



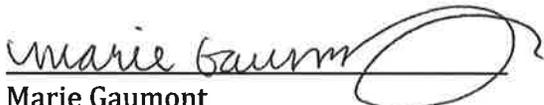
THE PRESIDENCY FROM PRINT TO SOCIAL MEDIA: THE EVOLVING MEDIA
TECHNOLOGIES AND COVERAGE OF AMERICA'S HEAD OF STATE

Senior Project

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Esther G. Maynor Honors College
University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

Marie Gaumont
Mass Communication
April 4, 2018


Marie Gaumont

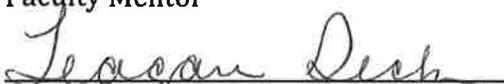
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Abstract

This thesis examines the technological advances of mass media, from print to social media, and presents the findings in the evaluation of the American presidency's media coverage from George Washington to Barack Obama. Print media, such as newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, as well as web journalism and social media are presented in this study. The presidents researched were George Washington, Calvin Coolidge, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Barack Obama.

This study aims to understand the progression of journalistic news and public relations communication through the introduction and incorporation of newer, more accessible, more immediate and advanced media technologies in the coverage of the United State's most prominent figures.

Pulling from texts, scholarly articles, news articles, multimedia including videos and social media accounts, this study presents media as fluid tools of communication that can evolve, but don't necessarily overtake the previous medium. While social media can be a prevalent news source or public relations tactic for communication, so, too, can print newspapers be today.

THE PRESIDENCY FROM PRINT TO SOCIAL MEDIA: THE EVOLVING MEDIA
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Introduction

Media technology has steadily evolved to become more accessible to the masses since its creation. From the printing press to today's era of handheld communication devices, media has changed with the times to best fit the audiences of the day. Fitting the seven values of news-worthy media (impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, bizarreness, and currency), coverage of the campaigns for American presidencies can contain all values and is often considered newsworthy. Coverage of presidencies exhibits timeliness, if the news is released with immediacy; prominence, as the president is considered one of the most prominent people in the country and the world; impact, with the Head of State making decisions or by representing the American people at an ambassadorial level; conflict, during elections, national security scares or scandals; bizzarity, if something out-of-the-ordinary occurs during or within the administration; and currency, during times of change in the presidency, presentation of new legislation, or office-exits.

Since America's first president, George Washington, citizens of the United States have yearned for news about the Chief Executive, and that is not likely to change. What has changed, however, is the technology used to present the reports. During the Washington-era, print media was used. Papers like *the American Daily Advertiser* and *National Gazette* published materials regarding his office, and Washington was the first president to use a paper to publish his Farewell Address. Media transformed from print to

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radio broadcast, emphasized during Calvin Coolidge's State of the Union, which was the first of its kind sent to the American public through radio airways. The next technological advance combined audio and video to broadcast through the television. Newscasts came directly into homes where citizens could physically see President Truman in the first White House telecast. The latest media revolution has come to us in the form of web-based journalism and social media-circulated news. President Barack Obama was the first American president to use social media to his advantage when he reached out to the public (especially young voters) through platforms like Twitter.

Using social media, as Obama did during both campaigns, a candidate can garner support through the creation of a two-way symmetrical dialogue of communication between the candidate and potential voters. This tactic is shown in Grunig and Hunt's excellence theory of public relations. In most cases, practices of public relations help to present the best image of the commander-in-chief. While George Washington was popular enough, Mason Locke Weems used his penmanship to profess to the world what an honorable man Washington was by the means of a printed bibliography. The father of modern-day public relations, Edward Bernays, used his knowledge of public interest and presented Calvin Coolidge as a president who was popular among radio celebrities. Harry Truman used television to reach Americans during times of crisis, like he did almost immediately following the Potsdam conference when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Americans may still watch morning news, check in with the radio during their commute to and from work, and occasionally, pick up a newspaper, but the internet is the fastest way to access information when news breaks. It can be argued that the changing

technologies can affect the sustainability of journalism in its current practice, “as a product and as a profession,” but there is also “the notion of journalism as a social network, open to change and innovation, and influenced by technological, organizational, professional, economic and political factors.”¹ The practice of public relations works much the same.

