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**PRESS & TELEVISION**

media spotlighting. For example, among women and the elderly, groups frequently victimized by crime, a doubling of crime coverage made crime twice as likely to be ranked as a major issue. Similarly, while families with members out of work were extremely sensitive to increased coverage of unemployment rates, opinion in families untouched by the problems held fairly constant.

Media coverage may affect people's notions of "what is important," to some degree. But the public's perceptions are more than a simple reflection of the front page.

### *Videopapers*

"All the News That's Fit to Compute" by Bill Kelly, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Apr. 1980), 3122 M St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20007.

Electronic data systems carrying advertisements and entertainment listings are already eating into print newspaper circulation and advertising markets in Great Britain, Japan, France, and Canada. Major U.S. newspaper publishers like the New York Times Company and Dow Jones now offer corporate clients instant access to published articles stored in massive electronic memory banks.

Such "electronic newspapers" may make print newspapers obsolete—and sooner than we think, says Kelly, a Washington free-lance writer. The Knight-Ridder newspaper group has announced it will launch the first major American test of an electronic newspaper this summer. Through a system called Viewtron, 200 Miami-area families will be able to read news, weather and sports reports, consumer tips, and movie timetables on their television screens.

Through 1987, gross annual newspaper sales are expected to fall 17 percent from 1977 levels, Kelly writes. But while labor, ink, and newsprint costs are steadily rising, prices for electronic computer components will average a mere 1 percent of 1976 prices as early as 1981. Circuit density (a measure of efficiency) will increase 100-fold, and the cost of magnetic storage will drop by a factor of 1,000.

Some electronic newspapers will probably be broadcast by television stations to home sets. Decoders will turn the signals into televised pictures of news bulletins, providing fast-breaking news coverage. Two-way phone-line and cable TV services will also be available, offering substantially more information and permitting the viewer to choose programs from a larger computer data base.

For all their advantages, electronic newspapers face several obstacles. "You can't bring your television on the bus to work," notes Kelly. Further, some members of Congress fear that electronic newspapers will undermine the watchdog role of the press in American society. Huge corporations could use their technological prowess to dominate the infant industry. (Currently, AT&T is prohibited from offering data base services.) And the public may find it easier than ever to skip serious news entirely in favor of sports and entertainment features.