The Image is a critical approach to distinguishing real events from those "contrived ones" that he labels "pseudo-events." He defines a pseudo-event by listing its four characteristics:

- (1) It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.
- (2) It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. Time relations in it are commonly fictitious or factitious; the announcement is given out in advance "for future release" and written as if the event had occurred in the past. The question, "Is it real?" is less important than "Is it newsworthy?"
- (3) Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very

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<sup>17</sup>Robert O'Hara answers the question "what makes news" in Media for the Millions Timeliness, proximity, prominent names, probable consequences of an event, special tests such as reader curiosity, sex, novelty, humor, human interest, and conflict. (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 205-18.

<sup>18</sup>Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation", Philosophy and Rhetoric, I (January, 1968), 11.

ambiguity. Concerning a pseudo-event the question "What does it mean?" has a new dimension. While the news interest in a train wreck is in what happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in whether it really happened and in what might have been the motives. Did the statement really mean what it said? Without some of the ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting.

(4) Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel's thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one.<sup>19</sup>

In order to understand why pseudo-events are common today, one should trace historical attitudes toward news. The attitudes reflect on the content of media. The first American newspaper (Boston-1690) promised monthly service, unless something "newsworthy" happened in the meantime. News reports were limited to covering spontaneous events. Gradually the philosophy changed so that people did not seem to expect a limited number of "news events." People began to expect a multi-page document, filled with interestingly-written news, twice daily. In Boorstin's words, "We need not be theologians to see that we have shifted responsibility for making the world interesting from God to the newspaperman."<sup>20</sup> With the advent of electronic media, we began to expect hourly news reports and special news bulletins when necessary throughout the hour.

Coping with an overwhelming demand for news, reporters left a gap if they covered only real events. Spurred on by competition from other media, and responding to what they perceived as the public

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<sup>19</sup>Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 11-12.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

demand, twentieth century reporters began covering "synthetic happenings to make up for the lack of spontaneous events."<sup>21</sup>

In congruence with this historical trend, this section from his book indicates how pseudo-events have come to over-power spontaneous events in the reporting of news.

- (1) Pseudo-events are more dramatic. A television debate between candidates can be planned to be more suspenseful (for example, by reserving questions which are then popped suddenly) than a casual encounter or consecutive formal speeches planned by each separately.
- (2) Pseudo-events, being planned for dissemination, are easier to disseminate and to make vivid. Participants are selected for their newsworthy and dramatic interest.
- (3) Pseudo-events can be repeated at will, and thus their impression can be re-enforced.
- (4) Pseudo-events cost money to create; hence somebody has an interest in disseminating, magnifying, advertising, and extolling them as events worth watching or worth believing. They are therefore advertised in advance, and rerun in order to get money's worth.
- (5) Pseudo-events, being planned for intelligibility, are more intelligible and hence more reassuring. Even if we cannot discuss intelligently the qualifications of the candidates or the complicated issues, we can at least judge the effectiveness of a television performance. How comforting to have some political matter we can grasp!
- (6) Pseudo-events are more sociable, more conversable, and more convenient to witness. Their occurrence is planned for our convenience. The Sunday newspaper appears when we have a lazy morning for it. Television programs appear when we are ready with our glass of beer. In the office the next morning Jack Paar's (or any other star performer's) regular late-night show at the usual hour will overshadow in conversation a casual event that suddenly came up and had to find its way into the news.
- (7) Knowledge of pseudo-events—of what has been reported, or what has been staged, and how—becomes the test of being "informed." News magazines provide us regularly with quiz

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

questions concerning not what has happened but concerning "names in the news"—what has been reported in the news magazines. . . .

(8) Finally, pseudo-events spawn other pseudo-events in geometric progression. They dominate our consciousness simply because there are more of them, and ever more.<sup>22</sup>

It can be concluded that the answer to the question "what is news?" is as varied as all the stimuli reaching news disseminators. Events and pseudo-events of every variety stimulate communication in our free society, thus creating reality for the receivers of the communication.

At this point it is necessary to introduce Lloyd Bitzer's concept of exigence; after a brief explanation, part of Boorstin's idea above will take on more meaning in relation to the four-step flow theory.

According to Bitzer's theory, the exigence is the most important part of a rhetorical situation because it stimulates comments upon something that is "an imperfection marked by urgency."<sup>23</sup> A rhetorical exigence is something which has the two qualities of (1) being something other than it should be and (2) being something which can be modified. Bitzer's criteria should be easily met by much public discourse today. He gives the example of death as not meeting his criteria; however, after the assassination of President Kennedy for example, the news reports, eulogies, and assurances to

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>23</sup>Bitzer, p. 7. The author defines two other factors of a rhetorical situation: the audience and the constraints. The audience must be capable of mediating the change produced by the discourse; "constraints" refers to attitudes, etc. which hold back action that would modify exigence.

the public were exigences. Although the death itself could not have been changed, the kind of circumstances that led to the death, the feelings of people about the death, etc. could be changed.

The significance of exigence for Boorstin's theory on pseudo-events is that not only are events and reports of spontaneous events exigences for further rhetoric, but also pseudo-events and reports of pseudo-events stimulate rhetoric. In effect, pseudo-events become "events" in themselves when they are treated as such. In reference to the first step of the four-step flow theory, the point is that the "reality" which stimulates communication may itself be a product of rhetoric. Two examples will be given in support of this idea—one having to do with Agnew's rhetoric and the other having to do with violence at the Chicago Democratic Convention—both showing how rhetoric from an exigence stimulates further rhetoric, which in turn acts as an exigence that stimulates further communication, etc.

In a sense, Agnew's speech criticizing the mass media (for its instant analysis of Nixon's speeches, its elitist ownership, its biased coverage) became important because of the coverage it received in the mass media! In accordance with Boorstin's theory of one pseudo-event spawning another, Agnew's speech took on greater importance as more and more people's reactions to it were broadcast by the media. For instance, the November 24 Newsweek devoted most of its coverage of Agnew's speech to reactions by other prominent persons in the media and in government; a part of its

space was spent in editorial reply to Agnew. The three major television networks used their time in similar fashion—making the effects of the speech even bigger by their reactions and editorial defense of their own position. Agnew's pseudo-event was repeated; his initial speech, delivered at the regional meeting of the Midwest Republican Committee in Des Moines (November 20, 1969), was followed one week later by a speech in Montgomery to the Alabama Chamber of Commerce in which he extended his earlier criticism to the press, mentioning specifically the New York Times and the Washington Post. Once again he received the headlines. At the local level, Kansas University Chancellor Chalmers contributed to the effect in a talk to the Kansas Association of Radio Broadcasters—the only major field which Agnew had not covered.<sup>24</sup> Even this author was asked to speak on Agnew and "contribute a little more rhetoric." The point is that one event or pseudo-event covered by the media can have great repercussions by stimulating further communication. This fact gives special meaning to the type of "news and interpretations" that the newspapers carry and the opinion-makers read and adapt in the first step of the four-step flow. In fact, the person whose reactions to the initial event are picked up by the media can later react to media-coverage of his own statement. When the media then report those reactions, the snow-balling effect is on its way.

The second example of rhetoric from an exigence stimulating

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<sup>24</sup>For the content of his speech, see "Chalmers Issues Radio 'Criticism'," Lawrence Daily Journal World, November 21, 1969, p. 11.

further rhetoric is probably more urgent because its consequences are potentially more powerful. The concern is basically whether the media serves as a catalyst for the staging of violent "spectaculars." The official report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence addressed itself to the question of how much news was staged and manufactured by demonstrators and newsmen in the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention. It is known that there was much violence directed to the news correspondents. Out of three hundred who were assigned to cover parks and streets of the city, more than twenty percent were injured, had equipment damaged, or were involved in incidents leading to their arrest. Sixty-three were attacked by police; photographic or recording equipment was intentionally damaged in thirteen of those instances.<sup>25</sup>

There is some explanation for the media-directed violence. Camera crews on at least two occasions did stage violence and fake injuries. Demonstrators did sometimes<sup>26</sup> step up their activities for the benefit of TV cameras.

When violence is staged, it can be called a pseudo-event, just as the staging of a fifth anniversary celebration for the local bank. Any happening, when structured for the purpose of receiving publicity, is a pseudo-event. In these instances, it appears that the communication stimulus could be the desire for publicity. The writings of some contemporary activists demonstrate this concept more than what the commission reports have been able to prove up to

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<sup>25</sup>Daniel Walker, Rights in Conflict, Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, November 18, 1968 (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1968), p. xvi and pp. 255-96.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. xxv.

this date. For example, Abbie Hoffman (ironically writing under the pseudonym, "Free") almost brags about times when his behavior was prompted by the presence of cameras and microphones, and he was able to "Make News."

The media is the message. Use it! No fundraising, no full-page ads in the New York Times, no press releases. Just do your thing; the press eats it up. MAKE NEWS.

Quote: 'Pot feels good, it's fun to turn on.'

They print it, not aware of the disruption they cause. The press spreads the word, tells them where the action is and they leave America. They stream to its two shores, can't go any further, up against the ocean, what to do, down and out.<sup>27</sup>

Hoffman recounts times when he has MADE NEWS by doing something for the press which he would not necessarily have done otherwise. The presence of mass media representatives provides a certain stimulus for communication, or an exigence for action. Action is an "event" which is the substance of press content; but when action is performed for the press, it is a pseudo-event.

These ideas are important because they raise the practical question of whether rhetoric and the presence of mass media cameras should be cut off when there are threats of violent rhetoric and/or violence. Or, is it undemocratic to cut off part of the communication flow just upon threats of violence, with the effect of hindering rhetorical exchange. Regardless of what is done in a situation with threats of violence, the fact remains that the presence of media acts as an exigence to stimulate further communication, whether it be limited to rhetoric about the threats or whether it be the rhetoric of disruption.

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<sup>27</sup>Free [Abbie Hoffman], Revolution for the Hell of It (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1968), p. 37.

## CHAPTER 3

### Government Response

"The news and interpretation of an event are first carried by, say, a newspaper; this is then read and adapted by opinion-makers, who assert their opinions in speeches on the subject . . ."

The first step of Rosenau's theory showed how mass media structures people's reality and then stimulates rhetoric. As soon as an opinion-leader in the public or government responds to an event, or an event reported in the mass media, a communication flow has begun. This second step of Rosenau's theory picks up on the response given by government.

If one would take Rosenau's words literally, there would be a very limited government response. Namely, the opinion-makers would "assert their opinions in speeches on the subject," as Rosenau is quoted above in his pre-theory statement. Certainly the giving of speeches is one possible response, but it is not the only possible response. In addition to giving speeches that will be heard directly by some and heard about by many through the mass media, government workers can hold news conferences, prepare handouts and maintain informal relations with the press which can stimulate media coverage. They can give out "factual" news, such as data on the Appollo flight, or they can leak information or send up a trial balloon for motives beyond provision of news. When government responds to a communication stimulus by providing copy (or being the subject of copy) by any of the means just mentioned, it communicates an image of itself which must also be considered in the theory as by-product of the response.

### Government Provides Information to Mass Media

Theoretically, there is a government-media conflict which affects the relationship of the two. Inherently, there is information which government would often prefer to withhold that the press would prefer to publicize. Washington, D. C. workers are often warned about certain "nosey" reporters who would get their lead story by almost any means, even if they had to survey wastebaskets after working hours! Especially when the press corps considers itself an extension of the public and therefore strives to keep government "honest" by exposing its activities, the conflict between the two bodies is significant.

In general, however, the Washington press corps dealing with top officials is a relatively small group of devoted persons who function with a deep understanding of the need for limitations upon exposure. For example, Bernard Cohen made the following statement in regard to one segment of the Washington press corps:

Despite his professional interest in storming the walls of secrecy that surround the operations of government, virtually every foreign affairs reporter acknowledges at least in an abstract way the need for secrecy in the conduct of international diplomacy and of national security matters. He is likely to point out that there are some important judgments to be made by the reporter about the relative priorities of secrecy as against the public's "need to know;" yet the Executive's right to conduct some of its operations in private, and to let the press and thus the rest of the political system in "after the event," is freely granted, both in principle and in practice.<sup>1</sup>

Against this background of secrecy-exposure conflict, government provides the mass media with information. It is in the government's interest to do so, because then there is more control over what

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 22.

information is given out when. This is a mutually satisfactory relationship, because in an era when the media must turn out two or more daily papers and hourly news broadcasts, the reporter would be hard pressed to come up with enough copy he had sought out by interview or by attending and reporting events.

With thousands of government information officers employed at every level, the scope of subjects for government communication is vast—proposals and plans and findings are written up for the press on subjects as "remote" as peanut oil uses or toy safety, or subjects as pressing as drugs or youth crime. Assuming that these government communications are in response to some rhetorical exigence, the question is how government goes about disseminating such an enormous quantity of information.

As Rosenau mentions in his brief pre-theory statement, one way in which government opinion-makers respond to an exigence is by giving speeches. Every department has persons employed whose job it is to give speeches to the public and to help private organizations plan programs, conventions, etc. in behalf of some cause in the government's interest. Departments have persons who give speeches "in the field", trying to solicit feedback to report back to their governmental department. Often such speeches are given to selected members of the academic and business communities, from whom they desire personal feedback.

Often speech-giving has an intended audience beyond the hearers of the message. Advance copies of the speech are given to the press, or a reporter is expected to cover a speech so that its actual audience includes everyone who hears or reads about the speech in the

mass media. Thus, speech giving is one means for government to respond directly to a particular audience, yet without sacrificing national coverage when desired.

Franklin Roosevelt was the first president to use the radio extensively and effectively for giving speeches of a personal nature to almost every American. He used the new medium in a way that brought his personality into people's living rooms. His fireside chats, broadcast worldwide, brought an audience more vast than any previous political speaker's. Although they averaged only two per year (to avoid over-exposure), they were timed for delivery during the banking crisis, the outbreak of the war, and Pearl Harbor. Perhaps as important as the content of the chats was their morale-building aspect. The President's calmness, frankness, simplicity and frequent use of "we" invoked the end result he sought. The chats were largely designed to report, review and explain policy to the public. Several were built around the thesis question: Are you not better off than you were in 1932? Although the chats were employed on occasion to encourage certain legislation, his use of any technique to arouse support for some specific bill was quite subtle, and usually just a passing reference.

Roosevelt's letter to the President of the National Broadcasting Company in 1933 highlights his interest in the medium of radio for reaching his public as directly as possible:

I need not tell you that in my opinion radio now is one of the most effective mediums for the dissemination of information. It cannot misrepresent or misquote. It is far reaching and simultaneous in releasing messages given it for transmission

to the Nation or for international consumption.<sup>2</sup>

Opinion-makers since World War II also have had available the medium of television for reaching the public directly. A president is usually given time upon request to speak to the nation directly, while lower government workers will usually have segments of speeches broadcast to the nation as news clips. By its very nature, the medium gives an opinion-maker his most concentrated contact with the public. For specialized segments of the public, direct speeches can best be utilized, and for personal inquiry on individual questions, face-to-face conversation or personal letter is the most direct means of communication.<sup>3</sup>

Another important means of government dissemination of news is the press or news conference. City, state<sup>4</sup> and federal officials will call a news conference when they have something to announce; by reading a prepared statement or by talking informally with the media representatives, they can communicate indirectly to the public (assuming that their copy is used in the media or over the national press wires). If an announcement is intended for a specialized or regional audience, officials can limit the list of reporters who are invited to the news conference.

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<sup>2</sup>Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 255.

<sup>3</sup>For a case study of Roosevelt's replies to individuals by mail, see Leila Sussmann, "FDR and the White House Mail," Public Opinion Quarterly, xx (Spring, 1956), 5-16.

<sup>4</sup>A 1968 study of state governors found that fourteen governors at that time had news conferences more than once per week, while eighteen called a conference at least once per week. Only three "hardly ever" held conferences with the press. Thomas F. Baldwin and Lowell Newton, "State Governors and Broadcast News," Journal of Broadcasting, XXII (Spring, 1968), 147-153.

Although officials at many top levels of government can call a news conference, the presidential conferences which have become "institutionalized" are the most top-level access reporters have to national policy-making information. The conferences are institutionalized in that they are expected; still, the president calls a news conference only when he wishes. By maintaining this control, the executive can time press exposure. At a press conference, the president can give information on public affairs; he can bring a certain issue to national attention; he can set a mood in regard to an issue by the degree of gravity he attaches or the sense of urgency with which he explains his action.

Although the possibilities for dissemination of information and the general format for doing so remains constant, different administrations have very different relationships with the press, depending upon the individuals' personalities, the president's concern for publicity, his understanding of mass media, etc. A brief history of presidential news conferences shows some of those differences, and therefore shows for Rosenau's theory some of the variables operating as the top government opinion-maker asserts his opinion.

