Political Communication: Gatekeeping
POLS 418
MWF 10:00-10:50

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April 19, 2011

Before we get started...

- Gatekeepting (Kaid Ch 11) today
- Kaid Ch 12 wednesday
- Hand back exams on Wednesday
- Friday we will talk about the project paper and presentation (no reading)
- Will start the Kumar book on Monday.
- News

Goals

- ▶ Gatekeeping role of media
- ▶ Factors associated with gatekeeping

Gatekeeping

- ▶ What is the gatekeeping function of the media?
- ▶ What is newsworthy?
- ▶ Does the media need to be a gatekeeper?
- ▶ Is there less room for serious political news, public policy related news, and/or hard news?
- ▶ What is the collective action problem of gatekeeping?

I have yet to hear a compelling argument as to why the old code of journalistic ethics is no longer valid. Under the old code, you didn't write about the sex lives of public figures unless you could demonstrate that the private life had an effect on the public person. I've heard all the discussions and seen all the country's major news paper editors telling us that they had no choice because we have a 24-hour news cycle and they have to keep up. And if they don't, their readers won't be served. But if they have no choice, then what qualifies them to be editors? (Shepard, 1999, p. 22).

The image of a gatekeeper implies that there is a gate. That may have been true in the old days of journalism when there were very few ways for folks to get news of their community or world. Today that just isn't the case. Information is raining on us rather than being funneled along any particular path. Simply put: The gate is gone, thus the gatekeepers need new jobs. (Lasica, 1996,p. 20)

► Have we come to the end of gatekeeping?
► Part of the problem is that we tend to oversimplify the process of gatekeeping, but Bennett argues it is more complex.

A Multi-Gated Approach

- ▶ The author argues for a multi-gated approach to gatekeeping. What are the four components to this multi-gated approach?
- ▶ The individual reporter's news sense.
- ▶ The organization for which the reporter works.
- ▶ The economic pressures that enter the newsroom.
- ▶ The technologies that facilitate gathering and transmitting information.
- ▶ How do these four factors work to explain patterns of gatekeeping?

The reporter-driven ideal type

- ▶ Decision basis: personal knowledge
- ▶ Information is gathering and organizing: based on the investigation (investigative journalism)
- ▶ Journalistic role: watchdog
- ▶ Conception of public: Engaged Citizens (public interest)
- ▶ Press-government relationship: Personalized (cultivated source relationships)
- ▶ Gatekeeping norm: Independence (What the journalist decided is news).

The organizational ideal type

- Decision basis: bureaucratic (editorial hierarchy)
- Information is gathering and organizing: a regular system of beets and assignments
- Journalistic role: authoritative record keeper
- Conception of public: Information monitors
- Press-government relationship: symbolic
- Gatekeeping norm: Objectivity and fairness

The economic ideal type

- Decision basis: business (profits demographics)
- Information is gathering and organizing: based on marketing formulas
- Journalistic role: content provider
- Conception of public: entertainment audience
- Press-government relationship: commidified
- Gatekeeping norm: Plausibility (would it make a good story?)

The technological ideal type

- ▶ Decision basis: immediacy (information fidelity)
- ▶ Information is gathering and organizing: informatics (location, access, coding and flow)
- ▶ Journalistic role: transmitter
- ▶ Conception of public: voyeur (information processor)
- ▶ Press-government relationship: mediated (real time, event-driven, instant reaction)
- ▶ Gatekeeping norm: Eyewitness (let the audience decide what's news; I-Reporting)

- Thinking about gatekeeping in the 21st century, how do you see each of the four factors from the multi-gated model at play today?
- What is the "Valley of Death" story and how does it relate to gatekeeping?
- Scholars have typically exhibited a single-gated approach, focusing on only one factor from Bennett's multi-gated approach? Which do you prefer and why?
- How did Clinton manipulate gatekeeping and what were the effects?