Those practicing public relations have adjusted to the technology changes. The press release, the practitioner’s most used tool, has transformed from print to an email sent to a journalist’s inbox, and today, some media releases have been condensed into the form of social media posts. News companies have adjusted to the change by accepting the new media tool and incorporating it into their news distribution. *The Daily Mail*, and *the New York Times*, for example, still print in hard copy, but each outlet also has an online version. These news outlets also have a Snapchat feature that allows the public to access their stories through the social media application when they’re not sending filtered selfies to their friends. Applications like Snapchat and Twitter seem to be the future technology of news media, but the ancestor of accessible mass media was introduced in the 15th century with the invention of the Gutenberg printing press².

George Washington and Print

When Johannes Gutenberg created the printing press, similar to a technology first used in China, he had no idea of the impact it would make as an agent of communication

¹ Lia-Paschalia, Matsiola, Veglis, Kalliris, and Charalambos Dimoulas, “Journalism in a state of flux: Journalists as agents of technology innovation and emerging news practices,” *The International Communication Gazette* 75, no. 1 (2013) : 77.

² Stephan Füssel, *Gutenberg and the impact of printing* (Hampshire : Ashgate, 2005).

and change.³ The cheaper, reusable materials made printed knowledge more accessible. First used to produce bibles, pamphlets and manuscripts, the press modernized into a tool producing newspapers, first in Europe and then in colonized America. The first American newspaper was the *Boston News Letter*.⁴ This paper, and ones like it, would distribute prominent news, local and national, to the masses and were heavily emphasized during the American Revolution, to spread propaganda, profess victories, and inspire separation from the Crown.

The Revolution broke out, the Declaration of Independence was drafted and approved, and the Nation was born. After the signing, and the ensuing freedom from the Royal Crown of Great Britain, the new United States needed leadership. It finally found its “reluctant president,” after the Electoral College made George Washington “the only chief executive to be unanimously elected,” in 1789.⁵ Washington didn’t have to do much campaigning. He was already popular among voters after his role in the Revolutionary War as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and as president of the Constitutional Convention, but during his inaugural address, Washington wore a campaign button of sorts – set in brass with an engraved eagle.⁶ Washington was anxious about his newly appointed position as head of state, but also saw it as an opportunity to serve his country. He viewed newspaper media in an equally anxious, but hopeful manner.

³ Stephan Füssel, *Gutenberg and the impact of printing* (Hampshire : Ashgate, 2005).

⁴ Emery, Emery and Nancy Roberts, *The Press and America – An Interpretive History of the Mass Media* (Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 24.

⁵ Ron Chernow, “The Reluctant President,” *Smithsonian* 41, no. 10 (2011).

⁶ Katie Uva, “Parson Weems,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, March 12, 2018, <http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/parson-weems/>.

“Throughout his adult life, George Washington had interactions with the press. As a Virginia planter, he used local newspapers to advertise for horses and jackasses for sale or for the use of stud animals. As Commander in Chief of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, he feared the media gave too much military information to the British, but he still encouraged the use of newspapers in order to boost American morale. As president, he perceived the importance of the press in keeping people informed.”⁷

Even before the new president reached New York, the capital of the United States at that time, newspapers covered his journey from his home, Mount Vernon, to his new occupational center. “His Excellency rode in front of the procession, on horseback, politely bowing to the spectators who filled the doors and windows by which he passed,” according to *the Federal Gazette* which reported from Philadelphia. For the Americans who did not have the chance to watch the procession, the description given by the papers was the only report of the historic event. Soon after, Washington took the opportunity of his inauguration to ask Congress to lift the tax on newspapers, as he considered the papers to be the necessary way to keep the “good citizens informed.”⁸

During Washington’s time in office, the public used newspaper reports to stay informed, but also to form their own opinions based on the partisan presentations of their president. When he ran for re-election, papers like *the National Gazette* started publishing criticisms and warned against falling for another idol to worship. The biggest criticisms occurred during the leaked details of Washington’s Jay’s Treaty, in which papers like *the*

⁷ Rozell, Mark J., et al., “George Washington and the Origins of the American Presidency,” *Greenwood Publishing Group*, 157, (2000).

⁸ *Ibid.* 161

Aurora, *the Independent Chronicle*, and *Valerius* presented the president's act as power-hungry and again in *the Aurora* when the president was accused of spending too much of the public's money.⁹ The latter was soon discredited by the Treasury.