Roosevelt was the first president of the modern-media era to empathize with, and respond to, the need of newsmen for copy. Reporters were summoned to his office at least twice weekly. At times he took the Washington correspondents into his confidence to keep them informed even when he felt the public should not be informed. When necessary, his "off-the-record" replies were explanations in

depth of why he could not discuss a particular subject. His philosophy was that when reporters understood public problems as he did, they would report the news from an accurate perspective, withholding information they knew should be withheld. Roosevelt assumed the role of teacher with the press on all significant matters, including fiscal and foreign policy, just as he did over the radio with the public. With the assumption that he could trust certain newsmen, he categorized comments to them so that they would know specifically what was expected of them in their news reports to the public. On some statements, Roosevelt would tell the reporters that a direct quotation would be permissible, while on others, an indirect quotation with attribution to his name would be satisfactory; some comments he restricted to background information which the reporters had to write under their own authority, and others were labeled entirely off the record and could not be used at all.<sup>5</sup>

In general, newsmen said that they felt indebted to Roosevelt for his understanding of the media and the demands upon them for news. He personally provided news and allowed considerable direct contact with the press through informal conferences.

In contrast to Roosevelt's explicit instruction for which comments could be used in which way, Truman was not specific, and then later he would blame reporters for misrepresentation of his conference statements. For example, at a November, 1951, news conference Truman responded to a question by stating that use of

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<sup>5</sup>Douglass Cater, The Fourth Branch of Government (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), pp. 34-35.

the atom bomb was "always under consideration." Headlines reporting the conference dropped the word "always." The effect was overwhelming. Prime Minister Attlee flew to Washington to consult the President; it is said that the death of the President's press secretary, Charles Ross, was indirectly speeded up.<sup>6</sup> While Truman blamed the media for mishandling his statement, reporters claimed that Truman had time, as always, to make his meaning clear at the time he uttered any comment. The fault probably lay in his inability to foresee the impact of his words when they were reported by the mass media. Joseph Harsch of the Christian Science Monitor put it that Truman was "not consistently aware of the general implication of the specific."<sup>7</sup>

Some writers have said that Truman felt persecuted by the press because after years of adulation, criticism was being directed at him. For example, in a January, 1961, news conference, Truman asserted that not a single U.S. newspaper had printed his important statement that he was ready to consult with congressional committees before he sent troops to Europe. A check-up showed that this particular criticism was not justified; all of the press associations and leading newspapers had carried his statement.<sup>8</sup>

During a news conference near the end of his administration, Truman attacked the press for being controlled by big business.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-39.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>8</sup>James E. Pollard, The Presidents and the Press (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1964), pp. 37-38.

"Look at the advertising pages, if you don't believe it. It's always been against President Roosevelt. It has always been against me, and if it was for me, I'd know I was wrong."<sup>9</sup> At a later conference, he warned reporters that he did not like to have words put into his mouth and that he did not like to be misinterpreted. He claimed he did not "give a hoot" about newspaper comments on him as long as the truth was printed. He warned of danger in a "one-party press in a two-party country"—obviously perceiving himself as a member or leader of the excluded party.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his personal feelings toward the press and news representatives, Truman continued holding news conferences frequently, whenever he felt circumstances justified them, and submitted himself to freely asked questions. His belief in the public's right to know was apparent, especially during the cold war when Korea and the United Nations were important issues. In his final news conference (January 15, 1953), Truman commented upon the importance of communication between the president and the citizens:

This kind of news conference where reporters can ask any question they can dream up—directly of the President of the United States—illustrates how strong and how vital our democracy is. There is no other country in the world where the chief of state submits to such unlimited question; I know, too, from experience that it is not easy to stand up here and try to answer "off-the-cuff" on all kinds of questions without any advance notice. Perhaps succeeding Presidents will be able to

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>This claim was made specific in the 1952 campaigns for Stevenson. He said that only 10.3 percent of the 1,769 daily newspapers supported the Democratic party (1948 figures), and cautioned Americans to compensate for the imbalanced presentation of news. New York Herald Tribune, September 12, 1952, as cited by Pollard, p. 54.

figure out improvements and safeguards in the procedure. I hope they will never cut out the direct line of communication between themselves and the people.<sup>11</sup>

Truman's remarks establish at least two important concepts for Rosenau's theory. First, the news conference is not only a means by which government can give out pre-planned information, but it is also a part of the structure by which policy meaning can be questioned; in other words, the press conference offers limited opportunity for two-way communication. The second concept we may draw from Truman's remarks is that the news conference is perceived as a channel for communication between the president (or other government official) and the public.

President Eisenhower picked up on Truman's suggestions and contributed to the form of meetings with the press. He permitted television cameras to record the conferences, bringing his personality directly to the people. He allowed almost unlimited direct quotation of his replies to questions. To balance these innovations, Press Secretary Hagerty maintained the right to edit sound and film recordings of news conferences. The Administration stressed that this was not "censorship;" it was only a measure for the "White House to remain in control of the spoken word of the President."<sup>12</sup> Although the changes in policy were received with enthusiasm by most media representatives, Edward R. Murrow (CBS) cautioned that White House control might become too strict or that

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<sup>11</sup>New York Times, February 16, 1953, as quoted in Pollard, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup>Columbus Dispatch, January 2, 1953, as quoted in Pollard, p. 78.

the President might be forced to curb himself in his contact with the press.<sup>13</sup>

On the average, Eisenhower held conferences only a little more than half as often as did Truman, and not quite a third as often as Roosevelt. Eisenhower's total is affected because in his first eight months of office he held only fourteen conferences; in the latter part of his administration, health and trips abroad limited his news conferences. The following chart shows a comparison of numbers of conferences held:<sup>14</sup>

|            | <u>Number</u> | <u>Months in Office</u> | <u>Average Yearly</u> |
|------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Roosevelt  | 998           | 147                     | 81.48                 |
| Truman     | 324           | 93                      | 41.76                 |
| Eisenhower | 190           | 96                      | 23.75                 |

President Eisenhower did not call a conference and then make frequent use of the phrase, "no comment." Instead, when there were problems he did not want to discuss in the public eye, he did not hold a news conference. One reporter remarked on the Washington news page in Editor and Publisher: "The President departed from our midst neither liked nor disliked—but pretty much unknown."<sup>15</sup>

Press Secretary Hagerty held a number of press conferences that were important for communicating information to the public during the President's ill health. Normally a press secretary is the daily link between the president and the press by supplementing the president's limited appearances before media reporters. Therefore, when the President was unavailable after his September, 1955,

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

heart attack, Hagerty gave frequent and thorough news conferences to soothe public worries about the President's health and the nation's politics.

Hagerty arranged interviews with top government officials. He arranged to have the President's heart specialist interviewed in conference by newsmen. Many critics, however, said that Hagerty overstepped his bounds as "provider of news". For example, once Hagerty handed a visiting Cabinet member a statement to read for the mass media microphones which said that the President was looking well. Actually, the visitor had not been in to see the President at that time. This led Douglass Cater to conclude that Hagerty had used the mass media and press conferences to "distort the public image of the President and the Presidency itself."<sup>16</sup>

President John Kennedy's term coincided with improved communication facilities; as a politician he was sensitive to the need for adequate press coverage. Because of those two factors, at least five significant changes were made in policy toward the media:

1. Live telecasts and broadcasts of Presidential news conferences,
2. Frequent exclusive interviews to supplement formal conferences,
3. Unusual intimacy with certain correspondents, including swimming in the White House pool, or dining in their homes,
4. Luncheons with groups of newspapermen—editors and publishers—by individual states to discuss mutual problems and matters of public concern, and
5. A shift in scheduling news conferences mostly to afternoons so that no morning session was held between March 31, and the final one on November 14, 1963.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Cater, p. 164.

<sup>17</sup>Pollard, pp. 95-96.

Perhaps because of the extensive supplementary encounters described above, Kennedy allowed the presence of four hundred newsmen of the thousand then accredited to attend formal conferences. This unusually large number caused some dissatisfaction. Journalist Hugh Sidney pointed out that one problem of a massive news conference is that it becomes necessary to stand up and battle for attention. "Many good reporters are not necessarily good actors. Thus the quiet kind of thoughtful questioning that really is the underpinning of this business is totally lost in the big press conference."<sup>18</sup>

President Johnson seldom allowed more than sixty representatives at his conferences with newsmen, both at the White House and the Texas ranch. In addition, there were at least four differences in approach:

1. The new President was more folksy than his predecessor,
2. He was more informal; formal news conferences were the exception rather than the rule as they had been under Mr. Kennedy,
3. The Johnson news conferences were much more frequent—twenty-six in the first 182 days, and
4. They were frequently given on such short notice—as little as five minutes—as to seem almost impulsive.<sup>19</sup>

Some correspondents preferred the Johnson style because they felt that in the atmosphere he created, he was likely to say more to the press. On the other hand, small bureaus often felt left out of the President's announcements because they did not have the personnel to be on hand for all impromptu proceedings. The larger

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<sup>18</sup>Delbert McGuire, "Democracy's Confrontation: The Presidential Press Conference, I," Journalism Quarterly, XLIV (Winter, 1967), 641.

<sup>19</sup>Pollard, p. 113

news bureaus installed stand-by facilities in the White House, which could be put into operation for spur-of-the-moment appearances. President Johnson requested television time to explain himself and his policies frequently. A Gallup Poll (August 1, 1965) showed that sixty-six percent of a national sample had heard or seen at least one Presidential press conference in the first six months of 1965.<sup>20</sup>

Johnson strove to remain accessible to the press, and thus indirectly to the public. In fact, some of his advisers mentioned over-exposure as a potential problem, particularly as related to family affairs and his daughters' wedding plans. He was sensitive to his press coverage and to the questions asked of him during press conferences. Some stories reflecting on him as a person, unrelated to public policy, bothered him greatly—such as the "human interest" stories about his fast driving and rough treatment to his beagles.

Early in his administration, Nixon appeared to live up to his campaign promise of having an "open administration." He held a live televised news conference only nine days after taking office; four more live conferences were held February 6, March 4, March 14, and April 18. May 22 he held an informal, non-quotable briefing on Warren Burger's appointment. June 19 was another live news conference. July 25 was an informal non-quotable briefing in Guam

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<sup>20</sup>Elmer Cornwell, Jr., "The Johnson Press Relations Style" Journalism Quarterly, XLIII (Spring, 1966), 4-8.

on his Asian policy. But from then until late September, he did not answer any question from the press. Newsmen had expressed their frustration that the President had not held a news conference for three months, and pointed out that since Nixon's aides were not regularly available for questioning, the President himself was their only authoritative source on White House policies. Robert Semple of the Times News Service, wrote that in the eyes of some observers there was a

growing and potentially damaging communications gap. He has withdrawn troops, cut the draft, and let the commentators do the interpreting. Many people here are confused by them [Nixon's actions], and out of this confusion arises the growing demands for a public exchange with the President.<sup>21</sup>

According to some, Nixon's lack of contact with the press through conferences reflects a negative attitude toward the press. For example, Edwin James, executive editor of Broadcast Magazine said that Vice-President Agnew's November, 1969, speeches which blasted several faults of mass media news were the fruits of a long-simmering attitude of the Nixon Administration toward the press.<sup>22</sup> A Presidential aide, Clark Mollenhoff said "the speech was developed in the White House. It represents White House concern about getting through to the public."<sup>23</sup>

For Rosenau's theory of the four-step flow, this means that personalities involved will affect the tone of communications about

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<sup>21</sup>Robert B. Semple, Jr., "White House Communications Gap" Kansas City Times, September 25, 1969, p. 17E.

<sup>22</sup>"Agnew's Complaint: The Trouble with TV," Newsweek, November 24, 1969, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup>"TV Broadcast Criticism," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, November 21, 1969, p. 2328.

the media and will affect the means by which the opinion-makers let their feelings be known. In other words, their feelings about the medium will affect the type of response given to a rhetorical exigence; their communication is affected by their feelings about the medium.

In general, news conferences serve as one means by which government opinion-makers can communicate indirectly to the public, exerting their influence as opinion-makers and providing information. In addition, the press "forces" government into the position of explaining public policy. As suggested previously in the discussion of Truman's remarks, and as Douglass Cater wrote, the press fills an important gap in the U.S. political system——putting government on the spot.<sup>24</sup> Cater pointed out that in Britain, for example, the press merely records periodic questioning directed to the cabinet by their opposition party. The questions are partisan, but they are responsible because the opposition realizes that they may some day be in the policy-making position with the questions directed to them. In our country, there is no such means of the executive being questioned by the opposite political party. Other branches of government are not necessarily brought into the policy debates until after the fact. As Cater says,

Congressmen must be content with the post mortem——a procedure that usually does little to rectify past errors of judgment and may even by endless re-examination of faits accomplis serve to hamstring present judgment. U.S. policy toward China, for example, has not been notably improved by the constant

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<sup>24</sup>Cater, pp. 148-154.

inquiries into why China fell to the Communists in the first place.<sup>25</sup>

Pierre Salinger, Kennedy's Press Secretary, claimed that the press conference system could not be considered a substitute for the parliamentary question period. The prime minister must answer questions from the House of Commons, while the U.S. president maintains control over whether to hold press conferences or not.<sup>26</sup> Cater's analogy is not perfect; nevertheless, he is generally correct, because as Salinger would agree, a president cannot put off meeting the press too long. Although he can control the timing of the gatherings, informal pressures operate to ensure that he does soon answer questions from the press.

Speeches and press conferences are surpassed by handouts for providing information to the mass media daily. A "handout" is a news release printed up and given to reporters and wire agencies. As a continuous source of news for the press, handouts are considered to be the basis of public affairs reporting. They are generally used as "orientation" material for reporters, and provide the leads for further search for information. In other words, a reporter's knowledge of current affairs may begin with the handouts, but would not necessarily end there, depending on his own and his editor's standards. Part of the reason for this approach is that handouts are one-sided, in general, with the intent of making known some event or opinion for publicity from the government's viewpoint.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>26</sup>Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), p. 55.

A study of releases from the State and Health, Education, and Welfare Departments claimed that government releases could be considered one aspect of news management.<sup>27</sup> By coordinating publicity into handouts, the government determines largely the manner and timing of the release of information. They can exercise suppression of information by not producing handouts; or when they do give a release they can slant the information as they see fit. The author of the study said this points up the importance of the governmental institutions in getting information on its way in the flow to the public.

The following table makes it apparent that White House releases are an important source of presidential publicity in the Times. February and March of one year was selected from the terms of each president. Since 1962 was necessarily used for Kennedy, the fact that it was election year may have some bearing upon the data.

Space in New York Times Devoted to Press Releases<sup>28</sup>

|  | Roosevelt<br>(1935) | Truman<br>(1945) | Eisenhower<br>(1957) | Kennedy<br>(1962) |
|--|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Number press releases issued                 | 35                  | 63               | 58                   | 154               |
| Number to which coverage<br>was given        | 27                  | 45               | 44                   | 107               |
| Number given page one coverage               | 14                  | 9                | 17                   | 42                |
| Number including test of<br>release          | 20                  | 17               | 15                   | 35                |
| Total Column inches of coverage              | 766                 | 945              | 944                  | 3289              |
| Average column inches per<br>release covered | 28                  | 21               | 21                   | 30                |

<sup>27</sup> Edward Glick, "Press-Government Relationships: State and Health, Education and Welfare Departments," Journalism Quarterly, XLIII (Spring, 1966), 53.

<sup>28</sup> Elmer Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion, pp. 235-236.

The totals of the figures above suggest increasing involvement of staff aides in communication to the public. The president is likely to have worded a statement or report only in important cases, because of sheer volume.

Attitude toward the press also affects the nature of hand-outs. Theodore White's study of the 1960 presidential campaign revealed what might be the most clear-cut example of this somewhat difficult phenomenon to "prove." According to White, Nixon restricted his handouts so that the press would "have to work", while Kennedy gave out transcripts with explanations of his speeches as soon as he could. Nixon's failure to keep newsmen informed caught up with him, because for the mass media to be able to inform the public on complicated positions, newsmen must first be made to understand the issue and the candidate's position in relation to the issue. Nixon and his advisers once worked for two days on a farm surplus speech without explaining the speech content to newsmen accompanying him. The night before it was to be delivered, they were handed only the text of the speech. From his complicated proposals, reporters wrote up their stories for dissemination very early the next morning. White offers the following four private dispatches as "illustrations of what happens when the press feels itself abused:"<sup>29</sup>

GUTHRIE CENTER, Iowa—Vice-President Nixon said today farmers should eat their way out of the surplus problem.

