New Global Learning

News, Noise, and Neutrality

Noise, news, and neutrality

PREVIEW

"He who controls the media controls the minds of the public" allegedly said by Noam Chomsky.

Though the famous linguist probably had political influence in mind, there is no doubt, that nowadays the one who controls the media significantly controls nearly every area of life. The majority of people consume their news first thing in the morning on their smartphones and continue to consume news and receive information throughout the day for more time than ever before. Media providers and platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter know better our personality, prejudices and desires than we know ourselves and can make us sad or happy (as they tried) or make us vote one way or the other (as they did). Social media are major means of communication, a source of social division, a place where neverending fruitless political debates, as well as revolution organization, take place Debate educators as well as debaters might struggle with the volume and complexity of information required to discuss and analyze the area of media, news, noise, and neutrality. At the same time debating news and media become an essential part of any other debate, because it always boils down to the facts people believe and the biases they share.

This module is created to deliver essential information on the area (with definitions, case studies, and examples), provide practice ideas for exercises and debates as well as expand debate education further than just arguments. Students and educators are encouraged in this guide to doublecheck their news consumption habits, and media outlets' biases and propose their own original ideas on the matter of fake news and more.

KEY ISSUES AND CONCEPTS

The module covers the following areas and questions:

- What are the media? What functions do media serve in society?
- What is the history and evolution of media? What were the most important factors that did play a role in media transformation? How does it help in the interpretation of the present media landscape?
- What is a confirmation bias? How do people consume news and why? How does it shape journalism?
- What is the communication noise? What is fake news? What is the real-world impact of fake news? What are the ways to combat fake news?
- What is media neutrality? What are the incentives and interests of different media stakeholders? What are the different approaches to achieving media neutrality and objectivity?
- What are the recent developments in media? What are the trends? What is to be expected in the media market?What are the most common debates about media, news, neutrality and noise?

Key concepts

A. **Media** - the main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the internet) regarded collectively (Oxford Dictionary, 2022).

B. **News cycle** - a period from one broadcast (e.g. news program) or printing to the next. A term is also used to indicate the "lifetime" of a particular news from the first report to the last one. For example "24h news cycle" might mean either that news is presented constantly (full day and night live news programs) or that a particular piece of news is dropped the next day because there is other "fresher" news.

C. **Tabloidization** - a process of transformation of media toward a tabloid format, which is more sensational, focused on entertainment, exploiting attention and emotions at a cost of merit, truth and quality

D. **Gatekeeper** - a person, group or entity who controls access to particular resources and opportunities. In the context of media, it is usually identified with the news outlets (like newspaper editor) or platforms (like Twitter). Democratization of the

media caused gatekeepers to lose their influence.

E. **Information bubble (also a filter bubble)** - a situation in which someone only hears or sees news and information that supports what they already believe and like, especially a situation created on the internet as a result of algorithms that choose the results of someone's searches (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)

F. **Fake news** - false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) .

G. **Disinformation** - false or misleading content that is spread <u>with an intention to deceive</u> or secure economic or political gain, and which may cause public harm (European Commision 2022).

H. **Misinformation** - false or misleading content shared <u>without harmful intent</u> though the effects can be still harmful(European Commision 2022).

FUNDAMENTALS OF DEBATING MASS MEDIA

What is media? If you ask 2 people, you would hear 3 opinions. Some would say it is the fourth estate, some would say it is an extremely profitable business and finally, some would argue it is maybe the fundamental means of social information and communication. All of them would be right because media as means of mass communication (such as newspapers, radio, television, and Internet) can play a variety of roles, which are sources of their power, but also the reason for concern and subject to important debates.

In literature, there are four essential functions of media recognized:
- Information
- Entertainment

- Public forum and

- Watchdog.