Despite some tense relations, Washington continued to believe in the freedom of the press. On September 17, 1796, *the American Daily Advertiser* published George Washington's Farewell Address to the American public.¹⁰ It is in this address that Washington compelled citizens to love their country, abide laws, be wary of political parties that can divide the country, and respect the checks and balances of the nation. After leaving office, Washington continued to subscribe to newspapers so he could keep up with current events.¹¹

In promoting Washington's image, book agent and author, Mason Locke Weems (also known as Parson Weems), used the print media as a way to communicate the life of George Washington. The work was published many times, with the finalized copy printed posthumously by Harvard. In the biography, *the Life of George Washington: With Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself, and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen*, Weems presented the president in a more human light, including anecdotes from his childhood, great battle stories from the French-Indian War, and how Washington behaved as a husband and business man. Before the establishment of public relations as a formal practice or profession, it can be argued that Weems acted almost as a publicist for the first president.

⁹ Rozell, Mark J., et al., "George Washington and the Origins of the American Presidency," Greenwood Publishing Group, 162, (2000).

¹⁰ George Washington's Farewell Address. (1976). *Congressional Digest*, 55 (1), 28.

¹¹ Rozell, Mark J., et al., "George Washington and the Origins of the American Presidency," *Greenwood Publishing Group*, 167, (2000).

Weems painted Washington in a favorable light, publishing in his biography: “Few great men are great in everything. But in the last testament of this extraordinary American, we see some things all together characteristic,” and “For these virtues, how excellent! How rare in youth! Washington was admirably distinguished when but a boy.”¹² The biography presented a chance for the public to feel acquainted with George Washington and to know him more personally. Weems is credited with giving the public the glorified and highly favored image of George Washington that remains today.¹³

As the first president of the United States, George Washington was also the first Head of State to face both criticism and acclamations by journalists and penmen. His presidency was covered from the moment he took office until the publication of his Farewell Address through print media like newspapers, pamphlets, and books.

Americans used these printed works to educate themselves and form their own opinions about their new president and government. The newly accepted Declaration of Independence gave the public freedom to print their thoughts without repose or consequence of the law, and Washington’s lift on newspaper tax gave publishers the financial ability; and so, newspapers flourished as journalists covered daily occurrences and spread this communication to the masses. It would take more than a century until the media had a new form of technology to spread information.

Calvin Coolidge Reverberates Through Radio

¹² Mason Locke Weems, *The Life of George Washington: With Curious Anecdotes, Equally Honourable to Himself, and Exemplary to His Young Countrymen* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Company, 1858), 242 & 222.

¹³ Katie Uva, “Parson Weems,” George Washington’s Mount Vernon, March 12, 2018, <http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/parson-weems/>.

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In the 1920s, a new media technology presented itself in the form of transmitted audio signals. Radio experimentation began in the 1700s, but the true invention of the medium can be accredited to many individuals in the 20th century working with electronic signals and wireless – men and women like Guglielmo Marconi, Nikola Tesla and Dr. Lee de Forest, along with his wife, Nora Stanton Blatch Barney. Lee de Forest was the first to broadcast music through radio and “in another publicity stunt, he and his second wife played records from atop the Eiffel Tower.”¹⁴

From showmanship to media purpose, it was a local newspaper that first decided to broadcast news through the radio. *The Detroit News* transmitted the first radio news broadcast on August 20, 1920, through their independent system, and was granted a commercial license in 1921. It was this license that allowed them to broadcast government reports at 485 meters (619 kHz). “[WWJ] is believed to be the first station to broadcast news reports regularly, as well as the first regularly scheduled religious broadcast and play-by-play sports broadcasts.”¹⁵

Nationally, and separate from print media entirely, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) also started using radio as a means to deliver information to the masses in 1921 – their first broadcast was of a boxing match. Three major national radio broadcast systems followed, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). When first assigned to head NBC, Merlin Aylesworth didn’t even own a radio.¹⁶

¹⁴ William Richter, *Radio: A Complete Guide to the Industry* (New York : Peter Lang, 2006), 13.

¹⁵ “A Brief History of WWJ,” *CBS Detroit*, last modified June 24, 2010, <http://detroit.cbslocal.com/2010/06/24/a-brief-history-of-wwj/>.

¹⁶ William Richter, *Radio: A Complete Guide to the Industry* (New York : Peter Lang, 2006), 23.