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<sup>29</sup>Theodore White, The Making of the President 1960 (New York: Atheneum House, Inc., 1961), p. 312 and pp. 374-380.

GUTHRIE CENTER, Iowa—Vice-President Nixon admitted today that the farm problem was too big for the Republican Party to handle. He said that if elected President, he would appoint Senator Hubert H. Humphrey as Secretary of Agriculture and let him wrestle with the problem.

GUTHRIE CENTER, Iowa—Vice-President Nixon said today that farmers are too blankety-blank greedy. He suggested they get what he called "honest jobs" in urban industries.

GUTHRIE CENTER, Iowa—Vice-President Nixon today called on Pope John XXIII for guidance in finding a solution to the troublesome farm problems which have plagued Catholic, Jew and Protestant alike.

White analyzed the situation as follows:

If there were roots to the malice, they lay up ahead in the plane carrying the candidate and his staff. The candidate and his staff had decided very early in the year that the press was their enemy and that they could reach the American people by direct emotion only via television.<sup>30</sup>

Another way in which government provides the press with copy is by staging pseudo-events, or creating communication for the purpose of generating media coverage as a response to some other event or pseudo-event. Senator McCarthy provided the most outstanding historical example. His appeal to the public was based entirely on what made public headlines. He did not set up a single contempt citation that was sustained in the courts. He did not propose any new laws to deal with the Communist conspiracy he said existed, although as every congressman, he had the opportunity to do so. He limited his activities to "alerting" America. He created news dramatically. He captured the attention of millions of Americans.

According to Cater, many activities of Senate investigative committees are geared to the production of headlines. The hearing

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

is the "final act" in the drama which may be designed to "attract public attention, to alarm or allay, to enlighten, or yes, sometimes to obscure."<sup>31</sup>

The trial balloon and leak techniques are additional ways the government can respond to communication stimuli. Both could be called pseudo-events because they are generated for the purpose of publicity, with the hope of generating a response, in turn, from the attentive public and from other opinion-makers.

The trial balloon is not a common use of the press, but it is a subtle and important device at times. Cohen defines "trial balloon" as "the calculated indiscretion that is designed to test reactions to new policy ideas."<sup>32</sup> Alfred Kuhn says that it is an unofficial release of information such that the top officers can deny any knowledge or responsibility if it is not well received by the public.<sup>33</sup> It may appear in the mass media as a rumor or a statement from a lower governmental official, testing public reaction before final action is taken.

Background briefings have become a breeding ground for trial balloons, because by the nature of the briefing, sources are confidential and are withheld from the media. For example, the "Eisenhower Doctrine" for the defense of the Middle East was not

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<sup>31</sup>Cohen, pp. 56-58.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>33</sup>Alfred Kuhn, The Study of Society: A Unified Approach (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 684-685.

mentioned by the President until it was tested as a trial balloon at a background dinner. Columnist James Reston perceived that defense of the Middle East was on Secretary Dulles' mind, and approached him with that observation. Reston's suspicions were confirmed, and so in his news column he quoted only "a reliable source." In response to this early release, Dulles invited a small group of Washington correspondents to his home to explain the plan. Reaction in the resulting columns was favorable, and so the Executive recommended the approach. Cohen pointed out a further repercussion of the Executive action; since Dulles gave newsmen information three days before he put the proposal to Congressional leaders, "it was presumably too late for the Congressmen to do other than acquiesce in the widely publicized policy."<sup>34</sup> Whether or not the policy-making response is given, the fact relevant for Rosenau's theory is that the balloon has been sent up in response to some exigence, and in turn the balloon will be covered by the mass media and serve as an exigence for response from others (i.e., feedback to the opinion-makers or decision-makers).

Bill Moyers pointed out that although reporters must promise not to quote the man they are talking to or even his agency, from a background briefing, they can cross-examine the witness, checking evidence with other sources later, and then choose the information that is reliable or purposeful as opposed to that which is self-

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<sup>34</sup>Cohen, pp. 187-88.

serving propaganda. The danger of the practice, however, is that the public official who finds a journalist willing to cooperate can hide behind anonymity, while the so-called "informed sources" conflict and cause public confusion.<sup>35</sup> For example in 1953, Secretary of State Dulles was the anonymous source for a story that the State Department was considering a Korean boundary settlement along the narrow part of the Korean peninsula. The trial balloon was shot down on Capitol Hill. Promptly another "informed source" from the White House denied that there was even any consideration of a permanent division of Korea. The second anonymous source was also Dulles; he had denied his own previous story.<sup>36</sup> Although the rhetoric was flowing, the "news" was dealing only in speculation; it was not reporting what was. If all the stories were written accurately, reflecting the mere speculation, it is questionable whether readers in the public could straighten out in their own minds what was (see chapter 5).

October-November, 1969, speculation that Vice-President Agnew was "speaking for Nixon" in his reaction to the Vietnam moratorium, is actually questioning whether Agnew was sending up a trial balloon for Nixon to test the public's stand. If in fact Agnew's remarks were known and/or planned by the President, they would serve as a

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<sup>35</sup>Bill D. Moyers, "The Press and Government: Who's Telling the Truth?" Speech given at the University of Kansas, April 29, 1968, pp. 17-19.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

powerful balloon.<sup>37</sup> The President himself would not receive potential criticism, yet he could almost be guaranteed some kind of feedback from opinion-leaders and the public with such strong words coming from the second-ranking executive.<sup>38</sup>

The leak is another form of unattributed news that is given out for purposes beyond strict information-giving. On the positive side, the leak can open the way for discussion and psychologically prepare the public for governmental action in a certain direction. But on the negative side, just as the trial balloon, it can be inaccurate since nobody takes responsibility for the statement. For example, the New York Times front page headline on March 26, 1955, was: U.S. EXPECTS CHINESE REDS TO ATTACK ISLES IN APRIL: WEIGHS ALL OUT DEFENSE. Three days later, in the same position was this contradiction: EISENHOWER SEES NO WAR NOW OVER CHINESE ISLES.<sup>39</sup> The similarity between the two reports is that neither one indicated who spoke for the "U.S." in the first case, or for "Eisenhower" in the second.

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<sup>37</sup>There are contradictory reports on whether Agnew was acting as an agent. "Post-Moratorium Developments Stir Controversy," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, October 24, 1969, p. 2052: "A White House spokesman declined to comment on the VP's condemnation of the moratorium, but said the VP had not conferred with Mr. Nixon before making the speech." Other reports claimed that one of Nixon's speech writers contributed to the speech, and that Nixon had probably given his approval or encouragement.

<sup>38</sup>The sharpest attack on the moratorium came in Agnew's October 19 speech to a GOP fund-raising dinner: "If the moratorium had any use whatever, it served as an emotional purgative for those who feel the need to cleanse themselves of their lack of ability to offer a constructive solution to the problem. A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals. It is in this setting of dangerous over-simplification that the war in Vietnam achieves its greatest distortion." Ibid., p. 2052.

<sup>39</sup>Cater, p. 129.

Another author<sup>40</sup> places the blame for these contradictory reports upon Eisenhower because he did not make clear which subordinates he considered could speak for him. The first headline was excited by Admiral Robert Carney, Chief of Naval Operations, who believed that war in Asia was imminent and perhaps even desirable. His background briefing resulted in the headline that caused even the President to bristle; Carney's word had been given the color of "authority" and official sanction. The second headline resulted from a background briefing with Hagerty held three nights later. Again the media could quote only a "reliable source" but government officials had not been dragged into open public conflict with one another. Eisenhower once stated that he had trusted subordinates who could occasionally leak news for purposes they considered proper. But who was Eisenhower's (or any government official's) trusted subordinate and reliable source?

In the case above, the mass media was blamed for exciting an unfounded war scare. Public confusion over what was true was evident. In the following case, another kind of response can be illustrated; leaks were designed to use the media to put pressure on somebody else. It is a strategic response by opinion-makers to a rhetorical exigence that inherently creates another exigence to which response is expected.

In November of 1967, General Westmoreland told reporters that he was "deeply concerned" that the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville was

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<sup>40</sup>William L. Rivers, The Opinion Makers (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 146-147.

about to become an important source of arms for Vietcong troops in South Vietnam. He said that the military was considering contingency plans to quarantine the port. "Some U.S. officials" was given as the source in news stories. Later, reporters reasoned that the leak was designed to put pressure on Cambodian Premier Sihanouk to control arms shipments and to spur international action toward that same end. Bill Moyers, who related this example of the leak, stated,

A worthwhile objective, no doubt; but was it necessary for several reporters to deceive the public into thinking that "some U.S. officials" rather than one in particular was considering such a significant shift of policy? Did it not occur to the reporters that the United States Government has more effective and legitimate ways to get a message of such import to Prince Sihanouk and to spur international action than to compromise the boundary between an independent press and a government which always seeks to make that press an ally in furthering its policies?<sup>41</sup>

Sometimes government opinion-makers leak information to the mass media, and have the media become the "source" for the public. Several days before the official announcement of General Hershey's replacement, the following article appeared over the A.P. wires and in many newspapers nationwide:

A Columbia Broadcasting System reporter says President Nixon is preparing to retire Gen. Lewis B. Hershey, director of the Selective Service System, within the next month. A White House spokesman in Washington said there was no such plan. Newsman Dan Rather said Monday on the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite that Hershey would be replaced as part of a draft reform plan "designed to defuse domestic political opposition to the war."

Douglass Cater said that the leak, as it is used in the examples

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<sup>41</sup>Moyers, p. 23.

above, raises fundamental questions about the nature of reporting. Granting that government opinion-makers will respond to a communication stimulus which will be reported to the public, does this mean that the media are under obligation to report opinion-makers' attempts to test public opinion or to win support for some cause? Is mass media a tool of government? Or is the newsman an intelligence agent for the public? The problem with unattributed news is that newsmen do not know whether to interpret a government official's statement as "fact" or as an element of psychological warfare.<sup>42</sup>

Thus far we have seen how government opinion-makers provide copy for the mass media by giving speeches, holding press conferences, preparing handouts, and by letting out trial balloons and leaks. One more factor of this aspect of the government-media relationship should be mentioned—informal relations with press representatives. Not so much a technique for talking about hard data, informal get-togethers set a mood about current affairs which is then reflected in the mass media. President Kennedy called frequent informal gatherings with selected pressmen. Although some felt his social flattery and play to favorites were indirect means of news management, others pointed up the advantage of reporters' having easier access to the prime news source. With informal access, there is less reason for inaccuracy in reporting. President Johnson was a great user of the informal press gathering. Newsmen were invited to his Texas ranch and the President would talk about his position on public policies from a haystack podium or over a big meal of bar-be-qued beef.

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<sup>42</sup>Cohen, p. 138.

Informal contact with the press has a service to offer in an era of worry that government decisions might be taken on the basis of whatever is "instantly explainable" to media reporters. Continuous informal relationships between top correspondents and top government opinion-makers (at every level of government) give complex issues time and opportunity to be understood. As long as newsmen take advantage of the opportunity for in-depth understanding of public issues, the coverage that government receives in the media tends to be more informed and accurate. That attitude is set by the opinion-maker. He can open or close himself to the press on a continuing basis that puts his responses to a rhetorical exigence in context—in the context of the complete issue and in the context of the opinion-maker's total position.

#### Government Communicates an Image

Americans carry in their minds an image of their nation. They carry an image of their nation in contrast with other nations.<sup>43</sup> And

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<sup>43</sup>Rostow calls the sum of these attitudes the "American national style," and gives an extensive survey of what images are popularly held. The tradition of isolation was one result of the central image of avoiding entangling alliances abroad. Ingenuity, industry and abundance are still often part of the American's faith in a man's ability to make his destiny. Americans respond with near-reverence to the terms "democracy" and "freedom," although in application there is divergence. Laws bring to most Americans' minds an expression of the people's will. From foreign nations, we generally want to be left sufficiently alone to enjoy our freedom and high standard of living. W.W. Rostow, The United States in the World Arena (New York: Harper, 1960), p. xix and Sheldon Appleton, United States Foreign Policy (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), pp. 36-67.

they carry an image of their government.<sup>44</sup> People form their images on the basis of "how they were brought up," what their parents and friends think, and whatever additional communications they allow to enter their cognitive systems from mass media, rumor, etc. The part of this image-formation relevant to Rosenau's theory at this stage is how the government contributes to its public image by what it communicates through the mass media. We have already seen how the government responds to communication stimuli by providing the press with information. In so doing, government communicates an image to the public.

Certain long-range concepts about government may change only once or twice in a person's lifetime, if at all. It is short-range images with which politicians and government opinion-makers are most often concerned in order to win over public favor for themselves or their program. "I Like Ike" reflects a favorable short-range image of the warmth and sincerity the public felt he communicated. Empathy for Nixon's attempts at withdrawal in Vietnam, despite nearly-insurmountable problems in negotiation is a short-range image that the Administration will probably strive for as long as U.S. troops are committed to Southeast Asia.

Favorable short-range images are usually perceived as essential to the success of a government opinion-maker or his programs. As mentioned previously, publicity may guide the development of a program. The point is that as government workers give out information, they

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<sup>44</sup>The book cited in chapter two, Political Ideology, explains well "what the common man believes," and probes into his image of government, democracy, etc. Robert E. Lane, Political Ideology (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962). Also, the following source provides a philosophical discussion of images of political roles: Kenneth Boulding, The Image (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1961), pp. 103-114.

simultaneously communicate an image. Thus, Rosenau's statement about opinion-makers who assert their opinions on a subject in response to some communication stimulus, may be refined to imply that as government responds, they help to create their own image (for others in government and for the public). Just as in interpersonal relations, the receiver of a message extracts not only content, but also a perception of the communicator. Chapter two showed some of the ways government used the media to portray an intended image, as described above. However, by their words and actions reported in the mass media, government opinion-makers also communicate unintended images. When an intended meaning from the government evokes an opposite response in the public, there is a boomerang effect. A prevalent image—unintended by government—that is of grave concern to government is the "credibility gap." It is felt that the government issues some statements to the public that are untrue, and the gap widens as the public questions the validity of more and more communications, not knowing which to believe.

At the heart of the matter is that many government statements are subject to oversimplification in news handling because of limited space and limited public interest. For example, in response to a question on foreign troop commitments, it is much more simple to report numbers than to always explain that "it is hoped" the commitment can be down to such-and-such "pending a certain situation" "by a certain time." But unless it is done that way, the statement can later be interpreted as lacking credibility. A recent issue of Congressional Quarterly reported the Laos involvement in a way that

heightened suggestion of a gap. The article opened with the following two quotations:<sup>45</sup>

We have increased our assistance to the (South Vietnamese) government, its logistics, and we have not sent combat troops there, although training missions that we have there have been instructed that if they are fired upon, they are of course to fire back, to protect themselves, but we have not sent combat troops in the generally understood sense of the word.

—President John F. Kennedy, Feb. 14, 1962.

We have been providing logistical support and some training for the neutralist government in order to avoid Laos falling under Communist domination. As far as American power in Laos is concerned, there are none there at the present time on a combat basis.

—President Richard M. Nixon, Sept. 26, 1969

The Quarterly's coverage of President Kennedy's statement does not allow for circumstances to change, and for a man to adapt his strategy to the circumstance. In Bill Moyers' words, "Events make lies out of the best promises."<sup>46</sup> In 1964, President Johnson said that he sought no wider war in Vietnam and that he would not have American men doing the fighting for the Asians. When he widened the war in 1965, he was accused of breaking faith with the public, and therefore of creating a credibility gap. Again, his hope-filled "promise" had been given, and the public was not willing to let him change his mind over time. This attaches a sense of permanence to government response; this must be realized so that government will word statements in a way to be reported by the media that reflects an open mind, subject to change if circumstances

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<sup>45</sup>"Concern Grows Over U.S. Commitment in Laos," Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, October 24, 1969, p. 2069.

<sup>46</sup>Moyers, p. 36.

change without creating a "credibility gap."

In addition to the effect of time on strategy, there are two other factors adding to the problem of credibility on what people gather from mass media. First, "some things are simply not suited for telling on the time schedule an inquisitive press prefers."<sup>47</sup> Top government officials must often resist commenting on a situation until they can be certain that their words will produce the intended result. But they should not wait too long, until other reports have become so massive as to make their contradictory statement lack credibility. In the Nixon example above, it was the President's persistent refusal to answer explicitly about certain military activity in Laos that brought fears of U.S. involvement! During the summer of 1969, press reports began coming from Laos that U.S. personnel were engaged in a clandestine war on behalf of the neutralist government against North Vietnamese-backed rebels. At a September 26 news conference, President Nixon acknowledged that the U.S. maintains aerial reconnaissance over Laos, and added that "we do have perhaps some other activities" which he declined to clarify. A new Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee was begun in response to the questions over intended Executive response.