The first one is the informative role. Acquiring, selecting, and distributing information to society in form of news, articles, book, documentaries as well as opinion pieces, debates, political advertisements etc. The question of to what extent this role is or can be actually fulfilled is open to discussion. Democratization of media due to the Internet and social media transformed the role of gatekeepers, transparency of information and accountability mechanisms. With the rising problem of misinformation and disinformation, there is a significant field for challenges and debates regarding the informative role of media

Media provide entertainment and while in the past the distinction between information (like news programs) and entertainment (like movies, plays, concerts, tv shows) was more clear, nowadays it became problematic. Broadcasters and providers noticed that use of entertainment techniques, storytelling, and appeal to emotion increases the attention of recipients, which created phenomenons of tabloidization or infotainment. The 24h news cycles introduced even more opportunities to cover news like stories or movies with constant action, breaking news, and neverending duel of protagonists and antagonists. Entertainment both increases attention and can decrease the quality of news narratives, which creates another area of debate. For example do satire and irony, used to comment on most important events in late-night shows, cause more harm or good?

Another function of media is the public forum for opinions. As in ancient Greece, the agora was an official forum for any citizen interested to speak out, media are assumed to provide this platform to anybody in society. This is theory. The practice raises multiple challenges and questions on the role and interests of gatekeepers and their transformation due to social media, as well as on the matter of acceptable and unacceptable opinions in public area (like "No platform" movement or cancel culture).

Moreover, media as the watchdog for politicians and business is probably one of the most important functions of democracy. Media are supposed to ask important and challenging questions, investigate, and disclose power abuse and malpractice. Given the abovementioned considerations, it is clear that the role is far from perfect. Media are dependent on funding, advertisement, interests of owners, attention and political opinion of their viewers, as well as their journalists' or employees' biases. Additionally, the rising influence of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or TikTok presents a new set of questions not only about who is watching business and politics but also about who should watch the watchmen.

Exercise for a debate class:

Visit students' favorite news sites and pick any news, that will get their attention. What roles and how does the news play? Is it more informative or entertaining? Does it provide a public forum to new stakeholders or minorities or stick to mainstream voices? To what extent does it serve as a watchdog? Rewrite the news, so it serves different purposes. What would be the impact of the rewritten news?

Exercise for a debate class:

Debates are used to boil down to fundamental claims, which are called the first principles. First principles assist students to identify major disagreements (clashes) and build better arguments in a shorter time. Analyze the motions below and ask the group:

> *a) Which functions of media are the most relevant for the debate?*
> *b) How do different functions clash with each other?*
> *c) How is it possible to weigh one function over the other?*

Motions for practice:

This House regrets the rise of comedy shows with journalistic content as a prominent news source (e.g. John Oliver, Stephen Colbert, Trevor Noah, Samantha Bee)

This House would force all news organizations to operate as non-profits

This House would introduce gender quotas in broadcasted debates

This House prefers that speech and user content on social media be regulated by the government as opposed to set independently by the platforms

History and development of newspapers, radio and TV

How do we consume news? Our grand-grandparents would mention reading one newspaper and maybe listening to the radio station for 30 to 60 minutes a day. Our parents would add major news websites and TV channels and probably more time. Even though the pattern is clear, it is also drastically changing and more confusing in the last 30 years with the development of the Internet and social media, where instead of a few channels and stations people stick to platforms and infinite numbers of news providers.

The evolution of media has been more complex and exploring it might help us to better understand the status quo. Moreover, it delivers numerous cases and examples to support arguments and debates today.

The beginning of mass communication (so communicating the same message to the high amount of people) is usually marked with the invention of the movable type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. However, the real "mass effect" was caused by the application of the steam engine and the actual industrialization of press printing in the XIX century. Industrialization lowered the cost of information distribution, factory workers gained more free time and more money, which they could have used for newspapers. Leisure time requires also a different set of articles, which is why the development of penny papers (the "ancestors" of the modern tabloids) was observed closely to the development of newspapers.