The media used radio as a means of communication that could span over miles and, unlike print media, had the ability to recount historical events while they were happening. In presidential instances, radio broadcast into the homes of Americans with the announcement of presidential election winners, addresses and speeches. “If the speech was important enough, it could be printed in pamphlets, books, or newspapers to be read and perused at a later date for contextual analysis, but a reconstruction of the conditions in which the speech was delivered was lost to obscurity.”¹⁷ While George Washington had traveled by horseback to deliver his speeches to the American people in person or printed his addresses in newspapers, the first president to broadcast his inaugural address, as well as a “political speech specifically for a radio audience,” was the thirtieth president of the United States, John Calvin Coolidge.¹⁸

Calvin Coolidge, or Silent Cal as he was known during his time as vice president under Warren Harding, took office after Harding’s death. The Republican first addressed Congress on December 6, 1923, and this presidential Annual Message of Congress (known today as the State of the Union Address) was the first of its kind to be sent through the radio nationally to the American public. The radio waves traveled from the microphones on the Speaker’s table to stations in Washington, New York, Providence, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Dallas. “The broadcast was so clear that the radio station KSD in St. Louis telephoned the Capital to find out what all the grating noises were periodically during the speech,” but the noises heard were simply the sounds of Coolidge turning the pages of his speech while he read.¹⁹

¹⁷ James Eric Black. “SILENT CAL AND THE INVISIBLE AUDIENCE: THE SOCIOTECHNOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOICE.” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 69, no. 1 (2012):3

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 10

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 10

During his inaugural address in 1925, the 4,000 words were uttered from his mouth, picked up by the microphones, sent through the radio waves and broadcast into the homes, plants, businesses, stores, and schools of everyday Americans who gathered around their radios heeding each utterance.

“America seeks no earthly empire built on blood and force. No ambition, no temptation, lure her to thought of foreign dominions. The legions which she sends forth are armed, not with the sword, but with the cross,” Coolidge said in his address, and almost immediately, the news was recorded by the radio and the public could easily be part of the experience through the new medium.²⁰ Coolidge used the radio to communicate directly to the American people, and in doing so, he broadcast over six hours during the course of eight months. His radio audience during those eight months in 1927 was around 30,000,000 people.²¹

Not only did Coolidge use radio as his own device of communication, but news about the president and his family was also transmitted through the medium. On July 7, 1924, the president’s son, Calvin Jr., died from blood poisoning. The horror of the 16-year-old’s passing soon found its way from the White House to the public when it was announced through broadcast radio news during a Democratic National Convention.²²

The news took only an hour to reach the convention where it spread to the rest of the

²⁰ Calvin Coolidge: Inaugural Address (1925).

²¹ James Eric Black. “SILENT CAL AND THE INVISIBLE AUDIENCE: THE SOCIOTECHNOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL VOICE.” ETC: A Review of General Semantics 69, no. 1 (2012):11

²² Jerry Wallace, *Calvin Coolidge : Our First Radio President* (Vermont: Five Corners Press, 2008), 14, <https://coolidgefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CCBOOKOur-First-Radio-PresidentPrint-Copy-July-2008-PDF.pdf>.

country, which was tuning in to the convention, and within minutes, the country was grieving with the president and his family.

Despite the invention and use of radio communication, print media was still a major technology of the era. Newspapers published accounts about Coolidge's presidency and his personality, and the president could use print to reach the public, as well. However, despite his attempts to communicate through the media to the American people, Coolidge's public image was not as favorable as presidents of the past. He had been described as "cold and taciturn."²³ Therefore, Edward Bernays, known as the father of modern public relations, was employed to be the necessary publicist before the chief executive's re-election. In an attempt to revamp the president's reputation, Bernays suggested the president and first lady should host a breakfast with popular opinion influencers.

Actresses and actors were invited to D.C. for breakfast and a few press photos afterwards. "In 1924, this was a startling idea, for actors and actresses still were tainted with a 17th Century reputation, but there was no disputing that they also carried a strong connotation of humanness, warmth, extroversion and camaraderie."²⁴ Most prominent in attendance were Al Jolson, Ed Wynn, the Dolly Sisters, Charlotte Greenwood, and Raymond Hitchcock.²⁵ Bernays used the print media to distribute this story, including a photograph of the president laughing, of Coolidge as a man of prosperity and likeability –

²³ Edward Bernays, "Prosperity and Thrift: The Coolidge Era and the Consumer Economy," The Library of Congress, 1962 : 4, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=amrlm&fileName=me02page.db&recNum=0>.

²⁴ Ibid. 4

²⁵ "How Bernays Improved Calvin Coolidge's Public Image," *The Museum of Public Relations*, Last modified July 17, 2015, <http://www.prmuseum.org/blog/2015/7/23/how-bernays-improved-calvin-coolidges-public-image>.

one who was inviting and distinguished himself with important company and ate breakfast with movie stars. The story ran in papers like *the New York Times* and *the New York Herald*.²⁶ Coolidge was re-elected shortly thereafter.

