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The Media Bias within Outlets of Media: Television, Radio, and Newspapers

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Introduction

News media functions as a means to channel, store, and deliver communications which connects people around the world. The information provided by news media comprises stories that are imperative to an individual's ability to understand what is taking place within society. News media can be seen as the driving force in our society that enables communication across different outlets. There are numerous forms of information distributed to individuals through television, radio, newspapers, the internet and social media. The advancement of news media distribution has increased the individual's awareness of accessible platforms of media. "For news organizations, distinguishing between high-quality information of public value and agenda-driven news has become an increasingly complicated task, made no easier in an era of economic churn" (PewResearchCenter, 2012, p. 2)

Ethics within news media should maintain its value enabling a consistent flow of data and knowledge. According to the Code of Ethics provided by the *Society of Professional Journalists*, "Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information" (SPJ, 1996, p.1). The ethical value of news media sources over the years has made it difficult for viewers and/or listeners to perceive the information in a positive manner relative to what has been reported. The manner in which media is delivered continues to become a growing business, and as technology advances, the delivery of news has to continue to be able to maintain its ethical value.

In today's society, media is an integral part on individual's day-to-day routines. "In households, neighborhoods, and work or leisure contexts, the electronic media are caught up in interpersonal tactics of 'affiliation' and 'avoidance'- they are used to express feelings of solidarity as well as being a focus of discord." (Moore, 1991, p. 11) Individuals rely on news

media, whether it is television, radio, newspapers, internet and/or the social media, to provide information that can be used as a guide and/or for conversation pieces. Forms of media today allow individuals to communicate with each other on topics that journalists have spoken and have written on to further understand society. Articles, such as opinion pieces written by journalists, may cause an individual to cast quick judgment on a topic that a journalist has published. “We learn what our social environment is and respond to the knowledge that we acquire.” (McQuail, 1994, p. 14)

With a plethora of news media outlets and the speed of its accessibility, it is up to the audience to try and make sense of what is being accurately reported. With the expansion of news media outlets increasing annually, the task of obtaining accurate information has become ever more difficult to accomplish. In addition to the increasing amount of media sources, there are also several 24-hr news networks produced. Networks like, *CNN* and *Fox News Channel* have live updates on stories every moment of the day. There may be a shift within the media’s culture that is highly invested in the speed and accessibility of stories. Overly abundant sources of news media can and will continue to be misinterpreted by individuals.

One forum that has played a factor in the convolution of news media is the use of social media. Social media at its base, as it relates to the integration of news media, is an internet platform that allows easy access for individuals, companies, news networks, and journalists to communicate information to individuals. Within news media, the need for stories to be developed at the fastest pace has become the way in which companies have to compete. Social media has become a highly effective tool in presenting information to individuals at a rapid rate. “Technology has enabled us to go to a whole new level with our networks or clubs when they

become digitized.” (Qualman, 2013, p. 10) Two social media sites used by news media and journalists are Facebook and Twitter.

Facebook, created in 2004, has a user data base of 1.28 billion users according to Digital Marketing Ramblings (2014). As it relates to news media, Facebook allows news networks to create pages. A page gives the ability to the news networks to upload pictures and write posts. There is not a limit in word count for posts; however, at a set number that is unknown to the viewer a ‘see more’ encryption will appear if the post is too long, but there is no limit to the word count. The post feature on Facebook also allows a company to add a link. The links photo is shown on the page. Lastly, with each post, the viewer can ‘Like’ the post or make a comment. These ‘Likes’ and comments also appear on the networks main website page where the story was originated. ‘Likes’ are essential because they are used as a metric to evaluate a network’s popularity and posts.

Twitter, according to its company page, was founded in 2006, has a user base of 24 million active monthly users and 77% of its users are outside of the United States. A typical news network account on Twitter has photos, ‘tweets’, followers, and who the news network is following. The two most significant aspects of Twitter are ‘tweets’ and followers. ‘Tweets’ are similar to Facebook posts, however they have limit of 140 character count. News networks can also upload links within their ‘tweet’. However, there is no picture accompanied with the link. Unlike Facebook, Twitter allows individuals to see how many ‘tweets’ account members have made. A special feature on Twitter allows users to ‘re-tweet’ a post that another user has made. For news networks, this feature allows for their ‘tweet’ that covers a news story, to be connected to outside users that may not follow them.

