

Handout 1

Introduction to Mass Media

What is Mass Media?

“forms of communication designed to reach many people: the newspapers, radio and television stations, websites, etc., through which information is communicated to the public.”¹

What are the Purposes of Mass Media?

1. Inform/Learn
2. Entertain
3. Persuade
4. Connect
5. Sell

What are Other Purposes of Mass Media?

How has Mass Media Changed?

¹ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Mass media. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved November 25, 2025, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mass%20media>

Handout 2

Understanding How Mass Media Shapes Us

Case Study: The MeToo Movement

The **#MeToo movement** gained widespread visibility when major media outlets began reporting allegations against prominent public figures. What began as individual stories of harassment grew into a **global call for accountability**, inspiring millions to share experiences and demand cultural and workplace change.

This case study will help you explore:

- How mass media amplifies social movements
- How different platforms shape public opinion
- How media framing influences audience understanding

Step 1: Guided Questions

You can use the questions below to guide your reading, annotating and taking notes as you go!

1. Media Platforms

- Which platforms (news, social media, blogs, TV, influencers) played major roles in spreading #MeToo?
- Which do you think had the biggest impact? Why?

2. Framing & Focus

- How did different media outlets present the story?
- Whose voices or experiences were highlighted? Whose weren't?

3. Influence on Society

- How did this movement influence public conversations about harassment?
- What changes (policies, attitudes, behavior) came from the movement?

4. Risks & Considerations

- What risks did individuals face when sharing their stories online or in the media?
- How might mass media help or harm people in these situations?

Step 2: Read the Article

[Text from Verity's Context Story on the #MeToo Movement.](#)

The Facts

- **Origins:** Originally coined by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, the phrase "MeToo" began to gain traction on Oct. 15, 2017, when American actress Alyssa Milano posted a letter to Twitter (now X) outlining allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. She wrote that if all women who'd experienced assault or harassment "wrote 'Me Too' as a status, people might get a sense of the magnitude of the problem."
- **Harvey Weinstein:** Milano's letter came out shortly after The New Yorker published a deluge of accusations against Weinstein, which became a focal point of the MeToo movement. At least 90 women accused him of sexual misconduct, with their accounts spanning three decades and including claims of harassment, assault and rape. Weinstein was removed from the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences on Oct. 14, 2017. In March 2020, he received a 23-year sentence in New York for two sexual assault convictions, and in December 2022, he was found guilty of rape and assault in Los Angeles and sentenced to 16 more years, served consecutively. The 2020 New York conviction was overturned in 2024, however, and a 2025 retrial resulted in one conviction, one acquittal, and a mistrial on a third charge.
- **Social Media:** The #MeToo hashtag has been credited with spreading the movement since 2017. Some have argued that social media has provided a platform for the movement's success by enabling global dialogue and highlighting the scale of the problem across the world. Research by U.N. Women shows that there were over 24 million uses of the #MeToo hashtag between October 2017 and December 2019.

- **Global Reach:** The reach of the movement hasn't been limited to the U.S. or even the global west. Since its inception there have been #MeToo tweets from at least 85 countries. Various countries have also developed linguistically specific hashtags, such as #QuellaVoltaChe ("That time when") in Italy, #YoTambien ("Me too") in Spanish-speaking nations, and #BalanceTonPorc ("Snitch out your pig") and #MeToo Hôpital (launched in 2024 to address hospital sexual violence) in France.
- **Statistics:** According to a study by Yale, #MeToo caused a 7% increase in the number of sex-crimes reported in the U.S. between October and December 2017, while the researchers showed that 24 countries from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) saw an average rise of 14%. A 2024 Newcomb Institute report notes 82% of women and 42% of men report lifetime sexual harassment or assault, showing persistent prevalence. False allegation rates range from 2–8% in the U.S. (about 3% in the U.K., per the Home Office), though these figures are complicated by varying definitions of “false” (e.g., unproven vs. fabricated) and widespread underreporting of sex crimes, likely making false reports a smaller share overall.
- **MeToo Today:** MeToo has continued to evolve, linked to allegations against figures like Bill Cosby, R. Kelly, Brett Kavanaugh and Sean Combs (acquitted in 2025). A 2022 Pew poll found half of U.S. adults support MeToo, with 21% opposing, often citing due process concerns. The movement has driven policy reforms, such as stronger workplace harassment laws in states like New York and a 50% rise in U.S. sexual harassment lawsuits from 2017–2020,

per the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The 2022 Depp-Heard trial, where Heard's claims were ruled defamatory, highlighted MeToo's divisiveness.