Calvin Coolidge used the radio to his advantage during his time as president. His re-election campaign was comprised around garnering the public's affection and votes by speaking to the voters via radio. His presidency was broadcast to the public in such a personal way that America hadn't witnessed before. However, like most technology, media machinery was soon to advance with new forms of communication. "The time may not be far away when it will be possible to have a receiving set in the home that will produce a sound motion picture. Central stations may be able to receive and broadcast to the eye and ear events taking place all around the world," said Calvin Coolidge himself.²⁷ Coolidge died in 1933 before he could witness the first American president to appear on television in 1939.

Roosevelt First On Set, but Truman Takes Television

In 1939, the World Fair was hosted in New York and it "turned the line of vision from past to future."²⁸ The RCA mimicked Coolidge's dream of a sound motion picture and presented an exhibition at the fair of a medium for both the ear and the eye. "A large television hall was the centerpiece of the exhibition, able to accommodate more than

²⁶ Edward Bernays, "Prosperity and Thrift: The Coolidge Era and the Consumer Economy," The Library of Congress, 1962 : 10, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=amrlm&fileName=me02page.db&recNum=0>.

²⁷ Jerry Wallace, *Calvin Coolidge : Our First Radio President* (Vermont: Five Corners Press, 2008), 23, <https://coolidgefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CCBOOKOur-First-Radio-PresidentPrint-Copy-July-2008-PDF.pdf>.

²⁸ Andreas Fickers, "Presenting the 'window on the world' to the world. Competing narratives of the presentation of television at the world's fairs in paris (1937) and new york (1939)," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 28, no. 3 (2008):295, doi: 10.1080/01439680802230704.

50,000 fairgoers a week for the 10-minute TV show on twelve 9-by-12-inch receivers,” with the content being pre-recorded interviews with fairgoers and the sounds and scenes from other exhibitions.²⁹

Present at the World Fair of 1939 was the thirty-second president of the United State’s Franklin D. Roosevelt. The president declared the fair open with a speech that captured both audio and visual recordings. The event was covered by print, as *the New York Times* published a first-page spread (which included the president’s speech and how the police were surprised by the “lack of traffic” surrounding the fair), by national radio stations NBC and CBS, and was televised by the RCA.³⁰

The Mutual Broadcast System interrupted Americans during their Sunday baseball with the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941.³¹

“No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory,”³²

President Roosevelt said in his infamous declaration of war speech to Congress following the attack. World War II placed a temporary hold on America’s enthusiasm for television, but Roosevelt’s speech to Congress was captured on video. After the war, and with the revitalization of the American economy, more families began using television sets as their source of entertainment and news.

²⁹ Ibid. 302

³⁰ Erika Allen, “April 30, 1939. The New York World’s Fair Opens to the Public,” *The New York Times*, (2014), <https://www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2014/04/30/april-30-1939-the-new-york-worlds-fair-opens-to-the-public/>.

³¹ Joe Garner, *We interrupt this broadcast : the events that stopped our lives-- from the Hindenburg explosion to the Virginia Tech shooting* (Illinois : Sourcebooks, 2008) 9.

³² Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Day of Infamy Speech,” (1941) : 1 *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 12, 2018).

While the new medium had been invented during Roosevelt's presidency, television was not nearly as popular or as accessible to the everyman as the previous media technologies of radio and print. It wasn't until after Roosevelt's death, when his vice president took office, that the television set truly earned its place in the American household. When President Harry Truman accepted the treaty to end WWII, the opening speech was broadcast nationally (the first of its kind to air from one end of the country to the other).³³

Truman was the country's first president followed extensively on television. He was the first president to make a telecast from the White House in 1947, the first to run a political ad on television in 1948 and the first president to televise his inaugural address in 1949.³⁴ The 1948 election was an upset, and NBC covered election night and presented Truman's win live to eager Americans gathered around their television sets. "President Truman is posing for news reel and still photographers. He is smiling, and everybody has been rushing up to shake his hand to congratulate him," the broadcast journalist recounted for the public, while the face of the president was flashed across the screen.³⁵ Truman's acceptance speech was broadcast as well.

Like Coolidge and Roosevelt's use of radio to directly communicate to the public, Truman knew to use television as a means to address and appeal to the people. In 1952, the White House was being repaired and the funds came from American tax dollars.