In the early XX century radio gained in popularity. It was cheap, it provided a more sophisticated experience for listeners, and it allowed real-time programs (or advertisements) for millions of citizens as well as effective propaganda content for politicians. Since radio shaped common experiences and desires in society, the sense of commonality, as well as growing consumerism, were also formed at the time. An interesting example of radio influence was supposedly observed on October 30th, 1938 during the radio show called "War of the Worlds" aired in the CBS Radio Network. Listeners enjoying music were interrupted by a special news program about extraordinary events in New York, which later

appeared to be the Martian Invasion. The "reporter" covered all the events from the roof of the Empire State Building with the church bells in the background. The narrative and realization were so realistic that some people believed it to be a true invasion. As a result, the police interrupted the show, and majors of towns called to stop the programme due to the mobs it created on the streets. The radio show is an illustrative example of the impact radio had even though some of the public reactions and following events are questioned by researchers.

While radio was definitely ruling the media market before the 1940s, after the Second World War, television "killed the radio star". It provided both visual and auditory stimulation which was essential for consumers and advertisers. The advantages of radio and television paved the way for a new model of news consumption. In the newspapers, gatekeepers controlled the content delivered to a reader but were not able to control the moment of reading it. Radio and TV broadcasters were able to control both content and moment of consumption because if you missed a program, you cannot watch it later. You lost it. Now gatekeepers can "force" viewers to consume media at a specific moment and benefit from advertisements displayed to the right target at the right time. Moreover, news reports become an important point in the daily broadcasting agenda, because if a person misses the report, they might miss important and fresh information and they would need to wait till the next program. This phenomenon is called the news cycle and created a demand for news updates, but also resulted in an increased supply of information to satisfy the listeners' needs and keep them engaged.

Popularization of cable television and specialized news programs led in 80s and 90s to breaking regular news cycles and continuous news reporting for 24/7. Previously news was distributed once a day (e.g. morning newspaper distribution) or several times a day (e.g. news reports in the morning, afternoon and the evening) or more often with a 30-60 minutes break between news reports in the radio or television. Increasing competition for viewers, advertisers and globalization created an incentive to present news first before the other outlets and keep a viewer engaged for longer. For example reporting about forest fires would be covered for six hours instead of three times a day, one minute each.

The Internet

The invention and massive access to the Internet were another game-changer in the market. Anyone can broadcast or provide news or comment or share content and the costs of news production, distribution, and consumption are close to zero. The Internet and later the development of the social media played the most important role in the news market.

According to various reports, social media are the primary source of news for around 40 - 80% of societies depending on the country, gender, race, age, and political affiliation. The most common social media news sources are Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn. Less than 35 percent of adults in Europe considered social networks to be trustworthy in this respect, yet more than 50 percent of adults in Portugal, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Croatia said that they got their news on social media.[1]

Due to the dominance of social media as a news source more and more people are living in their own, even stronger echo chambers when they get familiar with the news predominantly confirming their previously held views. It is possible thanks to platform algorithms, which analyze our actions and behavior, estimate a personalized profile and present tailored content. On one hand, it could benefit users, because they are served with the most suitable and interesting information for them. For example, a liberal user finds their favorite left-leaning influencers and does not need to deal with the extreme right. On the other hand, it created an enormous source of conformity and social division. If every single newsfeed is different, therefore our perception of reality is totally different and we don't agree purely with the opinion, but also with the basic facts and understanding of the world.

Exercise for a debate class

Read the motion and lead a discussion with the following questions: THR social media being the primary source of news

- *If traditional media would still be the primary source of news, how would they evolve and look like at this point?*
- *What are the key differences between social media and traditional media with regard to news consumption?*
  - *What are the changes in terms of the amount, frequency, variety, velocity, and context (place, time, occasion) of news consumption?*

[1] Amy Watson, Statista.com, 2022 Access: https://www.statista.com/statistics/718019/social-media-news-source/
How interaction with news does vary from traditional media consumption?