An individual who may use social media on a daily basis may refer to what they might have read on Facebook or Twitter from an associate before referencing news media for the actual source of information from a professional journalist. A post that an individual has posted on a social media site may not be complete with all details and facts, but people want the information that they want. “If the local paper and stations weren’t considered trustworthy and journalists seemed detached from what really mattered to them, people could find what they wanted elsewhere. What is more, they could stop being passive recipients. They could dig deeply into topics, follow their interests, and share their knowledge and passions with others who cared about similar things.” (Skoler, p. 39, 2009)

Without the use of social media, there are other forms to access news related articles via the internet through news broadcast websites. News broadcasters have created social media pages to stay connected with their audience as well as gaining a larger following. “With the excess of information on the web, people require a tool to make sense of it all. Social media is the mechanism.” (Qualman, 2013, p. 8) News media companies like ABC or NBC have created Facebook and Twitter pages to connect with their audiences. They are now providing what are called show “updated” which are story updates reported in a real time format on current news. “The news media exert significant influence on our perceptions of what are the most salient issues of the day.” (Bryant & Zillman, 2002, p. 1) Society is growing and learning more about how to use these new tools to become more independent relative to accessing information on their own. Individuals are relying more on the internet through social media and up-to-the-minute news through websites.

Journalists who deliver messages to their audiences about current events around the world and situations that could possibly affect the way the reader comports their lives on a day-

to-day basis. “The etymological origin of journalism is “diurnalis” in Latin and means a “daily account” or “record report.” (Demir, 2011, p. 537) Although the delivery of the news is changing, it is believed that the ethics relative to how the news is being reported should maintain its consistency. An individual should be able to understand a story in full, the course of the story should maintain its integrity. The purpose of the project is three fold: 1.) to discover modern-day ethics of news media regarding news media distribution to the masses, 2.) to understand framing effects of the news on audience viewers, and 3.) understand what audience viewers perceive from news broadcasting.

Modern-Day Ethics

When it comes to news media based corporations distributing information to a large population, it in turn is relative to whether they make a profit or not. “Economics plays a major role in shaping the information served up to the U.S. public in newspapers, on radio and television, and now on the internet. The news media are profit-driven enterprises” (Johnson, 2001, p. 7). Consumers are able to navigate through out their day based upon what has been provided through news media outlets. Current events, things occurring throughout the community, and even the weather are provided by news media to the consumer, it keeps them up-to-date. “Media owners may choose to give enormous freedom to their editors and reporters. They may consider it good business—and good journalism—to do so. But that is a matter of choice, not law” (Johnson, 2001, p. 7). The ethical value has gone out of the window when it comes to a company that may focus on the amount of “hits” their site may receive a day or by how they are staying ahead of the competition. Stories throughout a newspaper or news media site may not be worried about accuracy or how it may affect the reader. The days where a society could fully trust news media to be able to retrieve information from prodigious sources are long

gone. By providing information that a society needs and the accuracy that is put into that story could possibly bring back the trust that was once there before.

The Code of Professional Ethics guidelines is provided for professional journalists when writing stories for the public to ensure accuracy and be able to provide society stories that can be interpreted by its audience. Stories that are underdeveloped are not able to provide such things to its audience because of the way it was developed and presented to its audience. “Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage; Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.” (SPJ, 1999, pg. 2) The guidelines are listed on the *Society of Professional Journalists* website. These guidelines are set to infuse to the reader that a journalist has the best interest in its audience.