³³ "President Truman Makes First Transcontinental Television Broadcast," *History*, last modified 2009, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/president-truman-makes-first-transcontinental-television-broadcast>.

³⁴ "First Presidential Speech on TV." *History*. Last modified 2009. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-presidential-speech-on-tv>.

³⁵ World Media, "1948 Election Results Truman Wins," YouTube video, 27:26, posted August 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP2DYgrox8I>.

Truman thought the public would be interested and had a right to know how the money was being spent; therefore, “cameras and lights were set up in the White House,” while he gave a personal tour of the public rooms to the three network commentators (NBC, CBS and ABC).³⁶ The broadcast showcased Truman’s historical knowledge and gave the viewers at home a chance to see their president skillfully playing a piano.

While television had the ability to present citizens with the likeable side of their president, broadcast news could also show the horror of his nuclear decisions. In 1951, the local station KTLA out of Los Angeles televised the detonation of an atomic bomb in Nevada. Viewers saw the test detonation live.³⁷ When the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, Truman’s announcement of the drop was sent to television sets nationally. In the broadcast, the president can be seen reading his speech within the rocking hull of USS Augusta. “If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this Earth,” the president said in his broadcast.³⁸ Three days later another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and following the second deafening and destructive atom, Japan surrendered to the Allies.

Truman’s presidency, including the events ending WWII, founding the United Nations, enduring an economic crisis, issuing the Truman Doctrine, following the Korean War, and allowing the atomic bombs to be used against America’s enemies was covered by journalists through print, radio and television. “The United Nations was born out of an

³⁶ S. Shalett, “We Bring You Now the President!” *Saturday Evening Post* 227, no. 47 (1955) : 146.

³⁷ Hugh Hart, “Feb. 1, 1951: TV Shows Atomic Blast, Live.” *Wired* (2010), <https://www.wired.com/2010/02/0201ktla-atomic-test/>.

³⁸ “President Truman Speech After the Bombing of Hiroshima,” filmed August 6, 1945, C-SPAN video, posted August 14, 2010, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?294914-1/president-truman-speech-bombing-hiroshima>.

agony of war--the most terrible war in history. Those who drew up the charter really had less to do with the creation of the United Nations than the millions who fought and died in that war,” Truman said in his video recorded speech to the UN in 1950, which was broadcast nationally via radio. “The United Nations represents the idea of universal morality, superior to the interests of individual nations.”³⁹ Like many presidents, his presidential acts were debated, applauded and disagreed with, but most importantly, they were discussed because of the news media that gave citizens insight to the happenings of the White House and the government.

The laughable “Dewey Defeats Truman,” headline, printed by *the Chicago Tribune*, was a horrendous blunder made by a print medium. However, *the Tribune’s* mistake exhibits the fact that print media was still published, read and highly circulated as Truman is seen holding the faux pas front page on a printed copy of another newspaper.⁴⁰ Radio sets were found in almost every American home during the Second World War, and while the number of television sets steadily increased, and continue to do so with each family now averaging three sets per household, according to Nielsen, the previous media have not vanished.⁴¹ Media technologies continue to evolve into newer, faster means of communication. At this stage in history, no medium has been as instantaneous for the American public to access news than the latest – web journalism and social media.

³⁹ Harry Truman, “*Address in New York City Before the United Nations General Assembly.*” Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, 1950, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=901>.

⁴⁰ Tim Jones, “Dewey Defeats Truman,” *the Chicago Tribune* (2018), <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/chi-chicagodays-deweydefeats-story-story.html>.

⁴¹ “U.S. Homes Add Even More TV Sets in 2010,” *Nielsen*, last modified April 28, 2010, <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2010/u-s-homes-add-even-more-tv-sets-in-2010.html>.

Barack Obama Overtakes the Web Revolution

In 1995, the Federal Networking Council gave a definition for the word internet. “It was conceived in the era of time-sharing, but has survived into the era of personal computers, client-server and peer-to-peer computing, and the network computer.”⁴²

Today, it is difficult for many young adults, born in the 90s, to imagine a world without the internet – including the everyday question answering Google search engine and the communication availability gained through emails and direct messaging. “The growth of the Internet and the advancement of Web 2.0 technology have transformed how people socialize, communicate and seek information. This phenomenon includes how people access news.”⁴³

The first news media to go online was *the Columbus Dispatch* in 1980, quickly followed by *the Washington Post*, *the New York Times* and *the Los Angeles Times*.⁴⁴ As the World Wide Web started to connect people, so too did it disseminate information and news to the collective masses. From print to pixel, the newspaper medium changed with the times to offer access to their stories to more people with an immediacy that could only be outdone by the creation of social media.

