

Media Influence in American Culture

Research Paper

Introduction:

According to the *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*, “the mass media offers its audiences not a window on the world, but a filter that selectively screens, colors, and constructs a new reality” (Cahen and Koeur). This certainly gives cause for alarm, for in our increasingly media-saturated world, the public has been largely transformed from careful critics of the media to mere consumers of it. The unsettling consequence of this change is that too many of us today depend on the media for our very sense of self, rather than engage in meaningful inquiry into our own lives. The situation becomes even more troubling when we consider that the media is dominated by a market culture that seems to praise physical beauty, material wealth, immediate gratification, and indiscriminate tolerance at the expense of personal integrity, spiritual contentment, social responsibility, and genuine compassion.

In order to protect the American public against the negative effects of media exposure, experts now advocate a program of media education. The central aim of this program is to improve society’s overall media literacy, which the Center for Media Literacy defines as “a framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages” while “build[ing] an understanding of the role of media in society”.

Assignment:

Drawing from the material from a combination of three to five primary and secondary sources, students should discuss the following concepts:

- Identify **how the mass media influences** American society’s beliefs and behavior about a chosen topic.

Also, develop ideas with these concepts in mind:

1. All media are constructions. They present carefully crafted realities that reflect many decisions and are the result of many factors.
2. The media construct reality. Much of our view of reality is based on messages conveyed by the media.
3. Audiences negotiate meaning in media. Each of us finds meaning based on individual factors.
4. Media have commercial implications. Most media production is a business, designed to generate income. Thus, commercial considerations greatly influence the content, technique and distribution of media.
5. Media contain ideological and value messages. These may be deliberate or accidental.
6. Media have social and political implications. Media can have a direct influence on political and social issues.
7. Form and content are closely related in media. Each medium has its own language, its own system of encoding messages. Understanding the language is essential to understanding the message.
8. Each medium has a unique aesthetic form. Media is not inherently good or bad. But like any art, it has power.

Decide On a Topic:

This may be more involved than students think. In order to present a convincing argument, consider the following:

1. Can the writer's argument attempt to convince readers of something, change their minds about something, or urge them either to do something or to explore a topic in order to make a wise decision?
2. Does the topic address a problem for which there is no easily acceptable solution or ask a question to which no absolute answer exists?

Topics should present a position that has varying perspectives.

General Topics include the MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON:

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| ▪ Addiction/Alcohol/ Drugs | ▪ Health | ▪ Sexual Assaults |
| ▪ Bilingual Education | ▪ Homosexuality/ | ▪ Sexual Relationships |
| ▪ Birth Control | Sexual Orientation | ▪ Single Parents |
| ▪ Body Image | ▪ Immigration | ▪ Sports Industry |
| ▪ Censorship | ▪ Interracial | ▪ Stereotypes |
| ▪ Eating Disorders | Relationships | ▪ Terrorism |
| ▪ Ethnic Stereotypes | ▪ Legalized Gambling | ▪ Tobacco |
| ▪ Family Values | ▪ Politics | ▪ Video Games |
| ▪ Gay Rights | ▪ Music/Art | ▪ Violence |
| ▪ Gender Discrimination | ▪ Education | ▪ War |
| ▪ Gun Control | ▪ Religion | |
| | ▪ Role Models | |

**For more topics, check out the folder in the Research Project folder

Students should come up with a research question about their topic:

- "Did the media coverage of the Afghanistan war influence the American public's opinion in a negative or positive manner?"
 - Then, the student begins to gather sources and topics about the media presence in Afghanistan and how that affected the American public's opinion about the war.

OR

- "How do television celebrities influence the American's view on health topics?"
 - Students may consider researching the influence and success of such celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Doctor Oz, Doctor Phil, or Doctor Drew on the American public.

OR

- "Who has used the power of the media to make history?" Has this person's contribution been a positive or negative influence on the American public?
 - Students may consider unlikely candidates like Wael Ghonim or powerful media people like Mark Zuckerberg.

*Students should discuss paper topics with me before starting the research.

The Research Process:

The purpose of this paper is for students to research, structure, and formulate an argumentative paper on the influence of the mass media on one aspect. Students are encouraged to find a topic that is meaningful for them, but that is also worthy of scholarly research. Students need to evaluate their sources and think critically about their topic and its effect on American society.

Students will be turning in various elements of the project over three months. This will help students stay on track with the deadlines and allow me to provide constructive criticism throughout the process. Please see the Schedule:

Schedule:

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| ▪ Working Research Thesis (HMK 10) | Due: 11/1 |
| ▪ Library Workshop | Due: 11/8 |
| ▪ Annotated Bibliography | Due: 11/8 |
| ▪ Formal Outline | Due: 11/15 |
| ▪ Rough Draft | Due: 11/29 |
| ▪ Final Paper | Due: 12/13 |

Note: *The research project is a significant part of the course grade and therefore, students will be turning in different parts of the research project at different times. The entire project is due by **12/13**. Students will be turning in the rough draft and final draft of their papers using Canvas' Turnitin® application. This application searches through the paper for plagiarism. Students who are caught plagiarizing will receive a zero for this assignment.*

Research Assignments:

- Decide on a controversial topic in which the media influences American's opinions.
 - **Working Research Thesis** (HMK 10) - this is a preliminary activity that will help students narrow their topics.
- **Library Workshop** – students will be responsible for taking the Find Articles library research workshops (online) through Canvas. These modules will appear in our class Canvas page.
- **Annotated Bibliography** – This is similar to a works cited page, but it also includes the student's evaluation of the source. According to the Purdue's OWL site,
 - "The annotations for each source are written in paragraph form. The lengths of the annotations can vary significantly from a couple of sentences to a couple of pages. The length will depend on the purpose"
[\(http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/\)](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/)
- **Formal Outline** - please use the formal outline template in the Research Project folder. This includes using complete sentences, fully developed concepts, and a works cited page.
- **Rough Draft** – please use the essay template, including a works cited page, and upload the rough draft to the Turnitin link.
- **Final Paper** – upload the final draft (including a works cited page) to the Turnitin link on Canvas.

