

Today's news environment

- Previous generations – news came mostly from established local & national news outlets
- Now – an ocean of information
- Hundreds of outlets, most available to everyone
- Instant coverage (or expectation of it)
- Professional and non-professional
- Participate, not just consume
- Less established news hierarchy
- More difficult to stand out
- More opinion-driven material
- More difficult to know what to believe

**Let's back up
a little...**

What is news?

- Verified information that is relevant to public life.
 - *Ellen Hume, media analyst*
- That which protrudes from the ordinary.
 - *Walter Lippmann, columnist & political advisor*
- The departure from normal.
 - *Leo Rosten, author and humorist*
- What I say it is.
 - *David Brinkley, longtime NBC news anchor*

Today: Background

- Fully understanding current media landscape requires knowing how we got here
- Connective threads across many decades
- It's not all about technology
- Numerous elements of today's news environment can be traced to previous practices & trends
- Focus on key elements, individuals, turning points

Human nature vs. technology

- Theory of **Technological Determinism**
 - Technology shapes our lives
 - Technology changes how society operates
 - Technology changes how people think, feel, act
 - Society evolves in directions defined by technology
- Are there aspects of life that tech doesn't change?
- Scholarly research: Technology constantly changes, but human nature does not

Human communication: The basics

- Need to communicate with others
- Desire to learn, apply knowledge
- Desire to teach, pass on information
- Develop languages, customs
- Form communities/societies – work together
- Share stories through generations
- Basic impulse – spread the word

Earliest U.S. News Reporting?



Newspaper Rock State Historical Monument, Utah

Media functions

- **Inform**
- **Entertain**
- **Persuade**

Ongoing public discourse

- Citizens' continuing discussion of social and political topics that are important to them
- Best ideas work their way into larger discussion, evolve into consensus
- Discourse both fuels democracy & responds to it
- Makes ordinary people feel involved
- Considered a vital element of democracy

Newspapers

- Early 20th Century – were as much about entertainment as about news
- Circulation was everything
- Competition – most major cities had many papers
- Began to have competition from magazines (investigations, ‘muckraking’)
- Publishers had learned what drew large audiences – outrage, sensationalism, the unusual
- **Give the people what they want (not need)**

Newspapers: Yellow Journalism

- Named after comic strip “The Yellow Kid”
- Sensationalism – shocking, salacious stories
- Big headlines, illustrations, photos
- Self-promotion – one-upmanship
- Over-the-top nationalism, war-mongering
- Emphasized elected officials, public figures, business tycoons → early celebrity culture
- Publishers had learned what drew large audiences – outrage, sensationalism, the unusual

Newspapers: Yellow Journalism

Anything You Want?
Send to-day's "Wants" Supplement with the
Sunday Journal. It is a free gift.
Find Work, Money, Business.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AND ADVERTISER.

"WANTS"
Advertisers in the Sunday Journal's "Wants"
Supplement always bring quick results. It is
the best place to get the most for the least.
Send to-day's "Wants" Supplement with the
Sunday Journal. It is a free gift.

NO. 5,442. NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 1897.—64 PAGES.—Published 1885, by W. B. Clark. PRICE FIVE CENTS.

EVANGELINA CISNEROS RESCUED BY THE JOURNAL.

**An American Newspaper Accomplishes at a Single
Stroke What the Red Tape of Diplomacy
Failed Utterly to Bring About in
Many Months.**

By Charles Dool
Illustrated, 1897, by W. B. Clark

Havana, Oct. 7, via Key West, Fla., Oct. 6.—Evangelina Cisneros is at liberty, and the Journal can place to its credit the greatest journalistic coup of the year. It is an illustration of the power of the Journal, and it will find an echo in the heart of every woman who has read of the horrible sufferings of the poor girl who has been confined for thirteen long months to the walls of the Pinar del Rio.

The Journal, finding that all other methods were failing, decided to secure her liberation through force, and this, as the specially selected committee of the Journal, I have succeeded in doing.

I have broken the back of the Pinar del Rio and have set free the beautiful captive of monster Weyer, restoring her to her friends and relatives, and doing by strength, skill and strategy what could not be accomplished by petition and urgent request of the Press.

We've made Miss Cisneros a real heroine of Evangelina, but we could not build a hero that would hold against Journal enterprise when properly set to work.

Thought all Havana rings with the story. It is the one topic of conversation; everything else pale into insignificance. No one remembers that Miss

MISS CISNEROS BEFORE AND AFTER THIRTEEN MONTHS' INCARCERATION.