In the beginning, social media was merely a medium of social connectivity. The first social medium hit the web in 1997. Six Degrees was the first platform and was

⁴² Barry M. Leiner et al. “Brief History of the Internet,” *Internet Society*, (1997), <https://www.internetsociety.org/internet/history-internet/brief-history-internet/>.

⁴³ Z. A. Ahmad & M. Buyong, “CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ONLINE NEWS PORTAL: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES,” *e-BANGI Journal*, 12 (2017) : 164.

⁴⁴ David Shedden, “New Media Timeline (1980),” last modified December 16, 2004, <https://www.poynter.org/news/new-media-timeline-1980>.

established for blog sharing.⁴⁵ In the new millennium, Myspace, Facebook and Twitter surfaced, friend requests were sent, and messages were shared. Social media is now a congealed source of information about our friends as well as a means of distributing newsworthy information. “Roughly two-thirds (64%) of U.S. adults use [Facebook], and half of those users get news there — amounting to 30% of the general population.”⁴⁶ As well as a tool for direct communication (from news site to the reader or celebrity to their fans), social media gives the power of storytelling to the public. Almost all major news offices, organizations, businesses and influential people of the world curate a social media account to issue this two-way communication. In fact, even royalty, members of governments and presidents of the world have a few social media accounts.

President Barack Obama was a president holding the distinctions of many firsts. He was the first African American to be elected president in the United States, he was the first president to be born outside the forty-eight contiguous states, he was the first president to appoint females to the Supreme Court (Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan), and he was the first president whose official presidential portrait was taken by a digital camera.⁴⁷ Running for presidency at the start of social media’s new age and holding office during social media succession, Obama was also the first president to Tweet directly to the public, use his own website and YouTube to garner support on the campaign trail, and have web articles published about his legislation, family life, and his

⁴⁵ Benjamin Hale, “The History of Social Media: Social Networking Evolution!” last modified June 16, 2015, <http://historycooperative.org/the-history-of-social-media/>.

⁴⁶ Monica Anderson & Andrea Caumont, “How Social Media is Reshaping News,” last modified September 24, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/24/how-social-media-is-reshaping-news/>.

⁴⁷ “Pete Souza’s Portrait of a Presidency,” *the New York Times*, last modified October 8, 2012, <http://time.com/3445820/pete-souzas-portrait-of-a-presidency/>.

choice of suit (with the tan suit sparking a firestorm of breaking news and Tweets in 2014).⁴⁸

On both campaign trails, 2008 and 2012, Obama used this exciting, new medium as a direct line of communication to reach young, new voters and his public.

“They could ‘like’ Obama on Facebook, post comments about their feelings for friends to see, watch and comment on ‘viral’ videos (especially in 2008) such as Obama Girl and Yes We Can, make and display their own images or video, tweet or retweet messages about the campaigns (especially in 2012), donate money at the moment when feeling moved to do so, and be engaged in other ways that were largely novel.”⁴⁹

Obama’s own YouTube channel, Barack Obama dot com, has hundreds of videos documenting his run for office and his presidency. The videos range from his speeches at rallies, testimonies from influential Americans like comedian Kevin Hart, advertisements, televised debates, and calls to action for voting. With over 300 million views and 500,000 subscribers, the channel was a staple in the president’s tactic for linking to and gaining the support of the American people.⁵⁰ His Facebook, with 55 million likes, shared many of the YouTube videos, expanding the network of viewers and was used to upload photographs, share stories and articles, and spark dialogue among users. Obama’s Twitter has over 101 million followers, as his most popular social media account, and was used

⁴⁸ Elahe Izadi, “Twitter Nation Distracted by President’s Tan Suit,” *the Washington Post*, (2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/08/28/nation-distracted-by-presidents-tan-suit/?utm_term=.983fc8d0135c.