Second, policy-makers must often reach conclusions from inconclusive evidence.<sup>48</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, the press' later analysis should reflect why decisions were made as they were

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

at the time. In other words, to lessen the credibility gap is a cooperative government-media effort.

Credibility is a problem because of some governmental statements given in good faith which circumstances changed and because of some statements given to be deliberately misleading. The U-2 incident is an example of the latter. After Khrushchev's May 5, 1960, announcement that an American reconnaissance plane had been shot down, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration responded by claiming that the plane had wandered during a flight collecting weather data. Editorials bemoaned Soviet cruelty for killing an unarmed pilot. Two days later, Khrushchev announced that the plane was downed 1300 miles into Soviet territory and that the pilot was alive and had confessed that his mission was to photograph Russian military installations. The U.S. government responded in embarrassed stages—first, the State Department admitted that their first explanation had not been entirely accurate. Second, government and mass media began to defend the spy mission, but saying that it was not authorized by Washington officials. When the U-2 finally became a point of pride (to show that we would fight Communism with its weapons), Eisenhower said that, yes, he was responsible for what had happened. At that time, even Americans backing his position took note of the Administration's conflicting statements, realizing that only the last version was true. Lower officials took the blame for mistakes made in clandestine operations; yet in democracy where the people supposedly have information on what their government is doing, the set of

conflicting statements was clear.<sup>49</sup> In the future, which statements would be believed?

The Bay of Pigs incident is another good case study for finding grounds of a credibility gap. Fourteen hundred Cuban exiles were organized, trained, and supplied by the U.S. CIA in hopes of establishing a beachhead at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961. The project was kept almost entirely out of the mass media, and when it did reach the New York Times, it was denied by top officials. Then at the height of the invasion, reporters were told that five thousand patriotic refugees were going into Cuba.<sup>50</sup> The inaccuracy was designed to mislead the enemy by misleading everyone. For Rosenau's theory, the credibility gap is important because of what it means for government response: something happens to which the government responds; in doing anything, they contribute to their image; what they do must not communicate the image of a gap between themselves and the public. Thus, government's response which is relayed to the public through the mass media, should be adapted to the medium so that their intended meaning will be communicated. Opinion-makers realize that voters depend upon the media for seeing candidates as they "really are";<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Appleton, pp. 248-51 and David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, The U-2 Affair (New York: Random House, 1962).

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 258-274.

<sup>51</sup>The Langs found in a 1956 study that viewers believe they can catch the "real" person-qualities of a familiar television face. They drew some conclusions on what about personalities people perceive. Kurt and Gladys Lang, "The TV Personality in Politics" Public Opinion Quarterly, XX (Spring, 1956), p. 103-111.

and they depend upon the media for some understanding of issues.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, one means by which government can communicate the image it intends to, is by learning to use the media effectively.

Politicians and opinion-makers in government are becoming increasingly aware of the media of communication, particularly television. Over half of the nation's state governors employ personnel with background in radio and television news.<sup>53</sup> All top federal officials have available direct or indirect counsel upon communication through the media. Political candidates at every level are beginning to employ "image specialists" who concentrate upon portraying a favorable image of the candidate to the public.

Repercussions of this situation are being speculated and questioned. Questions such as the following are being asked: What effect does the medium have upon politics? Is there a new politician? What effect does the medium have upon the public's image of government?

The Selling of the President 1968 is a book written to popularize the notion that the television medium has an effect upon politics.<sup>54</sup> It shows how image specialists working for a candidate can reveal only selected attributes of a man that will "sell" him to the public. Instead of a candidate's position on public policy, a more important factor might be the temperature of the TV studio which determines how sweaty the candidate will appear. He is fed words that "offend nobody" when he has a heterogeneous national audience. McGinniss' work gives popularity to his notion of the

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<sup>52</sup>See chapter 5.

<sup>53</sup>Baldwin, p. 152.

<sup>54</sup>Joe McGinniss, The Selling of the President 1968 (New York: Trident Press, 1969).

importance of the medium to the message; the following quotation from Cornwell is a more exacting statement of the role of the image of political personalities in the electronic media:

In a crisis, the public will listen to the Chief Executive almost regardless of the elegance or inelegance of his prose and delivery. But in the long pull, television inexorably demands that he be an effective and persuasive speaker, and be able at the same time to radiate confidence, concern, warmth, and sincerity. Even if, as an individual, he had the potential to do all of this superlatively, he must have the additional ability to find and concert effectively the talents of the numerous supporting cast which television just as imperatively demands. No President, obviously, is likely to be able to act as his own specialist in the art and science of TV program production. He must use intelligently and imaginatively the skills of others. And since no President can prepare his own script unaided, he must be able to recruit and mesh the efforts of writers who can write prose that will be distinctly his in style and ideas. The ultimate test is his ability to do all of this, while at the same time enhancing rather than blurring his individual image as the source of initiative and energizer of public policy. His individuality is a key asset which must not become submerged in a collegial effort by hucksters and ghosts.<sup>55</sup>

Because opinion-makers' responses to communication stimuli are often "prepared and presented" by mass media experts (for the opinion-makers), there has been a rapid growth of the study of public relations and what is ethical in the field. An essay by Charles Steinberg established that ethical public relations operates between two disparate polarities. On the one hand, some philosophies, such as David Riesman's, view the public as a vast lonely crowd that is "other-directed" by the manipulation of public relations men; independence of thought and action is not valued by the public. The implication of this view is that techniques are purposefully designed

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<sup>55</sup>Cornwell, Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion, p. 294.

to manipulate the public image of politics in an unhealthy manner. On the other extreme is a philosophy which accepts public relations techniques uncritically because whatever occurs is an inevitable concomitant of mass communications in a mass society. Steinberg said that the middle ground, and the most acceptable ground, is a view that public relations techniques be examined critically so that ethical means are practiced; in this way, public relations serves as a valuable catalyst to effective and accurate communication between the government and the public.<sup>56</sup>

Recognizing the importance of the medium, some writers have expressed concern that the medium is deciding who is and who is not an eligible "political personality." Take, for example, this statement:

Most recently a new type of politician has begun to emerge. He is not in the "Inner Club." Rather he is a man versed in the subtleties of appealing beyond Congress directly to the mass audience. He knows the formula of the news release, the timing, the spoon-feeding necessities of the publicity drive. He is an artist at stealing the Monday morning headlines with the Sunday afternoon TV interview, twice gleaning the harvest of a single effort. He may be actually quite unindustrious, but he is an expert at skimming the cream of public attention while eschewing the thin milk of legislative drudgery.<sup>57</sup>

Once again, the answer is probably not found in an "extreme" position such as the one stated above. Perhaps the "new politician" is an expert in politics as the "old politician," and his ability to handle the mass media or to choose good public relations advice is simply in addition to his political expertise. There has always been some criterion relating to the individual's ability to communicate his

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<sup>56</sup> Charles S. Steinberg, "Public Relations and Mass Communication," Mass Media and Communication, ed. Charles S. Steinberg (New York: Hastings House, 1966), pp. 401-7.

<sup>57</sup> Cater, p. 65.

ideas clearly and effectively. An elected or appointed official has always had to "sell" himself by some means. Through the years, the channels of communication by means of which he attempts to do that have changed. It may not be appropriate to say that since a candidate must be able to project himself over the mass media that this is any more negative a criterion than past eras have had; it may be just different. As political candidate in the days before Woodrow Wilson, physical stamina and ability to project one's personality in speeches were important criteria—how many hours could one withstand waving to people from the back of trains, and how many speeches could one give to maximize contact with the public. Stamina or physical endurance in this context is no more rational a criterion for selection of a president or congressman than ability to project well in the mass media. Whatever the channel of communication to the public, it has been important throughout American history that government opinion-makers use it well.

## CHAPTER 4

### Media Treatment

"The news and interpretation of an event are first carried by, say, a newspaper; this is then read and adapted by opinion-makers, who assert their opinions in speeches on the subject that are reported by the press . . ."

Step two of the four-step flow of communication involved the nature of government response to communication stimuli. Government opinion-makers provide information for the press by giving speeches, holding news conferences, providing press releases and occasionally letting out trial balloons or leaks. When government responds to stimuli in those ways, it communicates an image of itself as part of the "hard facts" it attempts to disseminate to the public. The channels of communication opinion-makers employ to convey a favorable image to other government opinion-makers and to the public run the gamut of what is technologically available—inter-office memorandums to public speeches to television interviews. The use of mass media, one of opinion-makers' most important channels, is the aspect relevant to this thesis. It is virtually the only channel by which government heads can speak directly to the public on a mass scale. And, by convention, the press is one of the most influential ways government workers communicate among themselves, such as from a freshman congressman to the chief executive.

For the reasons above, the way mass media treats information it prints (or does not print) is important in the government-public communication process. This chapter—the third step in the four-step flow—deals with how the media communicate information fed by government or which they observe about government. To provide background understanding for the rest of the chapter, I will begin with a discussion of the roles of a

reporter, including how he perceives his own role. Second, this chapter deals with the "gatekeeper" theory which shows how a story can be changed as it moves down the line on its way to publication. Third, this chapter looks at three distinct aspects of media treatment to any particular story—word choice, factors of omission, and emphasis.

### A Reporter's Roles

Assuming that how a reporter perceives his role ultimately affects the information available to the public, researchers are investigating mass media reporters' attitudes and perceptions of their jobs. What is their relationship to the government and to the public?

Bernard Cohen outlined reporters' formal views on their roles, on the basis of extensive interviewing with Washington correspondents. He found that most reporters distinguish two basic roles: the neutral role and the role as participant.<sup>1</sup> Neutral roles can be subdivided into three parts, according to the correspondents' perceptions.

(1) Mass media "Neutrally" informs the public about events and about people making the news. Reporters expressed the traditional view that their function is to give factual information so that the people can make their own judgments about public affairs issues; this supports the classical notion that the public makes the decisions in democracy, and the more accurate the information they have available, the better decisions they will make. However, when questioned more closely, reporters recognized that classical view as only an "ideal;" actually, they said, the public in our democracy simply reacts to decisions made by

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 23-41.

an elite. (More specifically, they react to mass media reports of decisions made by an elite.)

(2) A necessary part of the news dissemination process is interpretation, which they distinguished from "editorializing." The latter is imposing judgments of good or bad upon news, while interpretation is not an attempt to color the news, but simply to make meaningful observations, clarify, and organize the mass of events.

(3) The press generally perceived itself as being used as an instrument of government. Although most representatives did not readily admit to being used to the detriment of accurate reporting for the public, they pointed out that it is natural that a government opinion-maker with a policy to sell provides the reporter with information and copy he needs.

The pressmen Cohen interviewed also saw themselves as participants in the policy-making process in at least four ways.

(1) News correspondents claim, usually with pride, to be representatives of the public. In their direct contact with decision-makers and opinion-makers, they pose questions and challenges that account for their public trust. This particular role provides the justification upon which newsmen build a liberating approach for their participation in public affairs. By "protecting the public," they find both the sanction of traditional democratic theory and the blessing of modern theory on how public decisions actually take shape. In a sense, newsmen adopt their own Burkean philosophy—acting as free agents, they pursue their own interpretation of the public interest.

(2) Criticizing government is a recognized function of the press. Regarding themselves as a fourth branch of government, newsmen view one of their responsibilities as "checking" the other three branches. This is the theory of the press that Fred Siebert labels "libertarian."<sup>2</sup> Reporters tell with pride of times when their stories forced governmental reconsideration of policies; with a bit of "Drew Pearson" in many reporters, they relish exposure of government wrong-doing.

(3) The press is often an advocate of certain policy on editorial pages and on every page. Advocacy in news columns is aimed for the public and for the policy-makers.

(4) One step stronger than point "3" above, the press also acts as policy-maker. Newsmen see themselves as actors in the policy-making process, directly and openly attempting to influence the public and the decision-makers. The Alsops interpreted this role clearly:

Sheer force of circumstance has made the American press almost the only forum in which our national debate is carried on. It is mainly carried on in the news columns (or, as we hope, by columnists dealing in facts), by the publication and counter-publication of barrages of information on all sides of every major issue.<sup>3</sup>

If the aforementioned views are the bases upon which the Washington press thinks of its role, they are the bases upon which stories are written and reported. Mitchell Charnley, in his extensive analysis of what the roles and responsibilities of a reporter should be, said that he should think of himself as artist and craftsman, investigator and

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<sup>2</sup>Fred Siebert, R.C. Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 51.

<sup>3</sup>Cohen, p. 41.

interpreter.<sup>4</sup> However, studies of "ordinary" suburban reporters reflect a different self-image.

For example, in one suburban area, the average reporter was constrained by his limited images of self, role, and community, or in the words of Robert Judd, was "a prisoner of his own perception of himself, his job and the news."<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Washington correspondents Cohen interviewed, Judd found men who were deeply engrained in a bureaucratic world composed of employers, bosses, and co-workers; sometimes tradition, sometimes pressure made the reporters most highly committed to the reportorial standards imposed by their boss. In other words, the reporter's perception of his role was in relation to his boss (maintaining his job) rather than in relation to the government (participating in formation of policy) or in relation to the public (representing or protecting the public).

For the four-step flow theory, the reporter's perception of his role is important because it influences what he reports and how he reports it. If the reporter considers himself "spokesman for the public," he is likely to try to seek out information that would help the public in its demands for better government. On the other hand, if the reporter writes only to meet his daily quota, he may not go much further in passing on information to the public than what the government had handed him by press release or conference. How the reporter sees his

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<sup>4</sup>Mitchell V. Charnley, Reporting (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966).

<sup>5</sup>Robert P. Judd, "The Newspaper Reporter in a Suburban City," Journalism Quarterly, XXXVIII (Winter, 1961), 37.

role in the government-public communication flow largely determines the information and opinions to which the public will be exposed.

Press-government relations, as touched upon in the previous chapter, affects how the press treats a story. Journalists such as Cater and Cohen established that most Washington correspondents find an appropriate balance both in principle and practice between the public's right to know (i.e., their right to expose) and the government's right to conduct some operations in private.<sup>6</sup> Still, there are very practical questions about the relationship remaining. For example, "is absolutely nothing to be printed about clandestine plans by the President to mount an illegal invasion of Bay of Pigs in Cuba for fear of interfering with the President's option to humiliate the country? Are the people to be denied information about Presidential options that will involve them in a way they have to finance and fight?"<sup>7</sup> If the answer to those questions is yes, the following statement by Arthur Sylvester (whom Shaw called Secretary McNamara's flackman) must also have some truth: "News is part of the weaponry of international diplomacy, and the results justify the methods we use."<sup>8</sup>

In commenting upon the press-government relationship, Walter Lippmann cautioned that we should separate terms such as "managed news," "deception," "lying," etc. Deception in the nation's self-interest may occasionally occur, while deliberate lying in reporting is rare. Managed

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<sup>6</sup>Markel discusses in detail when and why the press must ask itself whether to remain silent in the national interest. Lester Markel, "'Management' of News," Saturday Review, February 9, 1963, pp. 50-51+.

<sup>7</sup>James Reston, "The Press, the President and Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, XLIV (July, 1966), 553-573.

<sup>8</sup>Robert M. Shaw, "The Danger of Getting Used to Lies," Vital Speeches, XXXII (March 15, 1966), 332.

news, he said, is impossible to avoid; his explanation of why is a good tie-in with the rest of this chapter.

It is naive to suppose that in public affairs there is such a thing as one genuine, historically accurate version. Because the raw facts are indigestible, news has to be and will be managed. It will be selected, played up or down, clarified, sometimes obfuscated, emphasized—sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for bad reasons, sometimes for no reason at all.

### Gatekeeper Theory

How the reporter interprets his duty and how he reports the story is only a small part of the total picture. When a story leaves the hands of a reporter, it may be changed four or five or more times before it reaches the mass media. The story undergoes further selection all the way down the line, competing with other stories for recognition; the stories that make their way into the media have survived a lengthy chain of individuals who could have omitted them or changed them at any point. This is known as the "gatekeeper" process. Gatekeeper studies are usually empirical, systematic examinations of the behavior of those persons who control the fate of news stories at various points in the process,<sup>10</sup> including at least the reporter, wire service editor, copy-readers, translators, city editor and editor of the paper or producer of the news broadcast. Four men—Lewin, White, McNelly, and Bass—have contributed to the development and refining of the theory.