Newspapers – Professionalism

- Competition from magazines, other new media
- Audiences tired of sensationalism, absurdity
- Pulitzer Prizes begin 1917, 6 years after death
- Moved (mostly) away from partisanship
- Sheer size, daily schedule allowed depth, variety of coverage
- Established credibility in spite of limitations

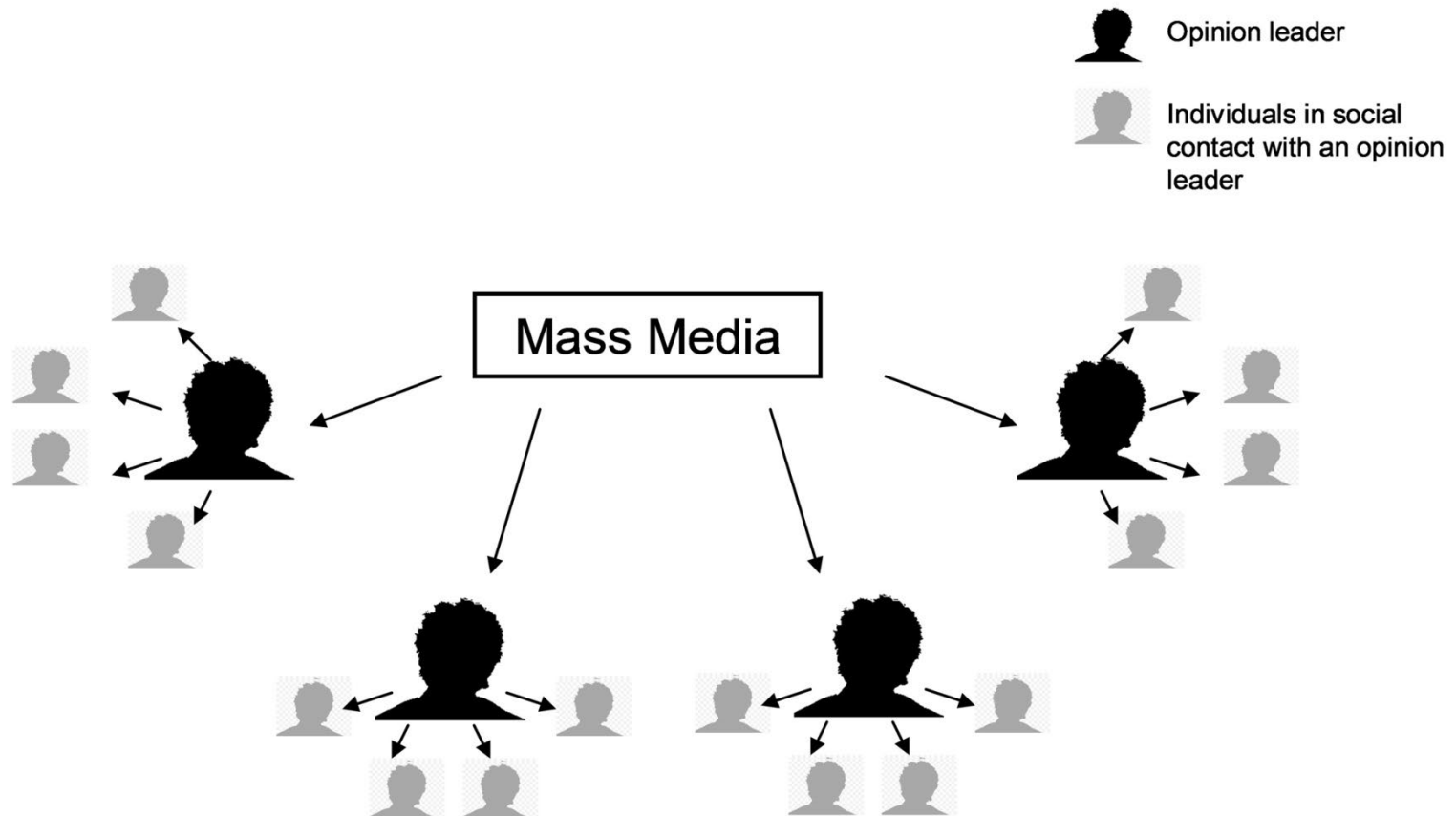
Journalism as self-policing profession

- Society of Professional Journalists (1909)
- Pulitzer Prizes (1917)
- SPJ Code of Ethics (1926)
- Competition – exposing competitors' mistakes
- Celebrated in other media (books, movies, radio)
- Top publishers – moguls, power brokers
- Top reporters – often turned into celebrities