⁴⁹B. Bimber, “Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment,” *Journal Of Information Technology & Politics* 11, no. 2 (2014): 133, doi:10.1080/19331681.2014.895691

⁵⁰ Barack Obama, *BarackObamadotcom*, YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/user/BarackObamadotcom/feed>.

much the same as his Facebook to attract voters. Since the end of his term, Obama has used the platform as a place to share family photos, discuss social issues, promote the Obama foundation, and even drum up friendly competition with his predecessor George W. Bush about March Madness basketball.⁵¹

While Barack Obama could use the medium as his own tool, the web and social media was also a network of sharable information curated by major news outlets. *The New York Times* has an entire section of their website tailored to their news articles about the president, who they were covering before his office run while he was still an up-and-coming senator. In 2004, when Obama first declared a run for presidential office, *the Times* published a piece online that said the announcement had set “a surge of interest in democratic circles.”⁵² When Obama won in 2008, *the Wall Street Journal*, among other news organizations, published a lengthy web article including photographs, interactive infographics and maps, links to speeches, and a video of D.C. celebrating Obama’s victory.⁵³ These extra story enhancements are a few of the reasons why web journalism is so successful. Print media does not have the ability to publish moving photos or link to related stories.

However, print media was not unavailable or unread during Obama’s presidency. While some argue print is becoming a medium of the past, newspapers and magazines continue to be published. Radio stations, while overtaken by music and advertisement, still broadcast sections of news (especially regarding the weather). Television is still

⁵¹ Barack Obama, *BarackObama*, Twitter Account, <https://twitter.com/BarackObama>.

⁵² Adam Nagourney, “Early ‘Maybe’ From Obama Jolts ‘08 Field,” *the New York Times*, (2006), <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/04/washington/04candidates.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FObama%2C%20Barack>.

⁵³ Jonathan Weisman & Laura Meckler, “Obama Sweeps to History Victory,” *the Wall Street Journal*, (2008), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122581133077197035>.

America's morning news source as ABC's "Good Morning America" cited 4.7 million viewers, NBC's "Today" had 4.6 million and CBS's "CBS This Morning" had 3.6 million.⁵⁴ America has not left behind its previous news media, but has catered to the advancement of web journalism and social media as citizens cling to their cell phones and Tweet through every newsworthy national success (like the Olympics), national tragedy (like the Parkland school shooting) and presidential event (like the 2017 inauguration of Donald Trump).

"Obama's approach to digital media constituted a strategic decision to embrace a wide variety of communication opportunities and to integrate these with the fundamental tasks of the campaign, such as managing volunteers, raising money, and making important announcements."⁵⁵ In embracing social media and taking advantage of its opportunities, Obama won the populist support and served two terms as president. As the first president to use social platforms, he paved the way for future presidents to communicate to their audiences without barriers. The current president of the United States, Donald J. Trump, has taken these lessons in new age media communication and incorporated them in his own way, tweeting to his 49 million followers about new legislation, issues within our nation, and the notorious "Fake News."⁵⁶

Conclusion

⁵⁴ Brian Steinberg, "Back on Top Among TV's Morning-News Viewers," *Variety* (2016), <http://variety.com/2016/tv/news/good-morning-america-today-tv-ratings-1201748149/>.

⁵⁵ B. Bimber, "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment," *Journal Of Information Technology & Politics* 11, no. 2 (2014): 134, doi:10.1080/19331681.2014.895691

⁵⁶ Donald Trump, *realDonaldTrump*, Twitter Account, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>.

Media technologies have evolved from the sole use of print media during the Washington-era, to the listening ears of the 20s beginning with Coolidge's term, took audio and included video as Roosevelt and Truman graced the screens of television, and has finally transformed to computer, phone and tablet screens as Obama introduced the use of social media in campaigns, all the while becoming more accessible, instantaneous and communicable to the masses. Technologies were not replaced, but instead enhanced so that Americans could obtain their information through various media. "Although these activities can be unrelated, tablets and mobile phones are also often used as 'second screens' to complement the television viewing experience. For example, television viewers can take part in a shared viewing experience by following and commenting upon a social media stream such as Twitter at the same time as viewing the broadcast."⁵⁷

Media specialists are aware of their audience and how they take in the information – whether it be through hard copy print, radio, television, or on the web. Journalists have evolved their writing styles to accommodate the short attention span of a web-reader and public relations practitioners have incorporated social media into their campaign planning. However, while the technology has encompassed the new era of web, media specialists continue to compete for job availability in the sought-after positions of more traditional media outlets as well. The field of communication is fluid, and with the progress of technology, media progresses as well, which can be seen throughout the history of coverage for American presidents.

⁵⁷ J. Kätsyri et al. "Negativity Bias in Media Multitasking: The Effects of Negative Social Media Messages on Attention to Television News Broadcasts." *Plos ONE* 11 no. 5 (2016) : 1-21, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0153712.

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