Media
Dependency Theory

Rodrigo Zamith

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Media dependency theory offers a helpful way of thinking about the relationship between media and the fulfillment of different audience needs and goals.
System of Information

Source
Importance of context
Impacts on Extent of Dependency

• Key attributes that influence the extent to which people may depend on media for information about a topic:
  ▪ An individual’s characteristics and goals
  ▪ Their personal environment and interpersonal network
  ▪ The dominant media and social systems they live within
Example: 2020 Election
Importance of Journalistic Media

Source
The degree of ambiguity about news information impacts the degree of media dependency.

(Higher ambiguity $\rightarrow$ Greater presumed dependence)
Ambiguity and Understandings
When a media organization has exclusive information, it tends to have more power within its relationship with an audience member.
Media Restrictions
Media Dependency and Intermediaries
Key Takeaways

- Media dependency theory views journalistic media as just one set of constituents within a broader system of information.
- Media dependency theory focuses on understanding relationships within a system.
- Journalism can be especially influential on people’s understanding of things they have limited personal experience with.
- When a media organization has exclusive information, it has more power in a relationship.