Social psychologist Kurt Lewin originated the gatekeeper concept during World War II to explain how food came to reach the family table

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<sup>9</sup>Walter Lippmann, "Managed News," Newsweek, April 15, 1963 p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Gieber, "News is What Newspapermen Make it," People, Society, and Mass Communications, editors Lewis Dexter and David White (London: Free Press, 1964), p. 174.

during wartime. He wrote:

Food does not move by its own impetus. Entering or not entering a channel and moving from one section of a channel is effected by a "gatekeeper." The "gate<sub>1</sub> regions" are governed either by impartial rules or by a gatekeeper.

Lewin suggested that his findings would apply not only to a food chain but also to the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group.<sup>12</sup> When David Manning White picked up the notion, he applied the theory to the large groups of people involved in getting the story of an event communicated from reporter to public through the mass media.<sup>13</sup> White explained the theory as follows:

Thus a story is transmitted from one gatekeeper after another in the chain of communications. From reporter to rewrite man, through bureau chief to "state" file editors at various press association offices, the process of choosing and discarding is continuously taking place. And finally we come to our last gatekeeper. This is the man who is usually known as the wire editor on the nonmetropolitan newspaper. He has charge of the selection of national and international news.<sup>14</sup>

In White's 1949 study, he found a cooperative editor who saved all his unused wire copy for a week, making brief notation on each story

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<sup>11</sup>Kurt Lewin, Field Theory in Social Science (New York: Harper, 1951), p. 186.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>13</sup>When White made the transfer, he changed Lewin's notion from one referring to the gatekeepers within a family unit (i.e., "in a group") to one referring to the long chain of gatekeepers before news reaches the family. A true transfer would not have gone beyond a market analysis of the family news-obtaining pattern. Abraham Z. Bass, "Refining the 'Gatekeeper' Concept: A UN Radio Case Study," Journalism Quarterly, XLVI (Spring, 1969), 71.

<sup>14</sup>David Manning White, "The Gatekeeper: A Case Study in the Selection of News," Dexter and White, p. 163.

why it was not used. In 1966, Paul Snider replicated White's study. He had the same editor—seventeen years later—save unused copy and make notation on each story why it was not used.<sup>15</sup>

John McNelly extended the application of White's gatekeeper theory to international stories (including both stories about other nations and about the U.S. that are sent abroad.)<sup>16</sup> He traced the passage of a story from the reporter at the event through various wire service editors to the telegraph editor to the reader. All along the way, people are deciding whether or not to let it through; and when it is let through, they contribute to its form and substance, revamp it for a better play in certain other countries; they translate it, and they censor. Before the story even reaches the foreign wire service office, editorial selection, translation, error, bias, censorship, and transmission difficulties are introduced; thus, McNelly concluded that the most important gatekeeping is done before news reaches the wire editor of a newspaper. His diagram and explanation of gatekeepers in the flow is on the following page.

Abraham Bass has refined the theories of White and McNelly because he felt that White's attention to the local telegraph editor should be focused instead at the central wire agency editor, and that McNelly should differentiate more highly the varying functional roles of the various newsmen and of the public. Bass came up with what he

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<sup>15</sup>Paul B. Snider, "Mr. Gates Revisited: A 1966 Version of the 1949 Case Study," Journalism Quarterly, XLIV (Autumn, 1967), 419.

<sup>16</sup>John T. McNelly, "Intermediary Communicators in the International Flow of News," Journalism Quarterly, XXXVI (Winter, 1959), 23-27.

## Gatekeepers in the International Flow of News

*Intermediary Communicators in Flow of News*

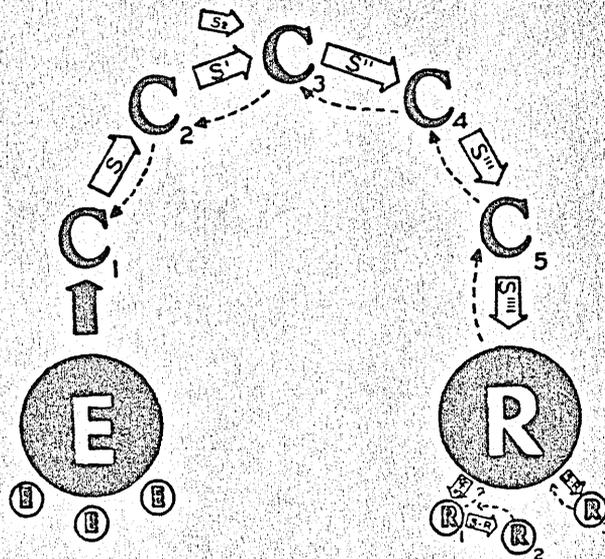


FIGURE I

This is a schematic representation of the step-by-step flow—through a series of gatekeepers, or intermediary communicators—of an international news story. A newsworthy event (E) comes to the attention of a foreign correspondent (C<sub>1</sub>), who writes a story about it (S). The story goes to a regional bureau where an editor or rewriteman (C<sub>2</sub>) may cut the story down (S') for transmission to the news agency's central bureau. There a deskman (C<sub>3</sub>) may combine it with a related story (S<sub>2</sub>) from another country. The resulting story (S'') goes to a national or state bureau where another deskman (C<sub>4</sub>) prunes it down (S''') and relays it to the telegraph editor of a newspaper or to a radio or television news editor (C<sub>5</sub> in this example). He slashes it still further (S''''') and passes it on to the reader or listener (R). The receiver, if he chooses to read or listen to it, may be interested enough to pass on his oral version of the story (S-R) to family, friends or associates (R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, etc.). Length of arrow represents length of story in each stage of its journey as determined by the intermediary communicators. Feedback, represented by broken lines, is infrequent and delayed—except in the case of direct feedback to the receiver from a person to whom he tells the story.

has called a "double-action internal newsflow" which divides the news flow process into two segments with different functions.<sup>17</sup> (His diagram of the flow is shown on the following page.)

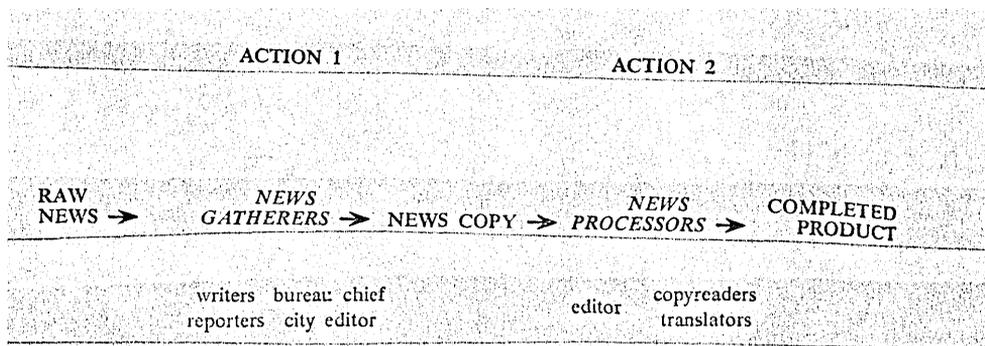
News gathering is the first part of the process, according to Bass. This refers to activity of reporters and writers, headed by an editor or bureau chief, who collect information and prepare news copy. On a national scale, this is the role of wire agencies; local reporters headed by a city editor form a parallel institutional structure. The second part of the process is news processing, which refers to changes internal to the news item as it is handled and adapted. It consists of copy editing, translating and modifying for local needs, heavily or lightly as policy dictates, to prepare a unified package of news that is ready for distribution to the public. The consumer public is outside the news operation, according to Bass, because it is outside the press and deals only with the results of the news operation.

Quite an amount of research has been collected regarding media treatment in the news gathering and news processing stages. Reporters and writers are the first gatekeepers that affect what is reported and how it is communicated. We have already discussed the reporter's self-perceptions which serve as the base from which he shapes the news. Depending upon the type of reporter referred to, there are still unanswered questions about his activity. Is he a passive gatekeeper who merely accepts and complies with his editor's instructions? Is the only demand he places upon himself reflected in this statement:

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<sup>17</sup>Bass, pp. 69-72.

Double-Action Internal Newsflow  
Gatekeepers that Gather and Process News



The first step occurs when the news gatherers make "raw news"—events, speeches and news conferences—into "news copy" or news items. The second step occurs when the news processors modify and unify the items into the "completed product"—a newspaper or a news broadcast—that is deliverable to the public. Both of these functionally different steps internal to the institutions of The Press have sub-steps where the generalized tasks are implemented. News gatherers and news processors may belong to the same or corporately different organizations. News processors may receive "news copy" from several news gatherers.

From: Journalism Quarterly, XLVI (Spring, 1969), p. 72.

"If it looks good, it is good enough to get past our editor's gate."<sup>18</sup> Leo Rosten's survey of newsmen in the 1930's showed them slanting their stories to please their employers because they would be altered anyway. Over fifty-five percent indicated that they had had stories cut down, played down, and omitted because of policy reasons.<sup>19</sup>

Such an environment would breed passive gatekeeping.

Or is the reporter a more active gatekeeper who may even try to shape his editor's choices? In the 1960's Rosten asked the same questions he had asked three decades before. Less than ten percent replied that although their orders were to be objective, that they knew how the boss actually wanted the stories played. Only seven percent said that their stories had been played down, cut, or killed for policy reasons.<sup>20</sup> The reporters whom this survey represents accurately are allowed by their job's structure to write as they wish and be their own gatekeepers.

McNelly said that one purpose of his study of gatekeepers in the flow of news was to contribute to progress in clearing away obstacles to a free flow. Hopefully, a recognition of purposive and other errors in the gathering of news will be minimized when scholars call attention to their existence.

National wire services are another step in the gatekeeper process. What makes it over the wire has survived a series of gatekeepers.

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<sup>18</sup>Judd, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup>William L. Rivers, The Opinion Makers (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 174-175.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

However, in measuring the importance of national wire service policies against production problems for determining what gets into print, local production is a greater factor. In a study of twenty metropolitan afternoon dailies where wire content was the greatest determinant of newspaper content, criteria such as the following were most important in determining which articles appeared: production deadlines, how early the story was filed, closing times and wire service cycles.<sup>21</sup>

In his studies of a local editor, White found that rejection of stories from all sources could be divided into two categories: 1) rejecting the incident as unworthy of being reported and 2) selecting from among several reports of the same event for reasons such as those indicated above. In the replicated study, seventeen years later, unused copy with notations of why each story was not used, showed consistent response. The main changes were that the editor had one wire service, had a better balanced news report, and used fewer human interest stories. If the editor studied is representative, the press is more concerned with "hard" news; both the wire service and the editor produced better balanced products in 1966. The editor's gatekeeping approach was the same in 1949 and 1966; he gathered copy in broad categories, but did not try to fill any real or imagined quotas for any particular category to achieve balance.

Editors of national magazines also serve as gatekeepers. A case study of Charles Mohr, an experienced White House correspondent

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<sup>21</sup>Robert Jones, Verling Trolldahl, and J.K. Hvistendahl, "News Selection Patterns from a State TTS Wire," Journalism Quarterly, XXXVIII (Winter, 1961), 303-312. Also Guido H. Stempel III, "How Newspapers Use the Associated Press Afternoon A-Wire," Journalism Quarterly, XLI (Summer, 1964), 380-384.

for Time illustrates that point. Mohr filed reports from Saigon for months showing that the Diem government was shaky and that U.S./South Vietnamese efforts were not faring well. But, when Mohr's reports appeared in print, they had been twisted to indicate that Diem was winning! The Managing Editor disregarded Mohr's appeals, and began to counter flatly any statements against Diem. Next he published an attack against Vietnam correspondents. The only superior Editor who could have overruled the article before being published, was called in as soon as possible; he recommended that a corrective story be published instead of allowing Mohr to resign. However, the "corrective" version also went through the Managing Editor's edit basket again so that when the story appeared, Mohr resigned.<sup>22</sup>

A 1967 study investigating eighty-eight purposive communicators, asked some important questions about what types of stories editors select for publication. The study measured a purposive communicator's success in placing news in the media by by-passing all gatekeepers prior to the local editor. Contrary to expectation, the successful agents' own news judgments were closer to the editors' values than were the agents' perceptions of the editors' values. Actual agreement in judgments and values was therefore more closely linked to success in placing news than was accuracy of perception. Furthermore, the researcher found evidence to justify his conclusion that what makes it by gatekeepers is more closely determined by situational

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<sup>22</sup>Rivers, p. 186.

factors and actual agreement (or disagreement in the Mohr study) on journalistic values than by overt public relations activity, including maintenance of extensive face-to-face contact.<sup>23</sup>

Publisher activity is yet another part of the chain of gatekeepers. Some significant conclusions reached in a 1967 study<sup>24</sup> of publishers' influence on news content were: (1) the larger the newspaper circulation, the less active was the publisher in news direction; (2) publisher activity was higher in areas that might affect the newspaper's revenue;<sup>25</sup> (3) there was less prevalent activity in use or non-use of news than in content or display; (4) less than one-fourth of the publishers were judged by their managing editors as inactive in the newsroom ("seldom" or "never" active).

In reporting opinion-makers' assertions about public affairs, the way the media reports the story will determine the message the public receives. All of the people involved in the gatekeeper process play a part in determining what news will be reported and how it will be reported.

One final point—this chapter has spoken largely of the press and newspapermen. Once Franklin Roosevelt wrote this to the President of North Carolina University after noting the odds the Administration faced in getting a certain story past the hostile

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<sup>23</sup>Phillip J. Tichenor, "Predicting a Source's Success in Placing News in the Media," Journalism Quarterly, XLIV (Spring, 1967), 32-42.

<sup>24</sup>David R. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," Journalism Quarterly, XLIV(Spring, 1967), 43-52.

<sup>25</sup>However, a case study of the Medicare issue did not indicate that the way a gatekeeper perceives public opinion alters his behavior. Lewis Donohew, "Newspaper Gatekeepers and Forces in the News Channel" Public Opinion Quarterly, XXXI (Spring, 1967), 61-67.

press: "Sometimes I wish the advent of television could be hastened."<sup>26</sup> What the President meant is clear—that he could by-pass the gatekeepers by giving a live television or radio address in which he could regulate the news he wanted the public to hear. In general, however, today the gatekeepers operating for newspapers are similarly operating in radio and television. Those who select-out news are probably even more active because less can be reported due to the nature of the medium. Roosevelt was probably correct in his projections, because a presidential address would be most likely to receive complete live coverage of almost any news event. But most communications from government opinion-makers intended for dissemination in the mass media are put on tape which is spliced to fit the brief time allotment given to that particular story, if it is included at all, as determined by all the gatekeepers.

#### Omission, Word Choice, and Emphasis

The gatekeeper theory shows how stories are passed from one person to another in the chain of communication. At each of its stopping points, it is either passed on or deleted from further communication. If it is passed on, anything done to it will affect the nature of its influence on public opinion. Gatekeepers in the news processing stage can alter a story in three ways: omission, word choice, and emphasis. This last part of the chapter will cover those three aspects of media treatment. They are important to the flow theory because they show how a gatekeeper's biases influence media content

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<sup>26</sup> Cornwell Elmer, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 256.

and therefore affect the information mediated to the public.

First, any gatekeeper along the channel of news-flow can omit a story or part of a story to remove it from further flow. The question of who cuts out stories is in part a reflection of the culture and political system. Newspapers in Communist countries, for example, print only stories that have passed the government-gatekeeper. As the arm of government extended to the people, the press is controlled and regulated because of the government's desire to control "reality."<sup>27</sup> Except in time of war, democratic governments do not function as a gatekeeper other than in the general sense of supplying the media with some information and withholding other information from nationwide publicity.<sup>28</sup>

An example of omission can best illustrate how public information is affected. One such example involved the Topeka, Kansas State Journal, which with its Republican editorial bias, omitted from publication a Drew Pearson column which complimented the Democratic Governor of Kansas on his trip to South America. The incident might have gone unnoticed, had the column not been pointed out to Kansas editors, some of whom encouraged its being offered as a paid advertisement. When it was reprinted in the Pictorial Times<sup>29</sup> it

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<sup>27</sup>George Gerbner, "Press Perspectives in World Communism," Journalism Quarterly, XXXVIII (Summer, 1961), 313-322.

<sup>28</sup>There are limited exceptions. Since 1924, there has been a city-owned radio station (AM-FM) and television station in New York. Saul Scher, "An Old City Hall Tradition: New York's Mayors and WNYC," Journal of Broadcasting, X (Spring, 1966), 137-144.

<sup>29</sup>The Pictorial Times is a paper established in Topeka a few years ago to offer a different perspective on city news and to provide competition for the Stauffer Publications which owns the city's two newspapers, the commerical VHF-TV station, and one of four radio stations.

# briefs by bert



The public might well scratch its collective head in muddled "puzzlement" trying to figure out the reason some Kansas boosters find it necessary to pay for the printing in both THE DAILY CAPITAL and THE PICTORIAL -TIMES, a copy of the August 4th Drew Pearson column.