- ○ *Are people more like to consume the news that confirms their views or are they more open to new perspectives?*
- *In what way access to credible news has changed?*
- *Do means of news influence the content of news? How?*
- *How social media does influence major purposes of media (information, entertainment, public forum and watchdog)?*

Platforms' ability to gather data on users' behaviors and characteristics opened a new ocean of opportunities for political and commercial advertising with the most famous scandal of Cambridge Analytica and the Brexit referendum. In these cases, algorithms could create a highly personalized profile of a user based on the advanced data set and predict what type of political message would be the most effective in convincing the user to vote in a particular way. The problem with the Cambridge Analytica case was threefold:

a) Users did not consent to such data use, were not informed about it, and were not even aware of the political profiling exploiting their own biases. The sophistication of the algorithm was supposed to estimate the person's patterns and political sensitivity better than the actual person.

b) The messages were often highly emotive (like instilling fear or hate) and misinforming e.g. pictures of supposed immigrants committing crimes

c) The data used by Cambridge Analytica was illegally obtained.

The development of media is strictly connected with the evolution of technology and society. The ability to connect with broader masses in an easier and more effective way at a cheaper cost shaped the political opinions and lifestyles of billions of people. This opportunity improved life in numerous ways, but also created new risks and dangers. The increased access to information has not determined the veracity and quality of the information. Communication noise and fake news

Communication noise is anything that influences the interpretation of a message in communication. It might be literally a sound in the background that makes it difficult to understand what someone says. However, for the purpose of this module, noise should be interpreted as psychological noise, which refers to biases, stereotypes, prejudices and feelings that make our perception of a message different than others. For example, if a person watches a favorite news show on TV, they are likely to believe and agree with the presented information, while the same information presented in the competition outlet would be approached more skeptically or even denied.

One of the most important mechanisms explaining psychological noise in media and news consumption is confirmation bias, which means a tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one's existing beliefs (Britannica 2022). Basically, it refers to a situation when people are more like to notice, remember and rely on information that confirms their preexisting beliefs and less likely to notice, remember and regard information that confronts it. In terms of media consumption echo chambers and information bubbles are phenomena based on confirmation bias theory.

Another aspect of communication noise that rose in the last years is fake news. Fake news means false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Fake news is distributed for political (power, votes), social (popularity, validation) or economic (profits from advertising) gain.

Even though the term "fake news" is dated back to 1890s (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018), when it meant simply false information printed as news, the first "fake news", called "The Great Moon Hoax" by the Sun appeared earlier in 1835 and some indicates even XV century for its origins. It might be claimed that the fake news problem is as old as any sort of media, because it evolves around the concept of truth and objectivity, which are obviously subject to a neverending debate.

Regardless of its origin and long history, the phenomenon entered public discourse as a serious concern in 2017 due to the US presidential election and later the title of the "word of the year" by the Collins publisher. The reason behind the increased popularity of the

phenomenon is to be found in an interplay between social media algorithms, advertising systems and high interest in the elections. All those ingredients made it possible for basically anyone to create, massively distribute and profit from fake news.

The technological development and rising popularity of social media caused fake news to be easily produced, easily distributed and easily misidentified as real stories. As an example, Youtube's algorithm was found to be optimized for sensational, divisive videos usually supporting Donald Trump and damaging Hilary Clinton (Lewis 2018). In order to increase audience reach and responsiveness strong emotional messages, familiarity as well as division and conflict are used in fake news.

Fake news are widespread and very rarely verified. In 2021, 47% of all people aged 16-74 years in the EU saw untrue or doubtful information on news websites or social media during the 3 months prior to the survey. However, only around a quarter (23%) of people verified the truthfulness of the information or content.[2] One prominent example of disinformation influence was the 2016 elections in the US, where researchers found Facebook the key vector of exposure to fake news (Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2018).