Columbia Journalism Review: Darts and Laurels



Two-step flow model



Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955

Technological earthquake: Television

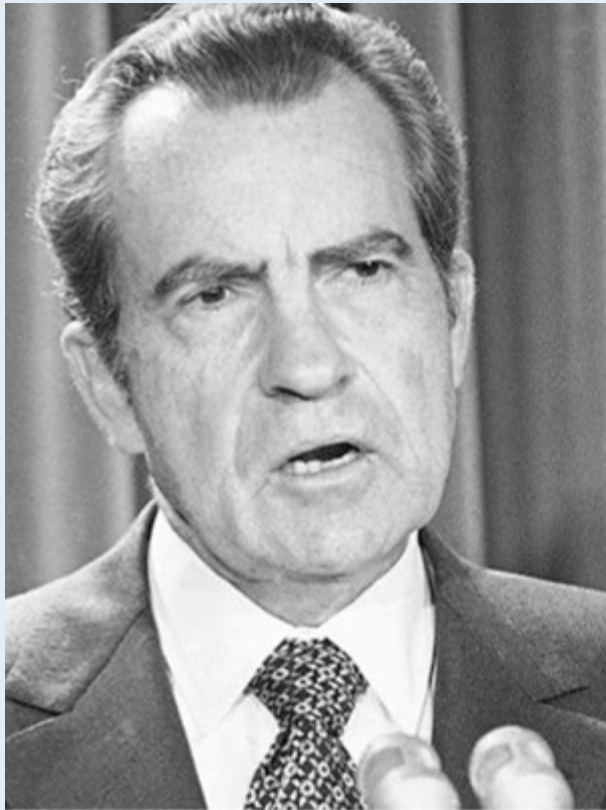
- First networks - 1948
- Exploded in popularity in 1950s
- Not much of a factor in news until 1960s
- Key event: JFK assassination
- Evolution – videotape, satellites
- Anchors emerged as trusted news sources
- Newspaper circulation & ad revenue fell

How television changed news

- Primarily an entertainment medium
- Television news had to adopt elements of other TV programming – get ratings, ad revenue
- Emphasis on video, visuals, emotion
- Emphasis on immediacy over depth
- Easier to process quickly and peripherally
- Audiences shifted preferences
- Newspapers scrambled to adapt
- Politicians shifted media strategies

Mike Douglas Show: January 16, 1968

Guest:



Richard Nixon

Producer:



Roger Ailes

Nixon and Ailes, 1968



Ailes' media strategies for Nixon

- Humanize him through TV ads and appearances
- Limit press exposure to controlled events
- Carefully craft simple campaign messages
- Place Nixon in telegenic settings
- Use surrogates to criticize opponents
- Portray his followers as 'real Americans'
- Paint news media as elite, liberal, out of touch
- Continued strategies later with Reagan, Bush

Roger Ailes



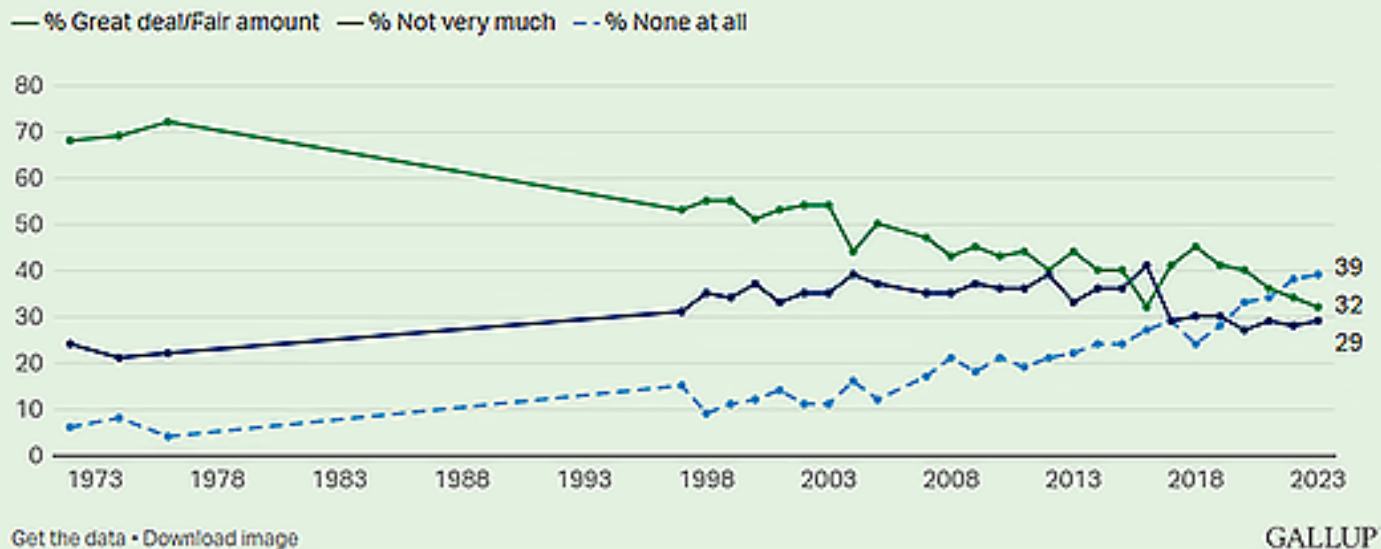
Political consultant, 1968-92
Co-founder, Fox News

Why does this matter outside of politics?