Underdeveloped stories in the news media are being quickly dispersed to the masses. “Newsmakers and others with information they want to put into the public arena have become more adept at using digital technology and social media to do so on their own, without any filter by the traditional media” (PewResearchCenter, 2012, p. 1). The information that is needed to complete the story or just have the story “make sense” is sometimes missing in stories written by journalists. Many of the topics are similar but articles can be misleading to the public debating on what to believe when a story is written. Where does this leave the reader, viewer, or listener? *Time* magazine media critic James Poniewozik described the perception gap between the audience and the media about trust this way: “Journalists think trust equals accuracy. But it’s about much more: passion, genuineness, integrity.” (Lasica, 2003, p. 1) Inaccurate information goes against the code of conduct that journalists are supposed to adhere too, and or abide by.

SPJ (1991) states that: Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The

duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice. (p. 1)

In the *Society of Professional Journalist Code of Ethics*, it states, as a part of the “Be Accountable” section, “Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.” (SPJ, 1999, p. 1) The development in the way news is gathered through different sources causes the ethical value behind it to be unclear. Competitive nature of media corporations continues to be an issue with accuracy. Reporters are in constant competition to release a story first to be able to draw in an audience. The accuracy should play an important role in the release of the first story allowing the audience to interpret what is written relative to its accuracy.

Ethics Pertaining to Social Media

Social media is a way to connect individuals to news media. Blogs and other resources are available for viewers to connect. A few news organizations have realized that weblogs can offer an opportunity newsrooms to become more transparent, more accessible, and more answerable to their readers. (Lasica, 2003, p. 1) “Social media functions in ‘real time’ so that the users can contribute, respond to or interact with other users instantaneously.” (Schwartz, 2011, p. 14) Users, through social media sites, are able to contribute to different posts with their own ideas, thoughts, or interpretations of a given topic. Not necessarily adding to the story but posting comments that are connected with that story; they provide their opinions as an interpretation of

what was written. “Today, people expect to share information, not be fed it. They expect to be listened to when they have knowledge and raise questions.” (Scolar, p. 39, 2009) Individuals want to be included and feel as if they are adding to the topic of conversation. They want to feel like their opinion matters especially when it affects their lives.

Social media can have a negative side but also have a positive side. Social media sites were the first sites to spread the news of the Tsunami that occurred in Japan in 2011. “The record-setting 8.9 magnitude earthquake that rocked Japan today sent millions around the globe to social media websites to spread news, share videos and donate to help victims of the quake and the tsunami in the Pacific.” (ABC News, 2011, pg. 1) Social media is a way to alert people of the different happenings around the world. Because of individuals posting photos and videos to these social media sites, the word can spread faster than a journalist reporting the story. “With reporting resources cut to the bone and fewer specialized beats, journalists’ level of expertise in any one area and the ability to go deep into a story are compromised” (PewResearchCenter, 2012, p. 3)

The Chicago Teachers Strike

In the first teachers strike in 25 years, the Chicago Teachers Strike was one of the largest strikes in years. Over 30,000 educators in the Chicago Public School system took to the picket lines fighting negotiations. The negotiations between CPS officials and union leaders stretched over a week over discussions of length of day, evaluations being tied to teacher performance, and potential job loss. (CNN, p. 1, 2012) In many ways, the way the Chicago Teachers Strike story was being reported caused many to believe that teachers were only striking about money. Viewers on sites such as *Time* made comments about the teachers’ salaries. They compared white collar workers who ask for more compensation and teachers who are vilified for asking for

more money. (*TIME*, 2012, p. 1) Articles, such as an *NBC* article “Chicago Teachers on Strike: Work Stoppage Is First for Chicago since October 1987” were outraged about teachers wanting to strike on money and voiced their opinions through the comment feed. The SPJ Code of Ethics states, “Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.” The strike affected many students that were not able to attend school because of the demands that the teachers insisted on having. Teachers were trying to negotiate length of days, job security, and fair compensation.

Many news sites have Facebook accounts that allow users to access their articles through links posted on their page. Facebook users can then leave a comment in regards to the article, and in the case of the Chicago Teachers Strike, leave harsh comments in on what the teachers are striking for. The students in the end are the ones who are hurt the most; comments about their schools, teachers, and overall education are shamed, but that seems to be the last thought that runs through the minds of journalists when wording a story that grabs the attention of its audience. They seem to forget about how harsh the comments can be from readers.