It is not settled why some people are more likely to verify fake news rather than believe, respond, and share them than others. While political affiliation, identity bias and low trust in mainstream media are often mentioned as the prior factors, new research provided evidence and explanation that a chance to reflect on information (using the slow and rational mode of thinking rather than an intuitive one) is much more critical for that effect than personal alignment[3]. This

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[2] Eurostat, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20211216-3

[3] G. Pennycook, D. G. Rand, The Psychology of Fake News, 2021, Trends in Cognitive Sciences, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2021.02.007

conclusion may lead to further analysis on what are the most efficient ways to fight disinformation.

Among the variety of attempted fake news combating methods are:

- legal bans (e.g. Germany, France) and prosecution (e.g. Turkey, India, Greece)
- cutting off advertising of fake news distributors (e.g. Facebook and Google)
- use of algorithms to downplay false or suspicious feed,
- factchecking and labeling (e.g. Twitter and Facebook),
- crowd-sourced fact-checking (by users, not by experts)
- publisher vivid labeling,
- prebunking (inoculation techniques - explaining ways of manipulation used in fake news).

Exercise for a debate class

Narrative: Students, as the world-leading experts in the field, were selected by the United Nations to solve the rising problem of fake news, which is one of the crucial challenges of the globe. Unfortunately, time is scarce and they need to come up with the ultimate solution within 30/45/60 minutes. They can create their own proposals or use the ones suggested above.

However, the ultimate policies need to be possible to implement. Through arguments and debate students have to come up with the best option to go.

You can use the "snowball" exercise to facilitate the discussion. Students are first paired to debate and choose the best solution within a pair. Later pairs are merged, exchange ideas and come up with the one solution for the group of four. Repeat merges by the time there are only two groups formed. Finally, the two final groups face each other in an open debate, evaluated by the teacher.

Spreading falsehood for individual interest developed instantly from single poor jokes with clickbait headlines for getting clicks into the organized methods of disinformation e.g in a

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formof troll farms. The sophistication of lying has also changed. Fake news sites are mixed with real stories to gain credibility and photo editing or deep fake videos made it incredibly difficult for citizens to spot and distinguish truth from falsehood. Due to the complexity of the phenomenon and the fact that fake news appears to be not only in the form of the purported news the European Union (EU) report from the independent High Level Expert Group on fake news and online disinformation has suggested to abandon the term "fake news" and use "disinformation" defined as "false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit".

Disinformation is constantly evolving into more sophisticated forms, among which some are worth the notice:

Deep fakes - artificially created media, often with the use of algorithms, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, which use existing image and voice of a particular person and merge it to the extent it is difficult to distinguish if it is authentic e.g. a dictator speaking about democracy and freedom, Barack Obama doing a stand-up comedy.

Troll farms - groups of real or fake users organized to achieve malignous political, economic or other gains through e.g. misinformation in comments, posts, messages, sharing information, graphics, photos, memes etc. So-called keyboard armies are reported to be used by numerous countries for propaganda or attacking critics and opposition. Troll farms are known to be used to question the fairness of the electoral process in the US, undermine COVID-19 policies and used against political rivals in Brazil among many other examples.

Exercise for a debate class

Ask students to prepare and print two pieces of news: one real, and the fake one. Put them all in a hat and take them out one by one.

- Are students able to spot, which one is real and which one is fake?
- What does it make so difficult or easy?
- What are the mechanisms used by creators to deceive users?

Guidelines for trainers

Students are likely to be familiar with the term "fake news", but might struggle with the definition and scope of the subject. Therefore a trainer should consider:

- Presenting or discussing differences between fake news, disinformation and misinformation
- Referring to students' experiences (e.g. discussing TikTok or Instagram algorithms, generating user data processed by platforms, sharing stories of fake news students found online) and real-life examples of fake news and combating methods

Moreover, students often fall into simplification (e.g. "people who believe fake news are stupid") and slippery slope fallacy, arguing that contact with fake news leads to direct and inherent consequences like supporting one's party, believing conspiracy theories or another "Brexit". A trainer should use critical thinking questions to examine presented causal chains and provide nuanced perspectives to students.