They might be even more puzzled to learn that this column, which was called to the special attention of Kansas editors, never appeared in THE TOPEKA STATE JOURNAL, until AFTER IT WAS OFFERED AS A PAID AD by these same Kansas boosters.

What was so shocking about this Drew Pearson column which the local editors of THE STATE JOURNAL saw fit to "kill," lest it corrupt the entire populous? It said something nice about Bob Docking, who just happens to be the Kansas Governor these days. (You wouldn't be sure of that, if your reading were restricted to the local daily newspapers.)

Pearson wrote, what we would call a non-partisan, non-political article about how Governor Docking of Kansas had made a lot more friends in South America with his little publicized trip, than did Governor Rockefeller.

In fact, there were no riots, no demonstrations, no deaths or injuries connected with Governor Docking's trip, while Rockefeller's trip was cut short by such activities.

Generally, the whole incident proved that a "country banker" like Robert Docking who knows agriculture and the simple life of country people, made a much bigger hit with South Americans than did "poor little rich boy Rockefeller," who wouldn't know which end of a mule to hitch up to a plow.

But we're getting away from our story. Pearson wrote the column (which we recommend you read in the reprint appearing by Drew Pearson's special permission in today's PICTORIAL-TIMES) and he sent a special note to Kansas editors calling it to their attention.

The column was promptly killed by THE TOPEKA STATE JOURNAL editors, and also in the state's largest daily newspaper, THE WICHITA EAGLE-BEACON.

You have to be close to the newspaper business to realize what really happened here. There are ways to cut up a man whom you do not support politically -- and you don't have to do it on the editorial page.

Our enlightened management of these two Kansas "businesses" (they really don't deserve the name "newspaper") have an editorial policy which could be demonstrated with these axioms-- which are indelibly etched across the skull cavity of their managing editors (where the brain formerly resided):

"AXIOM NO. 1: All Democrats are Bad Guys -- therefore, All Republicans Are Good Guys. A Democrat Can Do No Right -- A Republican Can Do No Wrong"

"AXIOM NO. 2: Thou Shalt Not Offend The Sensibilities of The Management -- Therefore, Always Place News Stories Depicting Bad Guy Docking (Democrat -- See Axiom No. 1) in Bad Light On Page 1 WITH LARGE HEADLINES. All Stories Which Tend To Depict Docking In Good Light, Must Be Killed Or Buried In Back Pages."

So, you see -- if you have ever worked for such enlightened management (and this hack has worked for the publishers of both these newspapers in days long gone by) then you can understand, why a complimentary column by a nationally-known columnist appeared in newspapers all over the country -- but was denied to the people who would be most interested - the citizens of Kansas.

Down at Kansas University, we have a school of journalism, called the William Allen White school, for the obvious reason that old Bill White was one of the nation's most reknown editor-publishers.

And every time they name another editor to the "Newspaper Hall of Fame," or every time the Kansas newspaper fraternity gathers together in the name of "objectivity" -- someone from the herd of journalistic jackasses which run these two newspapers is sure to be on hand, spouting platitudes about Kansas' great newspaper heritage, and what great newspapermen we all are today, because of it.

William Allen White would spin like a top in his grave if he could see what passes for journalism in Kansas newspapers today. They have become a group of archaic, near-sighted, psychologically ingrown, ineffective, self-serving, dollar-grabbing parasites, managed as we said, by what can best be described as a herd of journalistic jackasses.

There is hope -- however. Jackasses cannot reproduce their own kind.

carried the large headline: "YOU DIDN'T SEE THIS...THIS COLUMN WAS 'KILLED.'" This explanation accompanied the column:

Although the State Journal subscribes to this nationally distributed columnist, this one column—dated August 4—was not published until August 23, one day after space for this ad was purchased. Kansans gained new stature with Governor Dockings's South American trade mission. We believe Kansans should be allowed to read all viewpoints.

Beneath the column in larger type were the words "Paid for by Loyal Kansas Boosters!" On the preceding page is a copy of the editor's column "exposing" the State Journal and the Wichita Eagle-Beacon. It offers some interesting commentary on how mass media can "cut up a man" not supported politically on every page—not just on the editorial page.

Just as omission of public affairs information affects the public's image of reality, so does word choice affect the image obtained from mass media. Examples from the period of yellow journalism point up the extreme reflection of editors' biases in media content.

The decade of the 1890's is known as the period of "yellow journalism" when mass media assumed a major role in the process of psychological preparation for war. Gatekeepers altered media content to make the message fit their desire. Scholarly analyses of the country's newspapers at that time show that several were not content to get ahold of leaks and trial balloons (etc.); they manufactured them, and treated the "real" news in a way that aroused the greatest potential effect upon readers. For example Hearst's New York Journal aroused interest in an imprisoned Cuban girl whom the editors claimed had committed only the "crime" of defending herself

against the approaches of a Spanish officer. Under orders, a Journal reporter freed her from her cell and smuggled her into the United States. These headlines resulted: "AN AMERICAN NEWSPAPER ACCOMPLISHES AT A SINGLE STROKE WHAT THE RED TAPE OF DIPLOMACY FAILED UTTERLY TO BRING ABOUT IN MANY MONTHS."<sup>30</sup> Public interest was high; while leaders of other nations cabled congratulations, the Governor of Missouri suggested that the Hearst Journal send five hundred of its reporters and free the entire island.

In other words, the editorial stand of the newspaper carried over overtly to the news pages. The stories coming in over the wires were selected and altered so that their content would be consistent with the editors' biases. During the decade of the yellow press, this selection of news was done overtly and consciously. With the passing of time, one could say that media content is now chosen with a more deliberate intent at presenting "editorially-balanced" news.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, as long as people write and select news to report, human biases and preferences are unavoidable. As Ben Bagdikian stated about the reporter,

In a very real sense, no reporter can be objective. If he could, he would go crazy because he can see more things than he can possibly report. The selection of what story is going to be covered and what elements highlighted are subjective.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>New York Journal, October 10, 1897, p. 1, as quoted in Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958), p. 454.

<sup>31</sup>The following two sources put limitation upon the concept of balance, the first pointing out the liberal quality of this press era, and the second pointing out the dangers of wire reporters working too closely with private industry: Harold Taylor, "On the Slanting of the News," National Review, XVI (June, 1964) 489-490. Richard L. Tobin, "Straws of an Ill Wind," Saturday Review, July 13, 1963, pp. 41-42.

<sup>32</sup>"Is the Press Biased?" Newsweek, September 16, 1968, p. 67.

The specific words a gatekeeper chooses for stories affects media content.<sup>33</sup> Under Truman, when the Consumer Price Index rose to 183.8, Time reported, "Never in U.S. history had the cost of living been so high." Under Eisenhower, when the Index rose to 192.3, the same magazine reported, "The U.S. is more prosperous than ever before." When Truman refused to say whether he would run for re-election in 1952, Time wrote that he was "deliberately mysterious . . . a stale joke." But Eisenhower "adroitly fielded the questions." Truman's travels abroad were commented upon: "Officially, the trip will be billed as non-political, an ancient device whereby a President can pay his expenses from his \$40,000 travel allowance instead of from the party treasury." But Eisenhower's travels were defended: "From time to time, a President of the United States must travel around the country."<sup>34</sup> A study of the magazine's coverage of Truman, Ike, and Kennedy included this statement: "Time has no facts. It is the popularization of these facts, the constant weaving into semi-fictionalized language patterns and preferential treatment of news subjects."<sup>35</sup> With regard to Time and the three Presidents, stereotypes can be seen to emerge after reading the news and noting the way words are used, biases are revealed, and editorializing occurs. In actuality, happy, smiling, friendly Eisenhower was probably

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<sup>33</sup>A researcher must be cautioned against creating examples of "bias" in his zest for discovering just that; taking examples out of context can do injury to the author's intent.

<sup>34</sup>Rivers, p. 112.

<sup>35</sup>John C. Merrill, "How Time Stereotyped Three U.S. Presidents," Journalism Quarterly, XLIII (Autumn, 1965), 563-71.

not responsible for every positive development in the nation, as he was characterized or stereotyped. Ill-at-ease, grumbling, cocky Truman was not responsible for all evil-doing, as he was stereotyped.

Choice of words in two articles can put across the same "facts," and yet give the reader or listener a very different impression of reality. Consider two accounts of the same demonstration that begin this way: "A meager fourth of the total student body appeared. . . .;" "Over one-fourth of the students rebelliously cut classes and marched over campus, disrupting. . . ." Or contrast one television channel which reports the demonstration by going to classrooms where the majority of students are discussing control of dissent in democracy, with another television channel which reports the same event by showing the march at its peak.

Bias toward personalities in the news can be shown by this comparison between two editors' interpretations of an AP Wirephoto two months after the death of John Kennedy, showing Jackie Kennedy and her sister leaving a club after dining with Marlon Brando and his manager. The San Francisco Newscall-Bulletin ended a three-sentence caption this way: "The women left alone, with Brando and Englund departing a few minutes later." The reader was allowed to read in whatever he imagined. Washington Post captioned the picture this way: "The foursome was discussing plans for the second annual Joseph P. Kennedy International Awards Dinner."<sup>36</sup> Community suspicions can be

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<sup>36</sup>Rivers, p. 186.

reflected and nourished in local editors' word choices. What people in San Francisco and Kansas City know or suspect about Jackie and Marlon is largely dependent on how local mass media interprets the story or caption the picture.

Another important use of words is in the headlines; this aspect is covered in the next section devoted to emphasis achieved in headline treatment.

A third category of media treatment is emphasis. How is the story presented in the total news picture to emphasize its presence? And what aspects of the story are highlighted? Recognizing that few Americans watch and read news stories in depth or compare reports from among the many news sources, the parts of a story that "stand out" and almost grab the reader are the ones that will have a chance at entering his cognition. There are at least five important aspects to the question of emphasis: repetition of the story, placement of the story, headline characteristics, accompanying pictures, and cartoons.

The electronic media have made repetition of a story important. While people take daily papers to read articles when they have time, they can hear the broadcast of a radio or television news story only when it is given over the air and they are tuned in to the broadcast. Early morning news is usually repeated at noon, and sometimes it is rebroadcast until sign-off time. The assumption is that at one of those times, the listener will have the opportunity to hear any particular major story. This sort of repetition does not occur without having its effects upon the news. In a day's time there is

a smaller quantity of news put forth—both in terms of total volume and individual item length. The selection-out process puts emphasis on a minimal number of stories per day so that those few stories get maximum attention. Furthermore, the scope of subjects and events covered is lessened from the potential there could be if new items were covered each time.

Secondly, placement of the story is crucial to its emphasis. The key position for news is of course the upper right-hand corner of the front page. Next rank stories on the upper-right and upper-left of the inner pages. Last in order in terms of emphasis are stories near the center-fold and toward the bottom of the pages. Display has been found to be a better predictor of readership than subject matter or style of writing.<sup>37</sup> Persons who glance through the paper and over the front page are most likely to catch the stories placed in the more strategic places mentioned. Even the person who reads a paper thoroughly will be likely to place the greatest emphasis on events that he thinks the paper gave highest merit also.

A third factor is the emphasis the story obtains from its headline. Sometimes the reader stops with the headline, thinking of it as a capsule of the story, in which he then need not further involve himself.

The decade of yellow journalism is again a good gauge for establishing the importance of this aspect of media treatment. Meredith and David Berg wrote that there are three components to a catchy headline: size, simplicity, and clear organization.<sup>38</sup> In each case, they related

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<sup>37</sup>Richard Powers and Bryant Kearl, "Readability and Display as Readership Predictors," Journalism Quarterly, XLV (Spring, 1968), 117.

<sup>38</sup>Meredith W. Berg and David M. Berg, "The Rhetoric of War Preparation: The New York Press in 1898," Journalism Quarterly, XLV (Winter, 1968), 657-658.

the treatment by the World to that by the Journal. In the time period studied (1898), the World limited its headlines to three and a half centimeters while the Journal achieved a maximum of four times that size; throughout one entire month (April, 1898) the headlines never went below eight and three quarters centimeters. The Journal's headlines were a part of their sensationalistic appeal. Which approach was selected made a difference in what the public knew about public affairs and how important they thought it was.

Size was only a part of the total appeal. Simplicity was utilized by the Journal. They would attempt only a single idea stated as simply as possible, or a multi-headline would emphasize one theme. For example, the April 1 headline had five separate topics united by a ten centimeter high (equivalent to twelve lines of double-spaced typing on this page) "WAR" in the middle of the group.

Clarity in organization of headlines by the technique of subordination became important at that time. The Journal used many levels of headlines, while its competitors—as most newspapers today—used only two. As the "topic level" decreased in importance (according to the headline writer or editor), the type decreased in size and the amount of emphasis the reader registered would probably decrease. As Berg stated, "This 'funneling' technique helps the reader to assimilate the paper's ideas in the same rank of importance which it chooses to give them."<sup>39</sup> Research on reader comprehension, however, has shown subheads to convey little information and to be either not read or

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 658.

read so quickly that they have little effect on reader-recall.<sup>40</sup> Scientific studies of reader eye movement are being used to measure the reader's attention to subheads in an effort to learn just what is the effect of headline treatment on the reader.

Headlines are the most researched component of emphasis technique. A 1965 article on basic concepts in newspaper design proposed that news should be arranged so "readers know at a glance which are the important stories."<sup>41</sup> Hearst's most lasting contribution to journalism was perhaps how to use headlines to accomplish the above goal.

In addition to size, simplicity and clarity, another element connotes article content to the reader—word choice. Word choice was discussed previously to indicate its effect upon message content; in a headline, each individual word probably has more effect upon more people.<sup>42</sup> In run-of-the-mill everyday operations, headlines are worded by persons whose main goal is to fit the space allowed. Sometimes heads from publicity releases are adapted, and sometimes the newspaper employee words a headline from a cursory reading of the article. He is pressed for time. Weekly news magazines often word headlines to catch people's attention by grammatical "tricks."

Consider, for example, the effect of word choice on these two headlines reporting the same event: "U.S. MISSILE DETECTOR LAUNCHED;"

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<sup>40</sup>J.K. Hvistendahl, "The Effects of Subheads on Reader Comprehension," Journalism Quarterly, XLV (Spring, 1968), 123-125.

<sup>41</sup>Jack Z. Sissors, "Some New Concepts of Newspaper Design," Journalism Quarterly, XLII (Spring, 1965), 237.

<sup>42</sup>Radio and television news broadcasters usually give colorless briefs of the news items that will follow an advertisement; otherwise, word choice is important to the electronic media only in the content of the broadcast.

"ONE TON WHALE AMOK AT KEW."<sup>43</sup> Readers or persons just glancing at their papers would have very different impressions of the event from the two headlines.

Headlines—frequently the only source of front page news for people—can be very misleading by what they do not say about the article. In other words, they cannot accurately reflect the entire story. A study of New York Times revealed cases of misleading headlines which portrayed an inadequate treatment of facts, and in the opinion of the researcher reflected faulty editorial judgment on what should have been emphasized as "significant." The August 28, 1966, front page contained fourteen column inches (with a continuation of thirteen inches) headed by: "54% in Ohio Poll Assert U.S. Role in War Is Mistake." There was a sub-head also: "Nation Too Deeply Involved, Majority in Congressional District Study Declare." In actuality, one Representative, Charles Mosher, had mailed a questionnaire to 130,541 families in his district. He received a 3.5 percent return. Of those, 54.4 percent (2500) gave the headline response. The headline thus reflected "truth" about a poll not sampling "Ohio," and not representative of even one district.<sup>44</sup>

In the same study, it was found what this July 10, 1966, headline actually meant: "Johnson Policies Disenchant Iowa." The sub-head stated: "Bellwether County Shows He Would Lose Election Now." The sample had been of one precinct in one county. The sample consisted

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<sup>43</sup>Nicholas Tucker, Understanding the Mass Media (Great Britain: Cambridge Press, 1966), p. 36. The comparison is of the London Times and Daily Sketch.

<sup>44</sup>Gerhart D. Wiebe, "The New York Times and Public Opinion Research: A Criticism," Journalism Quarterly, XLIV (Winter, 1967), 654-655.

of the first fifty people willing to express their views. While the headline would tell people one thing, the whole story behind the headline could communicate something very different.<sup>45</sup> What these examples mean is that headline treatment, which is inherent to the mass media, necessarily emphasizes the highlight of a story (as perceived by the headline writer) or simple figures that are not space-consuming to report, or the action and dramatic highlights which might cause the reader to follow up the headline by reading the article. It gives a limited picture of news, and in so doing emphasizes some things at the expense of others.

