Mass Media: The News Essay, Research Paper

Essay #1

The News

Being “objective” has been an unrealistic ethic that defines the news media. Fallows agues that journalism and the news has provided largely “entertainment fluff” and has virtually selected unthinking news communicated to the American people; and Paenti agrees and states that the Media is big business and therefore is not independent, objective, neutral, informative, balanced, and truthful. Their ideas may seem outlandish and farfetched, but it is the fact of life for the media today. The news media struggles to please every component of the business, from the advertisers to the owners. In turn, every word that is typed or spoken has one side of the story.

The news shows that air on television today is nothing. but superficial programming to appease the public. Flip through the channels on a given day and a person will be bombarded with repetitive news “specials” or useless information. One has to ask oneself if there is not anything that is more worthy of this airtime. Parenti states that, “By focusing on “human-interest” trivia, on contest rather than content, the press makes it difficult for the public to give intelligent expression to the political life and to mobilize around issues (Parenti 17)”. The news media would rather spend their time and money on issues that do not attack what the public really needs or wants to know. An example of how the media does not report on what the public wants to hear that Fallows brings to the surface is in the 1992 presidential campaign. The president took questions from teenagers that were mostly concerned with the relationship of the government and schools or community projects. The questions raised, ranged from laws that might be proposed for punishing people that sold guns to our youths to the portrayal of young people in our society and even as simple as what is Oxford like. None of those questions were ever answered. Fallows notes that, “There was no overlap whatsoever between the questions the students asked and those raised by the anchors. None of the questions from these news professionals concerned the impact that legislation or politics on people?s lives (Fallows 22).” Fallows goes on to say “…the questions concerned the pure game of– the struggle among candidates interest mainly in their own advancement (Fallows 23).” Even with the opportunity to ask questions that concern people?s lives the media would rather talk about only the tactics of politics, barely skimming the surface of the real important issues that affects common peoples lives.

The news media, to many Americans, is a source of impartiality and a way to hear both sides of the story. Contrary to those popular beliefs, personal beliefs and economic interests do not only persuade the news media. Fallows gives many examples of public icons that have stated facts that had hidden agendas. The first example I will use, that Fallows brings up an event that happened in May 1995. A man named George Will wrote a column and made on-air comments scorning President Clinton and his administration for planning to place tariffs on Japanese cars focusing on the Lexus. On the Brinkley show Will said that the tariffs would be “illegal” and would amount to “a subsidy for Mercedes dealerships”. Fallows goes on to say, “Neither in his column nor on the show did Will disclose that his wife, Mari Maseng, had been paid some $200,000 as a registered foreign agent for the Japan Automobile Manufacturers…. (Fallows 37-38)”. To the public Will seems to be a creditable source of information, sharing his knowledge to the world as a way to do good for society. Unbeknownst to the viewers, Will was looking out for himself and his wife, not the overall good of the people. Many people speck about issues having only one agenda in mind… their own.

Another example is one that happened with a large airline and three newspapers. “Last May the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post accepted a deal from a airline publicist: They got exclusive details about the big story, so longs as reporters promised to make no other calls for comments: the airlines didn?t want any balanced story. And the three Newspapers accepted. (http://proquest.umi.com)” The reporters agreed to only show one side of the story, disregarding that fact that they were not giving the public the “whole story”. The fuel for the newspapers was to get the story first. To have exclusive story that very few newspapers had. The airlines company, by telling the same story to just three newspapers, established a certain sense of truthfulness. People would be less likely to show doubt.

In the control over the media there are four levels of control: the owners, advertisers, editors, and reporters. The owners, who Parenti says, “rank in the rich and nearly all of them are politico-economic conservative?s (33).” Rupert Murdoch was once asked: “You?re considered to be politically conservative. To what extent do you influence the editorial posture of your newspaper?” He responded: ” Considerably. The buck stops on my desk. My editors have input, but I make the finial decisions (Parenti 33).” Murdoch has all the power to decide what goes into his newspapers, but of most importance how the reporters should write their article. This might look like them are just doing their jobs and looking out the newspapers interests, but really it is only giving society one side of the story.

The owners must look out for someone else other than themselves, the advertisers that spend millions to billions dollars a year. The business of the media is very much controlled by the concept money. Parenti states, “The notion that the media are manipulated by big interests is dismissed by some as a “conspiracy theory.” Because they pay the bills, advertisers regard their influence over the media content as something of a “right” (35).” The advertisers and the money that is brought in control the owner. This causes a problem in writing articles. The owners must be sure that nothing be written about an advertiser that will anger them and in turn stop the money that flows in.

The next group is the editors. The editors are actually the ones that have the responsible for the news productions. They have the power to reject a story without having to answer to reporters. But, they had to make sure that both the owners and the advertiser will agree on the information. Parenti says that, “When an editor resists doing what the publisher wants…. Is not above ramming his or her dictates down the bosses throat. If they want to keep their jobs, editors learn to swallow (38).” Editors have the responsibility to know what to publish and what not to publish.

Reporters are last on the list. The reporter understands, whether it be spoken or unspoken what the editors expect from them. The editors and the owners place limitations on the reporter. They know that if they write a piece that their editor might not like then either the story will not get published or completely edited. Self-censorship is something that is very much a reality in the media business, “Many of the limitations placed on reporting come not from direct censorship but from self-censorship, from journalists who design their stories so as to anticipate complaints form superiors (Perenti40).”

I agree with every idea of Parenti and Fallows. All the points that they bring up

The news media is nothing but a moneymaking business. Owners to reporters have underlining agendas to why they write and publish what they do. They fill airtime and newspapers with nothing, but one-sided, useless, information that we are to eat up. Society has to realize that most of the information that gets to us is watered down, and spiced up with a bit of an entertainment quality.

Bibliography

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32e