

Delivering War to the Public: Shaping the Public Sphere

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How people *learn* about war profoundly affects how they *think* about war. That may seem counterintuitive; after all, the information itself, not its method of delivery, would seem to be what matters. But information and its impact are influenced to varying extents by the medium that carries the message. A newspaper analysis differs from a live television report from the battlefield, which in turn differs from an amateur's YouTube video, not just in the craft that has gone into the messages or even their specific content, but also in how they are received by their audiences.

This paper examines war and the media – primarily the news media, but also, to a limited degree, the role of non-news media. Relying primarily on examples drawn from conflicts in which the United States has been involved, the paper is designed to stimulate thinking about how war's place within the public sphere is influenced by media and, more particularly, how the news media define and perform their societal role related to war. This is more than an appraisal of news professionals, but rather is an analysis of how views of particular wars and war in general are related to how news is delivered.

As years have passed, the definition of "news media" has expanded, as has the definition of "journalist," with the population of each growing significantly. These changes make more complex the evaluation of how news is received by the public.

Another factor in the effects of news is the larger social context of information flow, which includes non-news elements such as entertainment – in this field the television, cinema, and other products that address war-related topics. As with news, entertainment's effects vary: a *Rambo* may stimulate a thirst for (vicarious) combat, while a *Saving Private Ryan* may encourage appreciation of the horrific nature of war. Whatever the particular entertainment vehicles may be, those that depict war become part of the inventory of images and ideas that shape the public sphere.

In this way, non-news messages as well as journalism help build the environment in which news is received. These are ingredients of the multi-faceted process of constructing opinions about war.