Another device utilized by the mass media for emphasis is pictorial art—pictures, drawings, and cartoons. In the newspapers, they attract even the lazy readers, and on television they highlight the words the announcer is uttering. After the "Maine" incident in 1898, newspapers began to use drawings to help convey certain editorial positions. An example of the Journal's vivid use of drawings was on the February 17 issue, showing what was alleged to be an accurate three-quarter-size drawing of the torpedo hole in the "Maine." Pictures of wounded men in wartime or hungry, bloated children abroad in peacetime have become common media treatment.

Malcolm Browne, an experienced reporter, wrote on the nature of Vietnam correspondence after three years of the war. He said that most of the important concepts about the war that would put it in perspective for Americans are difficult to capture in words and are generally not "interesting" for everyday-reading. Water shortage, for example, is

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 657.

often the most far-reaching "event" in a day in Vietnam—outranking battles fought that day. Vietnam does not lend itself to simple numerical reporting, according to Browne. Instead, what had the most effect on Americans about Vietnam is pictures. Browne said that the widely publicized picture he took of Buddhist Quang Duc committing suicide by burning himself to death was the initial means of focusing world attention on the Buddhist campaign. "Had a Western newsman with a camera not been present at Quang Duc's suicide, history might have taken a different turn."<sup>46</sup> When Henry Cabot Lodge was called in to see President Kennedy about becoming ambassador, the President had the picture on his desk. Buddhist leaders made huge color enlargements and carried them at the heads of processions. Clergymen in America reprinted the picture in the New York Times and Washington Post over the caption: "We too protest."

The picture had the impact in the above example. Is it a general rule that pictures, and artwork, with their advantage of being dramatic, can lend emphasis to almost any cause? Another way in which that question has been tested is by asking what effect art work showing the pro side in a two-sided message would have. Contrary to the hypothesis, the effect was not to make the message appear more pro. Instead, the study suggested that graphic art increases the weight of a message in one or more of the following ways: improvement of comprehension; gaining attention; providing cues about author intent.<sup>47</sup> Bill Mauldin once

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<sup>46</sup>Malcolm W. Browne, "Vietnam Reporting: Three Years of Crisis," Columbia Journalism Review, IV (Fall, 1964), 7.

<sup>47</sup>In the words of the author, it was found that increasing iconicity (resemblance between a pictorial symbol and its referent) of a pro argument in a two-sided message did not make the message appear more pro. Hugh Culbertson, "The Effect of Art Work on Perceived Writer Stand," Journalism Quarterly, XLVI (Summer, 1969), 294.

commented upon the second of those effects: "We've got his mind on the matter, and what he does about it next is his own business." Noting that statement, Brinkman asked in his study if the graphic arts could not do more than call one's attention to a matter. He found that when cartoons were used with editorials, it was most possible to bring about reversion and conversion of opinions.<sup>48</sup>

However, LeRoy Carl found in a study of editorial cartoons, that the intended commentary about public affairs was often not communicated successfully to the mass public because of the many forces at work "scrambling" the cartoonist's intended meaning, including ability of the receiver to see analogies, and his knowledge of current events.

Those limitations upon the effectiveness of pictorial arts in communicating to the public should be borne in mind; nevertheless, examples of effectiveness of communication can easily be found. In addition to the Quang Duc picture, how the press treated Castro shows its ability to create an "image" of people and events by means of pictures, cartoons, and news commentary emphasizing certain points. Castro was a good newspaper target because of the ease with which he could be depicted as a comic character. At first, newspapers reported that he was not a Communist; nor was he seeking aid from the U.S. Pictures and text were widely publicized of his placing a wreath at the Lincoln Memorial and shaking hands with Russian Ambassador to Washington, accompanied by the headline, "They Just Shake Hands in the

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<sup>48</sup>Del Brinkman, "Do Editorial Cartoons and Editorials Change Opinion?" Journalism Quarterly, XLV (Winter, 1968), 724.

Usual Way." (April 19 Chicago Tribune)<sup>49</sup> Slowly the press began to reflect a different image. The media over-emphasized Cuban officials' visits to Communist countries, accompanied by anti-American statements. De-emphasized were social and economic changes of the revolution which would have imparted deeper understanding of Cuban problems. However, when U.S.-owned property was involved in economic breakdowns, the incident generally passed U.S. gatekeepers. By mid-1959, the dominant image was of U.S. patience with Castro's harassment. Selection of stories and treatment of content created an image in the minds of Americans and then changed it powerfully in the short time span of a few months. As Brinkman's study suggested, conversion could be, and was, obtained by using pictorial arts and editorial news emphasis in concert. Declining relations between Cuba and the U.S. government became reality for the reading public; furthermore, the blame was placed squarely upon Castro and his officials by the press and therefore by the public.

The voice over electronic media can act like the written headline in determining for the listener what is important. Some commentators, such as Paul Harvey, are known for overt vocal inflections to emphasize news and give it shades of meaning. Most news broadcasts, however, are products of encouraged vocal monotony so that the individual announcer does not color the news. But does not that technique also emphasize news in a certain way? By putting all the news reports in the same vocal quality, some persons maintain that crimes, riots

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<sup>49</sup>Michael J. Francis, "The U.S. Press and Castro: A Study in Declining Relations," Journalism Quarterly, XLIV (Summer, 1967), 261.

and disasters receive the same degree of approval as "good" news. Neutrality, if this is the case, communicates to some people an acceptance or approval or recognition of the "bad." As James Thurber said, it gives the "listener the spooky feeling that the deaths of scores of persons in an air crash are not more important than a new candy bar or brand of coffee."<sup>50</sup>

The following quotation from Lester Markel of the New York Times is used to conclude because it shows the relationship of the three parts of this chapter, which he calls three judgments, within the general framework of the gatekeeper theory.

The reporter, the most objective reporter, collects fifty facts. Out of the fifty he selects twelve to include in his story (there is such a thing as space limitation). Thus he discards thirty-eight. This is Judgment Number One.

Then the reporter or editor decides which of the facts shall be the first paragraph of the story, thus emphasizing one fact above the other eleven. This is Judgment Number Two.

Then the editor decides whether the story shall be placed on Page One or Page Twelve; on Page One it will command many times the attention it would on Page Twelve. This is Judgment Number Three.

This so-called factual presentation is thus subjected to three<sup>51</sup> judgments, all of them most humanly and most ungodly made.

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<sup>50</sup>Rivers, p. 103.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

## CHAPTER 5

### Opinion-Leaders' Influence

"The news and interpretation of an event are first carried by, say, a newspaper; this is then read and adapted by opinion-makers, who assert their opinion in speeches on the subject that are reported by the press and thereupon picked up by 'opinion leaders' in the general public who in turn pass on their opinions through word-of-mouth."

In this final step of the four-step theory, mass communication is linked to the social processes of information and opinion diffusion. Political messages do not terminate their flow once they have been carried in the mass media. They are carried from the mass media to opinion-leaders to the public. This chapter will include discussions of who the opinion-leaders are, the two-step flow theory, and possible revisions of the two-step theory in light of new evidence on the opinion-leaders' role in the process of news and opinion diffusion.

#### Opinion-Leaders

There are two kinds of influence upon opinion. One is by prestige, which is influence from persons who occupy positions of power and prominence in society. The other is by personal influence, which is not the exclusive possession of any particular group in society, but found at all levels.<sup>1</sup>

Prestige is wielded through access to the formal channels of mass communication or from a particular role a person plays. The formal leaders of society can use their prestige to influence others—

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Information Service, "Prestige, Personal Influence, and Opinion," The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954), p. 402.

government officials, business and labor leaders, clergymen, school officials, etc. Personal influence, on the other hand, is more a function of who influences whom in face-to-face contacts. Most people influence others with their opinions on some topic at some time; opinion-leaders are those persons who "exert such personal influence upon those around them rather steadily with regard to decisions in at least one area of life."<sup>2</sup> Opinion-leaders are looked upon by others as persons with sound advice, which should be listened to and followed. It is important to note that opinion-leaders may or may not be the persons with prestige, as described above. Independent of the occupation a person happens to hold, his personal influence is based on the reliance people have for information and opinions from him because of certain personal traits. What is true for business—that influence does not necessarily follow the formal pattern of authority designated in an organization chart—is also true for society. In addition to this informal quality of opinion-leadership, it is specialized. Divergence of opinion between those persons with "authority" according to the organization chart and those persons with personal influence among the workers in the example cited, points up this quality of specialization. The business workers would probably accept their formal leaders' opinions on job-related matters, while they would accept others' advice on matters they define as outside that sphere of influence. The men we look to for advice on fashion are not necessarily the same men we look to for opinions on Vietnam.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Our concern is with opinion-leaders whose influence is felt on public affairs. Still, there is some specialization. The man one relies on for information and opinions about city hall is not necessarily the same person relied on for opinions about our foreign policy. The man we might judge knowledgeable on bureaucratic structure may not have the same reputation for knowledge about diplomacy. The degree of specialization may vary with the level of sophistication of information the followers have. Within the family unit, the male head may influence others on public affairs issues, while the woman has more influence on domestic affairs. Opinion-leaders exist in every social stratum and in every subculture of American society. Therefore, although the subject matter determines the opinion-leader to some extent, this is modified by the fact that people still like to talk to others and form their opinions from persons "like themselves." The opinion-leader is therefore usually informed and emulated, and still accesible to the follower.<sup>3</sup>

With this understanding of who the opinion-leaders are, we should ask where they get their information. As indicated by Rosenau's statement, their greatest source of information is the mass media. Their interest in public affairs is manifest in their reading and listening habits. They expose themselves to more mass media information,<sup>4</sup> to more different kinds of mass media information,<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Elihu Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-Date Report on the Hypothesis," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXI (Spring, 1957), 74.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. Information Service, p. 408.

and to more quality media as opposed to popular media than other members of society.<sup>6</sup>

Combined with their increased reception of mass media information, opinion-leaders tend to have more personal contacts for spreading their ideas in discussion than the average person. While more exposed to media, opinion-leaders generally report more often that they seek information and advice from others.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, other people initiate discussions with them and then they take on an active rather than passive role. That is, the opinion-leader is not an agitator who necessarily tries to arouse discussion and action; instead, other people urge him to express his views to them.<sup>8</sup>

A study of civil defense agencies suggested that opinion-leaders should accurately be called "heavy communicators." They act as both leaders and seekers of public affairs information, and are likely to be asked for their opinions. Persons who originated civil defense material in mass media also sought out the greatest amount of information on that topic from the mass media.<sup>9</sup> The implication in studies such as this one is that opinion-leaders seek out information and opinions from the mass media, and are more influenced by that information than the mass public (i.e., the mass public needs opinion-leader influence to tell them what they should believe). A study of

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<sup>6</sup>James N. Rosenau, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 81-83.

<sup>7</sup>Katz, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Information Service, p. 408.

<sup>9</sup>Verling Troidahl and others, "Public Affairs Information: Seeking from Expert Institutionalized Sources," Journalism Quarterly, XLII (Summer, 1965), 403-409.

the diffusion of opinion on a new brand of a familiar food product confirmed that implication; it showed that opinion-leaders were more influenced by the impersonal source of communication (mass media) than were the followers.<sup>10</sup> However, another study investigating the same question came up with data that would not confirm that result. Verling Troidahl "injected" written messages that contradicted common opinions into a complex social system by a monthly country agricultural newspaper. When followers initiated advice from opinion-leaders, it was traced by questioning subscribers. The authors hypothesized that opinion-leaders would change their opinions just on the basis of what they had read in the mass media, while followers would need opinion-leaders to influence any attitudinal change. The pattern of responses made the researchers conclude that media exposure alone did not induce significant change in the opinion-leaders. Both opinion-leaders and followers whose prior beliefs were contrary to the opinions in the experimental newspaper message were likely to seek advice from others, particularly a professional intermediary.<sup>11</sup>

In view of conflicting evidence at this stage of research, the question is, what can be verified about the opinion-leader. It is known that he obtains more quality information from the mass media than the average person, and that he is more relied upon for opinions than other persons. This is to say that on certain subjects

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<sup>10</sup>Johan Arndt, "A Test of the Two-Step Flow in Diffusion of a New Product," Journalism Quarterly, XLV (Autumn, 1968), 457-65.

<sup>11</sup>Verling Troidahl, "A Field Test on A Modified 'Two-Step Flow of Communication'," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXX(Winter, 1966-67), 609-22.

he obtains more than just "popular information," and he influences other people with whom he comes into direct contact on those subjects.

### Two-Step Flow Theory

The famous study of Erie County voting in 1940 yielded a hypothesis which is called the "two-step flow of communication."

. . . ideas often flow from radio and print to the opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population.<sup>12</sup>

In his field test of the theory, Johan Arndt made the following formulation of the hypothesis:

- 1) Messages (information) flow from impersonal sources (mass media) to the opinion leaders—the first step.
- 2) The opinion-leaders influence the nonleaders (who are less affected by the impersonal sources) by means of word-of-mouth—the second step.<sup>13</sup>

This two-step flow theory is a way of organizing information mentioned in the last section of this chapter, that opinion-leaders are more exposed to the mass media than nonleaders and that they communicate their information and opinions to the nonleaders.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of the formulation of this theory, it was called the "rediscovery of people" because it placed people communicating by word-of-mouth between the mass media and the mass public. Knowing that this communication takes place, the question is, what influence

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<sup>12</sup>Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 151.

<sup>13</sup>Arndt, p. 457.

<sup>14</sup>Also see the following source which can be credited for popularizing the two-step flow theory: Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (editors), Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications (New York: The Free Press, 1955).

does the opinion-leader have over the public.

In answer to that question, Katz found that the people an opinion-leader is most likely to influence belong to their same primary group, and they are likely to be more influential on those persons than the mass media.<sup>15</sup> By the nature of their face-to-face contact, opinion-leaders can exert social pressure upon an individual so that he will conform to the group's way, and they can serve as a social support for him. The opinion leader's influence over the mass public has limitations; particularly, it is clear that opinion-leaders and mass media interact to some extent in influencing the public. But what do the media do that limits opinion-leaders' influence? A political science textbook explains it this way:

The interested public ordinarily looks to the media to define policy problems and to formulate means of dealing with them. Which of the alternatives presented individual members of the public may then choose to favor is likely to depend more upon personal value preferences, group memberships, and other factors than upon the policy recommendations of the media. For an overwhelming majority of the people, the media represent their only link with the concrete realities of international affairs. The media—and the leaders they often quote—are therefore much more potent in determining what the people will think about than in dictating what they will think about it.<sup>16</sup>

This suggests at least one function of the mass media that operates directly for the public, by-passing the opinion-leaders in the chain. In view of the recent access the mass public has gained to all the channels of mass media, it is appropriate to question whether the role of the opinion-leader has been modified since the

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<sup>15</sup>Katz, "The Two-Step Flow of Communication," p. 61.

<sup>16</sup>Sheldon Appleton, United States Foreign Policy (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1968), p. 297.

formulation of the theory. Radio has become so widespread that most families have two or more radios in their homes in addition to the car radios. Television has become almost a family "necessity." Newspapers and news magazines are present in most homes and offices. People's access to mass media has increased so greatly that the role of face-to-face communication must be questioned. In view of people's access to mass media, we must still ask whether they are influenced by the media.

Seven studies after the assassination of President Kennedy found that person-to-person communication was the most important means of communicating the news of the event.<sup>17</sup> Two of those studies also found that personal contacts are the most important means of disseminating information about very unimportant matters; but between the greatest and the least important news, is the majority of the news which is communicated primarily by the mass media.<sup>18</sup> But just because the mass media was the channel for dissemination of news, does that mean that the media influenced public opinion?

#### Revisions of the Two-Step Flow

There is no clear-cut answer to the question posed above. There are at least three possible hypotheses that are potential answers to

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<sup>17</sup>Stephen Spitzer, "Mass Media vs. Personal Sources of Information About the Presidential Assassination: A Comparison of Six Investigations," Journal of Broadcasting, VIII (Winter, 1964-65), 45-54. Also see footnote 18.

<sup>18</sup>Richard J. Hill and Charles Bonjean, "News Diffusion: A Test of the Regularity Hypothesis," Journalism Quarterly, XLI (Summer, 1964), 336-42. and Bradley S. Greenberg, "Person-to-Person Communication in the Diffusion of News Events," Journalism Quarterly, XLI (Autumn, 1964), 489-94.

the "new" role of opinion-leaders: (1) There occurs a by-passing of the opinion-leader, whereby the mass public receives its information and is influenced by mass media; (2) The easy-access of media allows more people to be well-informed, and therefore has increased the number of opinion-leaders in society; or (3) There is no revision in the two-step flow pattern, but now the public picks up beliefs from opinion-leaders and low-quality ("popular") information from mass media.

