**Political Communication 1: Press Coverage of Political Affairs**

3 Players in the Process of Political Communication: Objectives of Each Player:

1) Political Elites – Public Officials (President, etc.)/Candidates
2) The Press – Journalists, Reporters
3) The Electorate

4 Interactions in the Process of Political Communication:

1. Political Elites vs. Press
2. Political Elites vs. Public (Voters)
3. Press vs. Public
   * Candidates vs. Candidates

1) Political Elites – Favorable Public Opinion / Maximizing Electability

   • Why Appeal to the Public Opinion – “Going Public” (Sam Kernell)

1. For Public Officials – “Bad publicity is better than no publicity”

   Ex) President’s ability to lead depends on popularity – popularity is power.

2. For Electoral Candidates –
   Similarly, the selection of nominees is no longer left up to the party leaders because the party machinery no longer provides the support candidates need.

   In summary, a greater need for direct appeal to the public and going public is the norm in today’s politics.

2) The Press – 2 Explanations for their objectives

   • A naïve view / A baseline – Mirror Image of Reality
     Journalists want to present their audience/readers with the reality as it is. Press coverage then is a mirror image of reality.

   • Alternative, more realistic Views:

1) Business Model:
2) Organizational Model:
   Professional Norms – autonomy, objectivity, appropriateness/convenience – guide the ways in which journalists cover political affairs.

3) The Electorate / Voters
   
   - Civics Class View of Voters – Motivated to realize democratic ideals
   - Group-level Rationality View: Information Overload
     - One vote doesn’t mean much → Participation is low → Have better things to do
     - Political affairs are too complicated to pay close attention & personal relevance is limited
     - Cost-benefit Calculus: Want to make a right choice while minimizing the efforts for searching.

   Summary: The objectives of each player determine his behaviors as well as the interactions in between the three players.
Political Elites vs. Press: Press Coverage of Political Affairs

(i) “Indexing”: “Convenience” + “Credibility”
- the news sources are indexed to the level of conflict among official sources.
- Journalists are constrained to use the “credible” source because of their professional norms. Therefore, the more prominent sources are given priority.
- Typically, the more prominent sources are public officials and other official sources.
- In addition, these are convenient sources of information.

→ The level of conflict at the elite level determines the media coverage of the issue → In turn, determines the public opinion on the issue

(ii) “Adversarial vs. Deferential Journalism”:
- “Adversarial Journalism” – Hostile to public officials and plays a true watchdog function. Investigative reporting is an example. → Ex) Watergate Scandal is the most frequently cited example.
- “Deferential Journalism” – Journalists are spoon-fed by public officials. Ex) “Rally Effects”

(iii) “Interpretative Journalism”:
- “Descriptive Journalism” to “Interpretative Journalism”
- Why Interpretative Journalism?

(1) “Autonomy”: Journalists want “autonomy” (and “objectivity”).

(2) “Celebrity Journalism”: In addition, this helps them in terms of their personal advancement in the profession (“Celebrity Journalism”).

- Results:

(1) Decreasing Soundbites:
(2) Typically, this interpretative journalism is negative in tone; they are suspicious about public officials and candidates’ intentions → often become critical
Ex) 1. Analysis of presidential debates – the actual performance of candidates in the debates do not really matter; instead the poll showings begin to change as soon as the post-debate analyses come out
Ex) 2. Ad Watch – Journalists write about candidates’ ads and analyze them.

(iv) “Horserace Coverage”:

- Why Horserace Coverage?

Poll showings are especially good news items because it is suitable according to the organizational model

(1) “Autonomy”:

(2) “Convenience”: Easy to write about because it is always available

(3) “Objectivity”:

(4) “Audience Demand”: It is likely that the audience/voters are largely uninterested. Consequently, use this information about others’ opinions and evaluations as a shortcut to making their own judgement. Consequently, it is likely that there is a high demand for these horserace coverage.