The Spin

- **Left Narrative:** MeToo has undeniably achieved significant success. Sexual violence and abuse are now discussed far more openly, and the outpouring of testimony and solidarity across race and gender has led to real results in holding exploiters — often industry monoliths — accountable. Yet society still has a long way to go. While individual attitudes have shifted, institutions and legal systems remain slow to change. Much work is also needed to protect vulnerable and marginalized communities, as well as women worldwide. Broader, systemic changes are required before we can claim full victory.
- **Right narrative:** MeToo may have begun with noble intentions, but it quickly became its own kind of religion, undermining the justice it claimed to champion. While some men were rightly held accountable, the movement also unleashed a frenzy of trial by media that ruined many innocent lives. Its silence on abuses in marginalized communities, and its tendency to equate a leg brush or crude joke with rape, have diluted its purpose and diminished the experiences of true victims. It is time to acknowledge the good it has done, but also take a step back.
- **Narrative C:** The MeToo movement has achieved a lot, but its popularity also distracted from larger goals it could have pursued. Socially, it has become easier to single out and vilify individual men, while bigger systems that fuel misogyny — like the porn industry — remain largely unchallenged. Simple man-hating, without a deeper look at how misogyny is built into society, is counterproductive and only creates more resentment.

Step 3: Mass Media Influence Table

Using the facts and narratives from the Verity Context Story, complete the table below.

Consider how mass media shape culture, attention, identity, and behavior.

Influence Area	Relevant Facts	Narrative Interpretations
Culture		
Attention		
Identity		

Behavior		
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Step 4: Quick Reflection

Write 3–4 sentences responding to one of the prompts below:

- What surprised you about how fast the movement spread?
- How did seeing stories shared widely across media affect public understanding?
- Why do you think this case is an important example of media influence?

Handout 3

Who's Paying?

Every piece of media you consume is paid for by someone. Your task is to figure out who pays for the content you use every day, and how that might influence what you see.

Step 1: Write down 5-8 media platforms, apps, or outlets you use regularly. This can include any form of mass media.

Step 2: Identify the funding model. Here's a guide to identify each platform's monetization model.

Advertising Supported Media	• Makes Money by selling ad space or sponsored content. • Look for: Ads before or during videos, sponsored posts, promoted content.
Subscription Supported Media	• Makes money from paying customers. • Look for: paywalls, monthly fees, premium tiers.
Donations & Nonprofit Funding	• Supported by donors, foundations, or member contributions. • Look for: “donate now” banners, pledge drives.
Data Collection & Targeted Ads	• Makes money by collecting user data and selling targeted advertising. • Look for: personalized recommendations, tailored ads.
Public Funding	• Supported partially or fully through government/public systems. • Look for: Public broadcaster, license fees, government use.

What to Look For

- **Good Conclusion:** This platform uses ads, so it may have an incentive to keep users watching, clicking, or scrolling.
- **Bad Conclusion:** This platform uses ads, so everything on it is false.
- **Good Conclusion:** This platform receives grants for reporting on conflict, so I should check whether it explains its funding and editorial independence.
- **Bad Conclusion:** This outlet receives grants, so its reporting is propaganda.

Step 3: Fill out the Chart.

Platform /Outlet	Who owns it?	How does it make money? What incentives might this create?	How does this affect the content you see?

Done Early? Think Deeper!

- Which type of funding model shows up the most in your own media use?
- Which model gives the audience the most control?
- How does funding shape what appears in your feed?

Handout 4

Benefits & Risks of Mass Media

Mass Media is powerful. Like any powerful tool, it can help us, or it can cause harm. Our job as media-literate people is to recognize both sides.

Look at the statements below. Are they a benefit, a risk, or both? Categorize the statements and note down your reasoning below.

Statement	Category	Reasoning
Millions of people share the same news story in minutes.		
Algorithms tailor content to your interests.		
You see mostly opinions you already agree with.		
Important movements gain public attention.		
A news outlet receives funding from a foundation to report on one topic.		

Done Early? Think Deeper!

- Did any items fit into both categories? Why does that matter?
- How would a funding model affect the risks and benefits?