The first hypothesis receives its foundation from theories that national and international events are "personal experiences" because of the media's speed in making the public aware of public affairs.<sup>19</sup> In spreading interpretations and opinions about events so quickly, there is no opportunity for opinion-leaders to interject their opinions by face-to-face contact before the public has heard the news, interpreted it, and placed some value judgments on it.

The second hypothesis maintains that the role of opinion-leaders is still to influence nonleaders by word-of-mouth, but that the easy-access of media information allows more people to assume the role of opinion-leader. There is evidence of greater numbers of citizens coming into the "attentive public". With the prevalence of mass media, the opinion-leader's function is to screen out

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<sup>19</sup>James N. Rosenau, The Attentive Public and Foreign Policy (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1968), p. 15.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 12 and 25-46.

specialized information for a particular audience.<sup>21</sup> With so many potential areas in which to specialize, great numbers of people "screen out information" which influences other people in that one field.

There has been some research and some confirmation of the third hypothesis—that the public picks up only low-quality information and an image of political events and people in the news from the mass media, which is supplemented by information from opinion-leaders that influences belief and behavior.<sup>22</sup> The meaning is that although broadcast media provide the first impact of most news stories, the major flow of influence and reinforcement is through personal channels.

Deutschmann and Danielson came up with what they called a Katz and Lazarsfeld hypothesis to be applied with caution and qualification:

1. Initial mass media information on important events goes directly to people and on the whole is not relayed to any great extent.
2. People talk about news learned on the media.
3. Opinion leaders do supplementary relaying of information. The relay function and reinforcement function exist simultaneously. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Experimentation by DeFleur and Larsen also supports this third hypothesis. By tracing pathways of communication after leaflet droppings,

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<sup>21</sup>Pye distinguished the role of opinion-leaders in modern American society from the role in traditional societies. In a traditional system, they add to limited information available to the general public. "The skill of opinion-leaders was not one of sorting out specialized information, but of piecing together clues and elaborating, if not embroidering, upon the scant information shared possibly by all present." Lucian W. Pye (ed.), Communications and Political Development (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup>Troldahl, "A Field Test," p. 611.

<sup>23</sup>Paul Deutschmann and Wayne Danielson, "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major New Story," Journalism Quarterly, XXXVII (Summer, 1960), 355.

they confirmed their belief that effectiveness of the mass communication act depends on the degree to which the media are linked to interpersonal networks of communication.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, they found that the central function of mass media is more one of reinforcement of existing individual and cultural practices rather than one of conversion to new behaviors.<sup>25</sup> While mass media operates conservatively on attitudes and tends to preserve the status quo, opinion-leaders can bring influence to bear upon the public that can bring about shift in attitude by direct face-to-face contact. Again, belief and behavior is affected by opinion-leaders, while the mass media only reinforce existing images.

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<sup>24</sup>Melvin L. DeFleur and Otto N. Larsen, The Flow of Information (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 31.

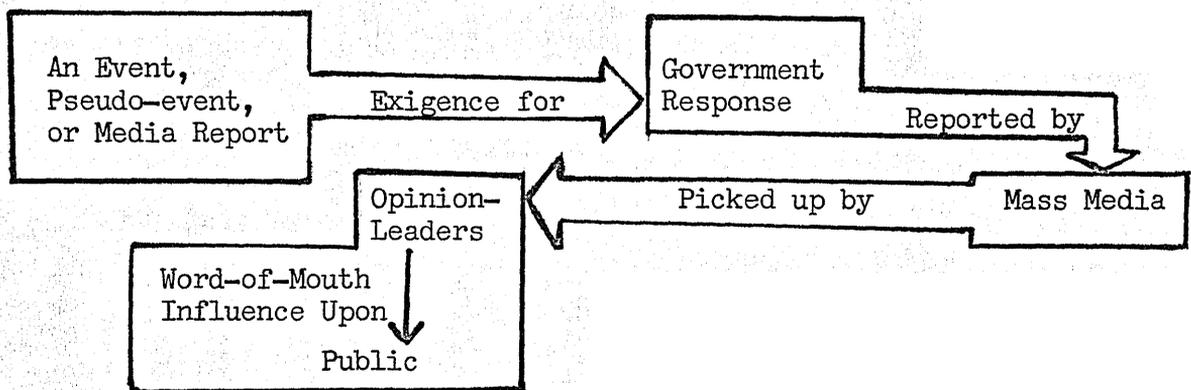
<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-26.

## CHAPTER 6

### Summary and Conclusions

Now that each step of Rosenau's flow theory has been developed, I have several observations to make about the theory itself and about further research that could be done to gain a better understanding of the role of government and the mass media in influencing public opinion. Specifically, I will cover the following items in this chapter: (1) a summary of the four-step flow of communication; (2) an evaluation of the theory's potential use; (3) an enumeration of limits of the theory and of the treatment I have given the subject; (4) an invitation to further research.

#### The Four-Step Flow of Communication



The four-step process traces an event from its occurrence to its reaching the public. The first step established how opinion-makers are stimulated to communicate in response to the reality created for them by communications they have received from mass media. Opinion-makers use the media to obtain images about events and pseudo-events and to communicate their own image which will become a part of "reality"—

even though it may consist of reports or pseudo-events that were done for purposes of publicity—which becomes the basis upon which further communication is stimulated. Rhetoric stimulates more rhetoric and is an exigence for response from opinion-makers.

Government opinion-makers respond to the event or media reports by preparing information for mass media reporters that says what they want to have communicated on to the public. But in so doing, unintended messages can creep in. For example, if people perceive that government is intentionally misleading them by telling them one thing and by later behaving differently, a credibility gap will develop. People tend to distrust every message when they feel they are misled from what is real; government is now suffering from the effects of this gap. In an effort to avoid these unintended messages, government opinion-makers are likely to work with image specialists so that they use the media to show what they want to in the most accurate or believable manner. It is important to government opinion-makers that they be able to achieve a favorable image because the mass media are the only channels by which they can speak directly to the public (or to opinion-leaders in the general public) on a mass scale. For that reason, not only how government presents its information, but also how the media treat the information is important in determining what the public ultimately "knows" about government.

The gatekeeper theory of the third step of the flow points up all the crucial "gates" at which a story can be omitted, changed, or passed on. Regardless of what is done to the story, its content is affected. There are examples of points of view being omitted in the

media, which thereby limits what the public has an opportunity to know. Words that are used have the potential for creating a certain image within readers and listeners. Selectivity of words can instill a one-sided or limited perspective of reality. Consciously or unconsciously, an editor can make words reflect his own biases to such an extent that content is twisted. Content is also affected by how each gatekeeper determines to emphasize a story (in the total paper, on a page, size of headline, etc.) and how to emphasize elements within the story (what information he puts in the first paragraph, what is highlighted in the headline, what is the "tone" of the headline, etc.).

The mass public comes into direct contact with a very limited amount of information from popular media. That information gives cues as to what is "current" and influences what they talk about. Opinion-leaders, who have more extensive contact with mass and specialized media, relay their opinions on to members of the mass public with whom they are in direct face-to-face contact. Apparently they influence the public on what to think about the popular issues, and have strong influence on people's beliefs and behavior.

#### Value of the Theory

With the addition of data and explanation to Rosenau's pre-theory, it serves as a workable model for explaining government-public communication. The concepts and data that this thesis offers in support (and modification) of the theory, make the four-step flow

a useful tool for understanding public communication.

The four-step flow theory should be of use to the teacher who is seeking an organizational framework for the vast quantity of information relating to public communication. The theory should help him explain many concepts, such as the ones explored in this thesis, by placing them within a meaningful context; each concept can take on greater significance to the student when it is understood in relationship to other concepts (or to the "whole").

This theory should be of value to the critic of public communication because he can use its overall structure as a base from which to extract certain notions of the process for criticism. In effect, the process of political communication could be criticized from the perspective of the four-step flow. Any part, or all of government-public communication could be focused upon by utilizing the framework of the theory. The theory gives a critic a unique perspective for examining any part of government or media influence upon public opinion by showing him the relationship of the parts; for example, he would see clearly that criticism of media treatment would also have effect upon both the nature of government response to the media and upon the kind of information made available to opinion-leaders in the public.

In addition to serving as a tool for various kinds of investigations, the theory is useful to any member of the public, to tell him the nature of things he can know about his government. It tells him that most of his general beliefs about government are what opinion-leaders tell him that they know from what they have heard from the

mass media, which reflects the journalists' perceptions of what the government means and what it does in response to some event. Hopefully, by showing a member of the public the degree to which his beliefs are "removed" from the decision-makers and opinion-makers in society, he will work toward accurate, open communication along each step of the flow. Furthermore, it is hoped that when the government opinion-makers realize the importance of an accurate image, they will also strive for influence upon public opinion to be mediated to the public accurately by all concerned at each step along the flow. And certainly the role of the journalist or media specialist must be reconsidered in light of that person's influence upon what information and opinions reach the public media. In other words, this theory should give insight on the political communications process to persons other than "academic" theorists; it should also have meaning for anyone involved at any level of the four steps, particularly in seeing his relationship to the whole communication process.

#### Limitations

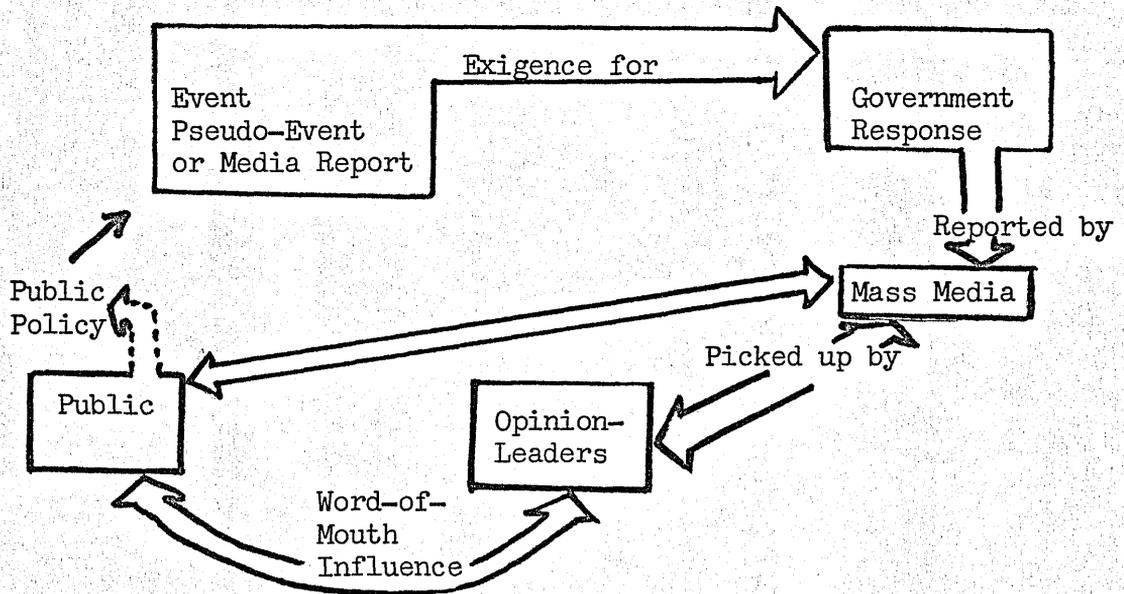
In attempting to find a theory to explain government-media-public communication, I employed a limited approach to Rosenau's pre-theory; I limited the theory to communications about or by government. This need not be the case. A four-step flow theory could also explain communications from any opinion-maker in response to any event that is then picked up by the mass media, mediated to the public by an opinion-leader, etc. This theory applied to "revolutionary rhetoric" or "black rhetoric" might bring new insight into understanding what

happens to the original opinion-makers' communications when (if) they finally reach the general public.

In working with Rosenau's pre-theory, I have felt that it would be a better explanation of the total communication process if it were to include more than a one-way flow from government to the public. In actuality, once opinions and information have influenced the public, the communication flow is not always concluded. Sometimes the public will become sufficiently aroused to feed back opinion to the opinion-leaders to be relayed to decision-makers, or sometimes they will attempt directly to influence decision-makers. There is also feedback from opinion-leaders to government opinion-makers, which is not directly mentioned in Rosenau's pre-theory. Specifically, I would suggest incorporating feedback aspects of the Westley and MacLean model of communication.<sup>1</sup> By completing the two-way flow, characterizing the nature of influence that flows back to the government, the complete process of government-public communication would be accounted for in the theory. An appropriate model for studying this two-way communication flow is suggested by several sources in this thesis. A model such as the following is based upon Rosenau's theory, but is expanded to include feedback mechanisms (indicated by two-way arrows) and possible by-passing of the opinion-leader for certain kinds of information.

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce Westley and Malcolm MacLean, Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communication Research," Journalism Quarterly, XXXIV (Winter, 1957), 31-5.



There are other limitations that should be mentioned in regard to the theory which have to do with research available for supporting (or rejecting) the four-step flow theory. Although there are "limitations" to conclusions that can be drawn now, I hope that they will be thought of more as areas for expanding research.

#### Further Research

Even at the end of this thesis, the term "influence" is not completely clear. From the flow theory, we have a "feel" for the fact that influence is exerted upon the public by the mass media and by government. But we do not know the nature of the influence. Does the mass media instill an image of government in the mind of the viewer that can be articulated meaningfully? Does an image have any "influence" upon a person's behavior?

From chapter two, we received a concept of exigence, broadened from Bitzer's original use of the term to refer to the specific aspect of a communication situation that stimulates a specific response. We

found how rhetoric can be an exigence for further rhetoric. It would be worthwhile to investigate other things that serve as an exigence. For example, is there something about publicity consciousness which guides an opinion-maker to begin the communication flow in response to nothing, but in a desire for self-expression. If so, is some special media treatment desirable?

From the third chapter, I believe there is an ethical question in need of further exploration. To what extent should the government put forth an "appearance" that is designed to protect the public interest? How much influence should government exert over the mass media to control their image and indirectly to control the "reality" people can know about. Aristotelian concern for "appearance" versus "reality" is applicable to this ethical question.

Also in chapter three, we saw how the government uses the mass media to respond to stimuli. A relevant point which needs further research is what effect the media have on government. Does the medium employed alter the content of an opinion-maker's message to the extent that the meaning of the message is altered in some significant way? Does the medium of television encourage "appearance" rather than "reality" in public communication? Does the knowledge of availability of mass media alter what the government says or does in any way?

The research behind the chapter on media treatment contained many inferences that such factors as headline size have an effect upon the public. Just what is the nature of that effect? Eye movement studies are underway to determine what people pay attention

to in a newspaper or on television; but I would like to see follow-up research on what difference it makes to an individual whether his eyes happen to focus on a certain word in a headline or not. How much influence does a headline have upon a person's beliefs or opinions about government? Does not an opinion-leader have a broad enough sampling of information so that he can "see through" media treatment?

In the last chapter three hypotheses were proposed comparing the influence of opinion-leaders on the public versus influence of mass media on the public. The few sources cited represent most of the research that has been done on those important ideas; further research is necessary to find just what types of data people pick up from the media and how that relates to what they rely on from their primary group associations and from opinion-leaders in the community.

There are at least two remaining shortcomings in the research done on opinion-leaders. First, part of the research on opinion-leaders is based on the assumption that they are more responsive to the media than are members of the mass public. If this is so, the concept should be clarified. Why are they more "media-gullible?" Is it because people are more influenced by authoritative information, and that is the type of information opinion-leaders get from specialized media in contrast to the non-specialized reports most people get from mass media? Or is it because of some "follower" nature inherent within the mass public, that they need people to influence them in direct face-to-face contact on what is right for them to believe?

Second, only two major field studies have been conducted of the two-step flow theory; many more will be necessary in order to determine just what is the role of opinion-leaders in influencing others. As the theory is tested more and more in the field, it can be modified as necessary to bring it closer to an explanation of what actually occurs in the public communication process.

In general, a theory should explain human behavior with a view toward predicting the outcome. Rosenau's approach fulfills this expectation in a very sweeping sense. By looking at a particular government response to some exigence, and by examining the flow pattern it will follow, it is possible to predict the potential effect it will have upon public opinion.

And finally, I should conclude by pointing out that this four-step flow theory opens up more research questions than it answers. Perhaps it can serve as an "exigence" for producing similar theories on the role of government and the mass media in influencing public opinion. But whatever this development of Rosenau's pre-theory does accomplish, I hope that by organizing all the information into a meaningful flow pattern, it will point up specific topics for concentrated research effort, while putting ideas about what influences public opinion into context.

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