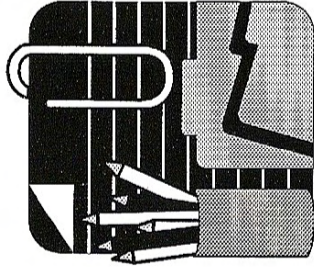


QUALITY  
FOCUS



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# Space Invaders: Media Growth & Electronic Addiction

As a society, our exposure to the media has increased several hundred percent within a few decades. Yes, Virginia, local channels used to sign off at 11:00 p.m., before Johnny, before Arsenio, and long before CNN. Until recently, you had to get up to change the channels. Do you know what teenagers in my town call the remote-control channel device? The godbox.

Certainly, worldwide media coverage provides many benefits. The rapid spread of democracy in the recent years is attributable in part to people throughout the world having a chance to see how other people live and work.

## The Proliferation of Messages

As we spend more and more hours tuned to electronic media, we are exposed to tens of thousands of messages and images. As with too much food at one sitting, too much data, in any form, isn't easily ingested.

- Three out of five television households own VCRs, while the number of movie tickets sold and videos rented in the U.S. each exceeded one billion annually starting in 1988.
- More than 575 motion pictures are produced each year compared to an average 175 twelve years ago. ("So that's why the flicks keep changing before I get to the theater!")
- The average person spends more than eight solid years watching, electronically, how other people supposedly live.
- Twenty years ago three major television networks dominated television - ABC, NBC and CBS. Today, well, you know the story... In fact there are now 339 full-power independent television stations.
- Many cable television subscribers receive up to 140 television channels offering more than 72,000 shows per month.
- And for you sports fans, in 1970, no regular-season college basketball games aired on network television. In 1991, more than 1500 were aired on network or cable television.

I'm not value-judging the effect of TV on society. Many others already have, and it is not my purpose to do so. Besides, you're going to keep watching the same amount you always do!

Regardless of whether you flip the channels, you're subject to an onslaught of issues and images. As Neil Postman, Ph.D. observed in his

little-known masterpiece, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Television*, with the three words, "and now this..." any TV news anchor is able to hold your attention while shifting gears 180 degrees.

## Radio Power

Radio listenership does not lag either. From 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. each weekday in America, listenership far surpasses that of television viewership.

- Since television was first introduced, the number of radio stations has increased tenfold.
- 97% of all households own an average of five radios (not counting car radios).
- On weekdays, 95.2% of Americans listen to radio for three hours and fourteen minutes.
- Typical salaries for morning shock-talk DJs in major cities are \$300,000 to \$600,000 per year, plus bonuses.

Instead of letting yourself be buffeted by news coverage that skips around the world and changes topic at the speed of "and now this..." give a chance to the shows that intelligently cover the issues for more than 45 seconds each, such as The MacNeil-Lehrer Hour, C-Span and anything by Bill Moyers.

They may not be as titillating as coverage on the networks, but you're bound to understand prevailing issues in more depth, and have a better chance of preserving your sense of equilibrium.

To gain context of world events, read history, travel, talk to foreigners, and listen to short-wave broadcasts from other countries (increasingly in English.) ▲