

MEDIUMS OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE INFORMATION

Date: March 4, 2023

Revision Date: N/A

Document Number: 20230304-01

Authored By: Practitioner Committee

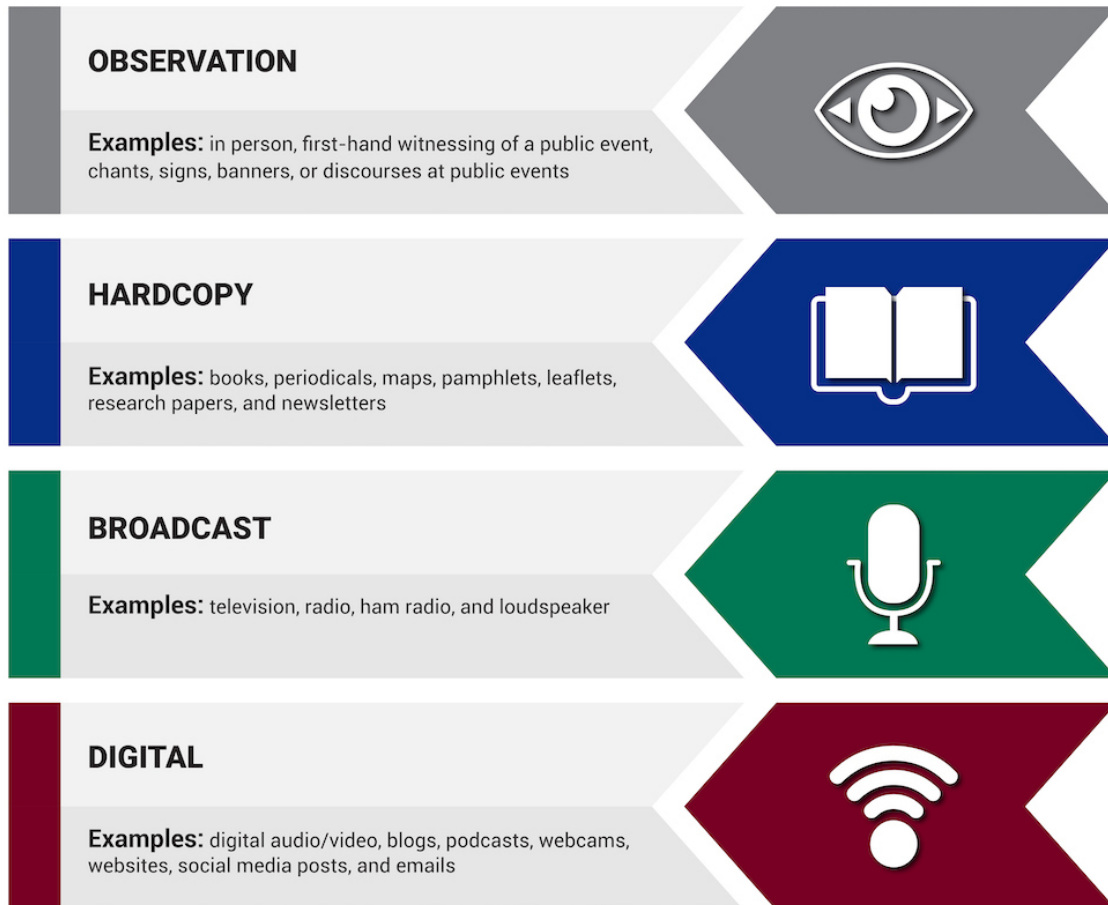
BACKGROUND: The Practitioner Committee of the OSINT Foundation published a definitions document on November 28, 2022, entitled OSINT Definitions (Document Number 20221128-01). The definition of Publicly Available Information (PAI) is “Information that has been published or broadcast for public consumption, is available on request to the public, is accessible on-line or otherwise to the public, is available to the public by subscription or purchase, could be seen or heard by any casual observer, is made available at a meeting open to the public, or is obtained by visiting any place or attending any event that is open to the public.” (DoD Manual 5240.01) The Practitioner Committee determined that delineating comprehensive mediums of PAI was a critical baseline for the discipline.

APPLICABILITY: The following is applicable for OSINT practitioners in and supporting the U.S. Intelligence Community. The information contained herein is instructive, but not necessarily applicable to non-U.S. Intelligence Community activities. These mediums may inform tradecraft decisions and development, but are not intended as a restriction on collection activities. OSINT practitioners are encouraged to review the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) Civil Liberties and Privacy Office guidance on obtaining and using PAI.¹

ASSUMPTIONS: The following four mediums represent the totality of the PAI environment at this time. As the discipline evolves, additional mediums may be added. The examples provided should not be viewed as a comprehensive listing but rather selective examples to aid in comprehension. The mediums are ordered chronologically even though the Practitioner Committee acknowledges that digital is the largest and most common medium. While most OSINT practitioners focus on digital exploitation, a working knowledge of the other PAI mediums is essential. As commercially available information (CAI) is a subcomponent of PAI (see OSINT Foundation OSINT Definitions document), the following also applies to CAI.

¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Civil Liberties and Privacy Guidance for Intelligence Community Professionals: Properly Obtaining and Using Publicly Available Information, July 2011, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/CLPO/CLPO%20Publication_Publicly%20Available%20Information_July%202011%20-%20Public%20Release%20Version.pdf

MEDIUMS OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE INFORMATION (PAI)



Copyright 2023, OSINT Foundation, Incorporated, free for use with proper attribution.

The mediums listed are not the content themselves, but rather the means by which the content is delivered. The Shannon-Weaver Communication Model breaks down the communications process into its characteristic parts and attributes. The channel or medium is how the audience sees, feels, hears, or experiences (via a particular technology) the message.²

² Jim Marteney, 2.3 *The Communication Model*, Open Educational Resources Initiative, February 20, 2021, [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Argument_and_Debate/Arguing_Using_Critical_Thinking_\(Marteney\)/02%3A_Communicating_An_Argument/2.03%3A_The_Communication_Model](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Argument_and_Debate/Arguing_Using_Critical_Thinking_(Marteney)/02%3A_Communicating_An_Argument/2.03%3A_The_Communication_Model)

Observation: That which must be observed in person, first-hand; it is experiential in nature. To be in this category, the information must not have been collected by any other means. Observation is the oldest of PAI categories, and as the PAI definition states can be either seen or heard by any casual observer at a meeting or event open to the public. Examples include chants, signs, banners, or discourses at a public demonstration; first-hand witnessing of a public event or incident; and observing an individual's tattoos or identifying features in a public setting.

Hardcopy: Information conveyed on paper or similar physical object which can be acquired by the public. Examples include books, periodicals, maps, pamphlets, leaflets, research papers, governmental/corporate reports, and newsletters.

Broadcast: In the context of OSINT, non-internet-based signal or loudspeaker transmission intended for a general audience that must be accessed at the time of transmission using specialized signal reception equipment, or which is audible to the human ear. Broadcast media encompasses, but may not be limited to, analog and digital over-the-air, satellite, and cable transmissions. Examples of broadcast sources include television, radio, ham radio, and loudspeaker.

Digital: Any data accessible to the public that can be stored and retrieved on a computer whether text, images, sounds or video, as well as immersive virtual environments. The ultimate goal of OSINT exploitation is to convert any observations, hardcopy or broadcast PAI into digital form. Examples of the digital category include blogs, vlogs, podcasts, webcams, websites, social media posts, emails, computer files, digital or digitized photographs, 3-D models, digital audio and video (to include streaming), and e-books.

ADDITIONAL CLARIFICATION:

In this document, *medium* means the communication method. The term *mediums* is used when referring to more than one medium (observation, hardcopy, broadcast and digital). *Media* are physical mechanisms (e.g., television, radio or loudspeaker) used to convey the communication.

Although document and media exploitation (DOMEX) deals with collected information in hardcopy and digital forms, DOMEX materials are not publicly available, and therefore DOMEX is not a category of OSINT.

Gray Literature

Gray literature is frequently misconstrued as solely hardcopy, however, it may transcend both hardcopy and digital formats. According to the U.S. Government Interagency Gray Literature Working Group (IGLWG) (pronounced *'ig-el-wig'*), “Gray literature, regardless of media, can include, but is not limited to, research reports, technical reports, economic reports, trip reports, working papers, discussion papers, unofficial government documents, proceedings, preprints, studies, dissertations and theses, trade literature, market surveys, and newsletters. This material cuts across scientific, political, socio-economic and military disciplines.”³

Observation vs. Elicitation

The ability to observe information is part of the definition of publicly available information, and therefore clearly permitted for OSINT activities. Elicitation is more closely associated with human intelligence (HUMINT) collection. The specific act of requesting information or asking a question is frequently confused with elicitation. However, the act of requesting information or asking a question at an event open to the public is an element of the observation category. Elicitation is defined “[I]n intelligence usage, [as] the acquisition of information from a person or group in a manner that does not disclose the intent of the interview or conversation.”⁴ For example, attending the Paris Air Show and asking a question of an aerospace company representative during a question-and-answer period would fall under the request element of the observation category. Asking said representative for drinks after the presentation and asking questions in a non-public setting would be elicitation.

³ U.S. Government Interagency Gray Literature Working Group, 1994.

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 2-0, Joint Intelligence*, October 22, 2013, page GL-7. The Committee is aware there is a newer version of JP 2-0 (May 28, 2022), however the newer edition does not have a definition for elicitation. For additional context see *U.S. Army Field Manual 22-2.3*.