A title of an article read, “Real lesson of the Chicago Teachers Strike—Fire them all and start over!” (Fox, p.1, 2012). A reader is drawn into an article from its alluring title, they are not aware of the different types of articles that can be written, such as an Opinion article. The Opinion article written by a major news station, Fox News, also reported in-depth on the teachers strike but was able to draw its readers in with its title. An audience who may come across such an article and not know the difference may consider the article objective. The article appeared on Facebook acquiring 722 likes; how does that help the children involved? The demands were tarnished in the news focusing on what they thought was important to discuss, money. On

Twitter, ranking #4 of the top 15 social media sites worldwide (Bennett, 2013, p. 1) and which allows its users to voice their opinions about given topics, the Chicago Teachers Union created its own Twitter page that provided its followers and even outside viewers a means to stay current with the Teachers Union from their perspective and to use hash tags. One Twitter follower wrote in regards to the strike, “@CTULocal1: The TRUTH In Black & White HD [ow.ly/dYTmq](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ow.ly/dYTmq) #EDUJustice” what is real in #Chicago. #EDUJustice”. The users ‘tweet’ speaks of a video link that was posted in her comment that shows teachers, students, and parents speaking of how harsh conditions and school closures affect their lives. A reader of the *TIME* Newsfeed commented in regards to Chicago teachers pay stated “At \$76,000 a year, these teacher are overpaid for teaching nothing”. Another user posted, “So an average of 25.1 students per teacher is too much work and an average salary of \$76,000 is not enough money. Good grief! My college classes were larger than that and these clowns are making nearly as much as a professor with a PhD! It’s time to recognize that the teachers unions are wildly out of control and that we are not getting our money’s worth.” These types of comments from user’s show that because of what is portrayed in news media can determine how individuals formulate opinion on topics being discussed. Individuals commented, from their perceptions on what the strike was really about and how they felt in regards to what they knew from news media outlets.

Amongst the many details discussed on the strike, money seemed to be the main topic of discussion amongst news media outlets. Money was included in negotiations, but there were other reasons as to why teachers were striking. “The Chicago Teachers Union is striking over mandatory subjects of bargaining such as compensation, evaluation procedures and the conditions within our classrooms.” (Chicago Teachers Union, 2012, pg. 2)

The stories in relation to the Chicago Teacher's Strike may have contributed to the audiences' inability to form an unbiased opinion based on what teachers and the teachers union were stating. The audience focus was on what the news media provided. Messages that were put out focused on mainly one of the issues that the teachers were striking about Chicago Public School teachers were striking on issues of more money. When the teacher's strike ended, Chicago's Mayor, Rahm Emanuel released a television ad in regards to the settlement that was agreed upon with the Teacher Union. The television ad cost in airtime \$1 million dollars, which was bought by a non-for-profit organization *Education Reform Now*. "The spot proceeds to name the longer school day and the revised teacher evaluation system as among the successes of the strike-ending tentative agreement reached between the Chicago Teachers Union and the city." (Huff Post-Chicago, 2012, pg. 3) "According to CBS Chicago, advocacy group Education Reform Now picked up the \$1 million tab for the ad buy." (Huff Post-Chicago, 2012, pg. 4)

There was not much continued conversation amongst journalists and reporters about the ad, thus the conversation about teachers' salaries in Chicago continued to be the main topic of discussion. There were recently 49 CPS schools that closed, forcing students to attend schools in unsafe areas that were further from their homes. One would think that with an ad costing over \$1 million dollars and the recent school closing, one would think that this money could have been spent to build schools in safer neighborhoods that students would be able to attend instead of traveling to schools that are more dangerous areas.

Framing Effects

The framing of news media affects how the audience perceives the information that is given. Framing refers to how individuals or groups perceive reality. "Viewing media or news frames as necessary to turn meaningless and unrecognizable happenings into a discernible

event.” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 106). Individuals are given what is reality through our everyday news. An individual’s reality is based on what they think is real or has true meaning.

“Knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner” (Bodner, 1986, p. 1). Constructivism is based on what is learned through experiences and the environment around the individual. One can acquire their own opinion based on what they perceive from reality and gain a hypothesis based on their own experiences. What is depicted on television media, through the radio or written in the newspapers is how the audience will gather information. “Media or news frames serve as working routines for journalists, allowing them to quickly identify and classify information and “to package it for efficient relay to their audiences”(Scheufele, 2000, p.306) How the media frames a story and how the viewer identifies the story can have either harsh circumstances or can be rewarding.

After reading through Scheufele’s research on framing effects I have come to the conclusion that the true meaning of framing varies within news media and the individual’s perception. Framing could relate to the topic and how the audience conceptualizes it or framing could be vice-versa with the audience in charge of how they have understood what the media was trying to depict within the story. “The term framing has been used repeatedly to label similar but distinctly different approaches.” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 103) What I understood framing to be was that what the broadcasters were giving to its audiences has an effect on how the audience perceives it. Each broadcast is important to the viewer. Dietram A. Scheufele (1999) stated two different types of framing; media frames and audience frames. He described media frames as the idea or storyline that provides meaning for a series of events. The frames suggest the essence of the issue. Audience frames refers to the ideas that are stored that help to process information.

The competition between news media corporations causes journalists to quickly release a story that may not contain all of the details but allows for journalists to return to at their earliest convenience to incorporate the detailed information that was missing in order to complete that story. “Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176) The reader must continue to “check back” to understand what may have occurred within that story in order to have all the details. A subject title should be clear for the reader to have an understanding of what the story will be about. Details outlined within the story should allow the reader to have an understanding of what information they have gathered from the story they have read and be able to summarize the details. If a story title does not match the story in itself then the reader will not be able to justify what the story they read was about because it did not have a clear understanding. Journalists should be able to lay out details of story to be able to captivate their audiences; it should not be about the competition between news media outlets.

Audience Perception

Reporters influence the opinion of the reader. If a reporter writes a story with a bias perspective, the bias opinion leaves the reader unable to make an accurate opinion based on what was written. “If the media do not merely report but also mold public opinion and even shape events, we inevitably begin to wonder how they should exercise their influences properly.” (Blitz, 2005, p. 126) In news stories an audience needs facts, not opinions. An audience can make up their own opinion based on the facts throughout a story. The integrity of a society wants, should consist of facts with detailed information regards the circumstance. “Some research has shown that individuals’ pro-environmental consumer behaviors are related to their media use, particularly their news media use.” (Cho & Krasser, 2011, p. 9)

Individuals who are consumers of news media need to know the truth of what may be affecting society. “We expect [them] to honor their professional norms of impartiality, and we want them to stand in for the public at large and to report and interpret reality with the interests of the commonwealth in mind.” (Pauly, 2009, p. 12) The truth needs to be told with detail and an unbiased approach. In many circumstances, individuals are faced with stories that have biased opinions on what is written. “News offers condensed and powerful moral fables, in which violence figures as narrative shorthand for the roles, motives, and ethics of the participants.” (Pauly, 2009, p. 12) The harsh reality is that not only is news media biased on stories that are not related to politics but they are also biased on topics related to race and violence within those communities.

A study that was done in regards to the war in Iraq revealed that “before and after the Iraq war, a majority of Americans have had significant misperceptions and these are highly related to support for the war in Iraq.” (World Public Opinion: Global Public Opinion on International Affairs, 2003, pg. 1) The misperception had nothing to do with individuals’ not gathering information from the news but instead those who primarily tuned in to networks such as *Fox*. Individuals who gathered information pertaining to the war from print media were said to have had fewer misperceptions.