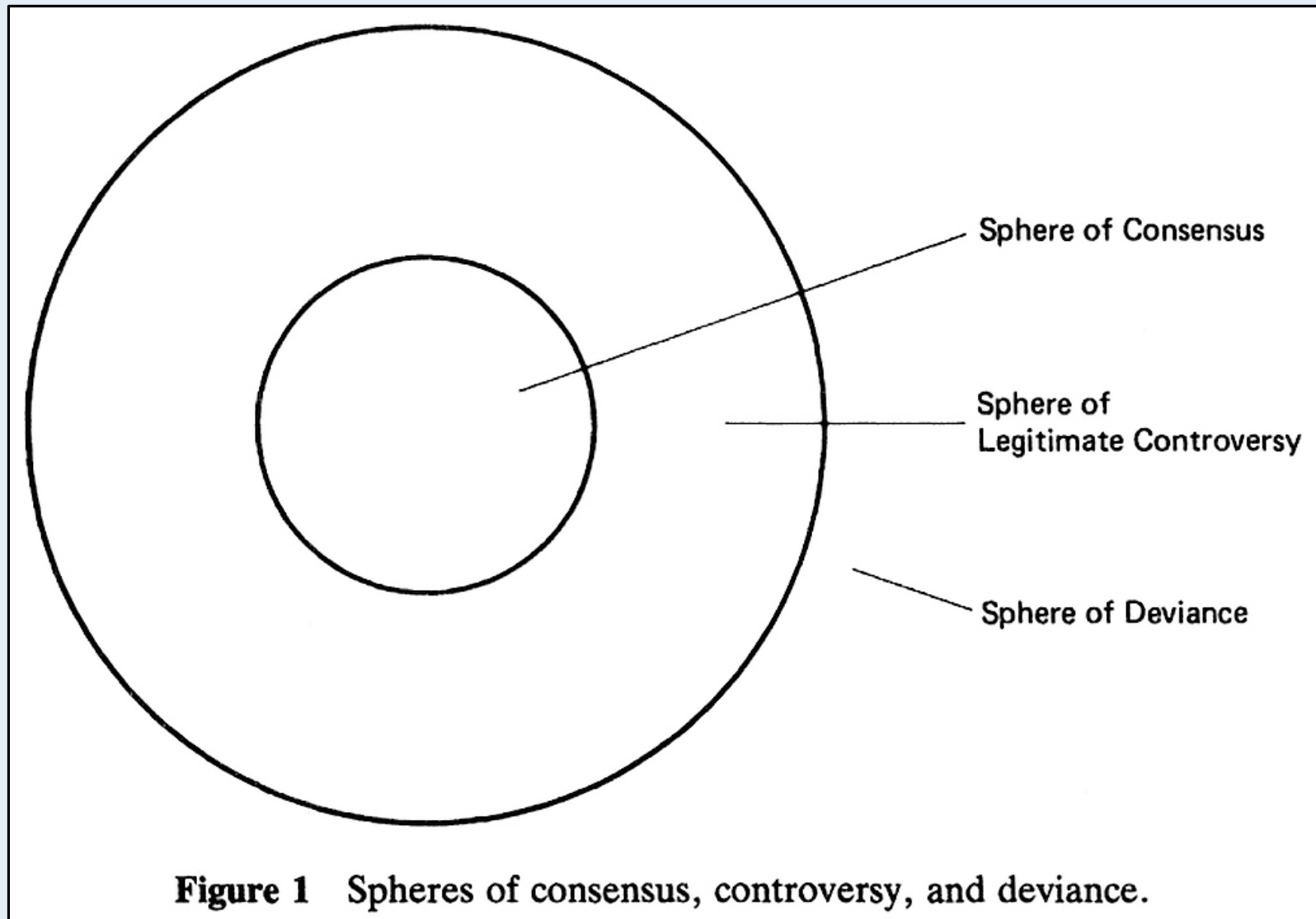
- Timing – newspapers already losing readers to TV
- Took advantage of existing social divides
- Challenged journalism's credibility
- Institutionalized distrust of news media
- Created 'us vs. them' narrative
- Turned huge swath of populace against media
- Anti-media narrative continues to this day

Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972-2023

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?



[Gallup Poll: Media Confidence in U.S. Matches 2016 Record Low](#)



[Dan Hallin, UC San Diego: Spheres](#)