Library Workshops:

In addition to their own research efforts, students are required to take the "Finding Articles" Library Workshop to aid in their pursuit of credible source material for their research projects. This workshop will be offered through our Canvas class and available to students on the date indicated in the syllabus and should take approximately 60 minutes to complete. We will complete this in class.

Please use the handbook when doing research as well as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. The paper must be typed and appear on the page exactly like the sample paper in the MLA chapter in the handbook. The works cited section of this paper is a significant part of the overall grade, so works cited entries for all sources must be completed exactly as the MLA style and format dictate. Failure to record important bibliographic information will certainly result in re-doing research, as well as a lower grade.

*****Please note that automatic works cited entry generator websites may not include the correct information in the correct order, or with the correct formatting. If using these websites, you must check your finished citation against the MLA entry.*

Weak arguments, point of view shifts, colloquial language, and non MLA formatting will all result in a lower grade.

Structure for the Research Paper:

This essay will be 5-7 pages long and must include a works cited page. The essay must include a(n):

- Introduction – general topic to the specific topic.
- Claim: It must be a claim of fact, claim of value, or a claim of policy.
- Background – narrative of past events, an overview of others' opinions on the issue, definitions of key terms, or a review of basic facts.
- Thesis Statement – must be debatable, must take a position, or make a proposal. It must discuss how this specific **topic** is **influenced** by the **MEDIA**.
- Arguments in Support of the Thesis – present assertions and the evidence to support them.
 - Evidence - facts, statistics, examples, expert opinions, appeals to readers' beliefs or needs (evidence can be one of these or a combination of these).
- Counterclaim – acknowledge the opposing argument.
- Refutation of Opposing Arguments – show how opposing arguments are weak or limited to make your argument stronger.
- Conclusion – restate major arguments in support of thesis, summarize key points, restate thesis, remind readers of weaknesses in opposing arguments, or underscore the logic of the position.

Forming a Thesis:

Students must pick a topic that explores the power of the media to shape our perceptions and understanding of reality. To develop the thesis, students will have to incorporate both nonliterary primary sources (photos, magazines, movies, television shows, advertisements, web pages) and literary secondary sources (books, articles, etc.).

The thesis statement must state the topic, state an opinion or value judgment, and the desired or projected result. It must be debatable, must take a position, or make a proposal. It must discuss how this specific **topic** is **influenced** by the **MEDIA**. Please use the form of one of the four patterns we learned:

- Correcting Misinterpretations
- Filling-the –Gap
- Modifying-What-Others-Have-Said
- Hypothesis-Testing Model

Refutation

Good arguments acknowledge that dissenting opinions exist. Great arguments show that how this dissenting opinion is not convincing. If the opposition has a good point, admit it (concede that the argument has valid points). Then show why the point is still not enough to sway the reader's opinion in the counterargument (Greene and Lidinsky 100). This is also called conceding a point, and it will strengthen the writer's argument. To refute the opposition's argument, you must show that it is **one** of the following:

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|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. untrue | 5. dishonest (deliberate attempt to deceive) |
| 2. illogical | 6. absurd |
| 3. self-contradictory | 7. antiquated/ no longer relevant |
| 4. ambiguous (not clearly defined) | 8. only partially addresses the issue |

In addition to these methods, students can also point out any logical fallacies which are “flaws in the chain of reasoning that lead to a conclusion that does not necessarily follow from the premises, or evidence” (Greene and Lidinsky 267) they see with the argument. Logical fallacies invalidate an argument and can be used to refute the opposing side. Review the “Language of Persuasion” handout and the book for illogical fallacies like:

- Erroneous Appeal to Authority
- Ad Hominem
- Shifting the Issue
- Either/Or Fallacy
- Sweeping Generalizations
- Bandwagon
- Begging the Question
- False Analogy
- Technical Jargon
- Confusing Cause and Effect

Sources:

Students will need to use at least three different sources: reference books, periodicals, online periodicals, database search, etc. Be sure to keep accurate research notes for the Annotated Bibliography and the final works cited page.

- There are examples of the Annotated Bibliography in the Research Module in Canvas and in Greene and Lidinsky (p. 235).
- Also, there is a brief description of the Annotated Bibliography in the Greene and Lidinsky book (pp. 184-187).
- Please review the rules on paraphrasing and plagiarism in the handbook or on the OWL at Purdue's website (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>)

Note: Please note that **Wikipedia.com** is not considered a scholarly website and therefore NO citations or references for this paper should include Wikipedia. However, students may use the articles that Wikipedia references at the bottom of the entry for your research paper (if they are from a credible source).

Works Cited Page:

Throughout the semester, students have been learning how to cite sources correctly in in-text citations and in the works cited page. For this assignment, students will first turn in an **annotated bibliography**, which is similar to a works cited page, but it contains an **evaluation paragraph for each source**. This will allow me to see the sources and make comments on the formatting for the works cited page for the final page of the final paper. Please note that students are required to have **five to seven sources** for the annotated bibliography, but only required **three sources on the final paper**.

On the final paper, students will need to list their sources in alphabetical order by

- author's last name (or by title if no author is listed),
- use the correct container formatting as specified by MLA,
- and use the correct punctuation and abbreviations as required by MLA 8 formatting.

The **final paper's works cited page** will list the sources, but **not contain the evaluation paragraph** from the annotated bibliography.

Absolutely NO WORK may be submitted after 12/13/2018.