Journalists should develop stories that an audience can comprehend and know that what they are reading or hearing is complete information available at that time. Too many news media companies are concerned with how many “hits” their webpage receives a day and that calculates that people are reading news on their site. It should be important to a journalist that what they are reporting is giving the reader the information that they need to know at that time. “Old-media journalists measure their mettle in scoops and Pulitzers; new-media reporters and editors have

another gauge of success or failure: hits. By counting the hits or, more accurately, page views, on the web sites, online magazines can track not only how many people are reading them but also for how long people are reading any given article.” (ERIC, 1999, p. 3) With so many news broadcasters telling the same story, an assortment of the information is bias. Before social media, journalists were rewarded based on their accuracy and the details within their stories. Today, because of social media, the more ‘hits’ a news media outlet receives the more individuals continue to retrieve their information from that sites. Accuracy of a story seems to be less of an importance when the views on a news media site gain more popularity and appeal. In regards to the Chicago Teachers Strike, articles and reports gave its audience a perspective that the strike was focused on money and showing a teachers income.

Conclusion

The ethical value within media has altered over the years due to the development of the internet and sites created by news media outlets that individuals can have access through cell phones, tablets, and computers. The internet provides journalists a new platform to inform individuals of different ideas, new development, and also making society aware of outside engagements. Because of news media sites being able to utilize their sites to bring viewing traffic allows for them to post stories even faster than before or even allowing for brief description of the story before the full story is released just to be able to gain a larger view audience. Today, it is faster to view news on your cell phone, tablet, or computer than it is to purchase a newspaper or listen to the radio; it is also cost effective for the individual when a news media website is free. News media outlets know that they can have more hits through a website than through an individual purchasing a newspaper or listening to the radio. News media is what connects individuals, it allows communication on all spectrums, and provides a platform to voice opinions

or thoughts. News media has helped us as well as harmed us due to misinformed or miscommunicated information. Today, individuals rely on news media to give us a clear view and a platform to discuss what is written or said.

I wanted to see how individuals felt towards news media today and the effects that it has in regards to perception of news. I wanted to know how they gather news and what they take from each broadcast. I had the opportunity to shoot a film that consists of interviews that show the affects of news media bias on individuals that I had the opportunity to speak with and discuss news media bias and the effects that it may or may not have within their lives. I shot in places where they felt comfortable to be able to share their thoughts and feelings; I went to homes, schools, and parks to discuss the topic at hand. The film is important because it showcases the true feelings that the audience has when viewing or listening to the news. The interviewees had strong perceptions on how news media has affected them and what it has portrayed on society.

It is important for an individual, ranging from ages 18 to 50 years of age, to view the film because it shows an audience perspective on what news media has shown to them. This age range is based on the beginning of adulthood and a more experienced age of what the world is. They provide a broad range of what they depict reality is for them. The six subjects in the film displayed emotions of how they felt in regards to news media, ranging from ages 24-55, they discussed their views on news media. These individuals were chosen based on their ages, to show their views of news media and gender and racial background to show how different individuals depict news media. The participants were church members, family friends, and college associates. Each individual shared their own experiences with how news media has affected their everyday lives and how today, they now turn to different sources of news media. One young woman shared with me her experiences of watching the news as a young child with

her father, she learned to enjoy tuning in each night but her views on news media today have changed. Each individual of different race and gender displayed their “love/hate” relationship towards their viewership. They tune in because of what drives the reporters; the topics are intriguing but it is what is expressed from the reports opinions that captivate the audience, even if they are in a deviating from how it may affect the viewer or listener.

The film allowed an inside look into what most reporters will not have the opportunity to see and that is allowing the viewer or listener to have a voice. I was able to ask them between 6-10 questions from how they retrieve or view the news, their thoughts on news media bias, and what their thoughts on news in the future are. The interviewees had an understanding of reality based on their own personal viewpoints of news media that they have experienced. The film portrayed an enlightening look into the different perspective on news media bias that I feel an audience of 18-50 year old adults will be able to appreciate and gain an understanding.

Today, with the competition of the newspaper, television, radio, and internet, corporations compete on giving their insight on “reality” on the events in today’s society. The technological advances have advanced society into the next century and will continue to grow overtime with the easy access of information within seconds. The news media goals in distribution attain its integrity to ensure that its audience continues to be a valued part in news media.

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