Neutrality

Due to media's social importance and enormous power to influence every aspect of life the bias of the media is subject to heated and never-ending debates. Therefore it is vital to recognize and analyze various, supplementary as well as conflicting interests of the media stakeholders make up for the bias.

Media owners.

Owners control the media to the highest extent. They gain profits and incur losses from media operations and are able to significantly influence the media governing body (e.g. board of directors, editor-in-chief). The owner can open, suspend, transform, sell or close the media outlet. There are generally three groups of media owners on the market.

a) State e.g. in public television like BBC in UK, TVP in Poland, **Deutsche Welle** in Germany. There is a strong interest for the public to own media to increase the highest accessibility to information and ensure the proper quality of information. State-owned media demonstrate various levels of bias and neutrality from being propaganda tools for the ruling party to the standard of excellent objectivity.

b) Private owners:
    i) individuals (Elon Musk - Twitter, Jeff Bezos - Washington Post)
    ii) families (e.g. Murdoch Family in Fox News, Shaw family in Canada)
    iii) private firms (e.g. Axel Springer, AT&T),
    iv) shareholders,
    v) employees (media cooperatives e.g. il manifesto in Italy).

Private ownership is the most common type of ownership and it increases every year due to media concentration. Among the largest conglomerates of media following enterprises are found: Comcast (NBC, Sky, Universal Studios), The Walt Disney Company (ABC, ESPN, Lucas studio), Warner Bros. Discovery (CNN, HBO, DC).

c) Special interests groups
    i) trade unions,
    ii) political parties,
    iii) churches,
    iv) NGOs
    v) business associations.

Owners might have their own values, agenda and interests. For example, the most important driver for private owners is profit, but the interests are much broader e.g. direct and indirect political and social influence, advertising, influence over narrative and regulation. In the case of public discussion about increasing inequalities and taxing billionaires, the media owned by thebillionaires might have conflicting interests and also an active incentive to criticize such regulation.

Consumers (users, listeners, viewers, readers)

Consumers are central to the media, its functions, and its business model. Media without consumers are worthless in all senses. Therefore media owners and employees make active efforts to understand users' preferences and behaviors as well as cater to these needs, biases and actions. In exchange for information, entertainment, the opportunity to participate in social life, or for their watchdog position, a consumer contributes in different ways like:

a) payment (single one, regular, subscription),
b) attention and engagement (through sponsored ads, which generate sales for sponsors or political support for parties or other stakeholders),
c) data (which e.g. Facebook or news outlets gather on their users and is able to monetize later through direct sales, personalized ads etc.).

Moreover, consumers are becoming more and engaged in the production and distribution of media through comments, polls, direct calls or sharing content. Some of the consumers become citizen journalists, who create and share their own content and build their own independent users base.

Employees and journalists

Individuals working for media outlets should (in theory) acts in the interest of the employer (the media owner). Therefore their objectivity is reliant on the agenda and policy of the organization. However, journalists can also benefit also from their personal brand and are able to change an employer or establish their own independent media stream (like a podcast, Instagram account, or newsletter). The interest of journalists is to provide news valuable to a consumer, but also to themselves or their employers. For example, tabloidization of the news is partially caused by journalists' incentive to create so-called click baits and emotive articles, because ads are soldbased on clicks, time spent on the website and user engagement. The interests of the journalists and the consumers contradict and supplement each other at the same time.

Media strategic partners

Media and journalists rely heavily on numerous actors to achieve their goals.

A) News sources like politicians, businessmen, spokespersons, public figures, and informants. Their interests might conflict with the interests of the general public or a journalist. For example, a journalist that relies on direct information from the Prime Minister is not likely to openly criticize them, because it will lose its source.

B) Ads providers and sponsors, who usually provide the vast majority of revenue that allows for media operations in the first place. Ad providers might be interested in commercial ads, but also in social or political advertisements.

Special and new stakeholders

A) **Platforms** - like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram etc., which connect consumers and providers, but do it in a way fully controlled by them (through algorithms and decisions) and is not transparent or checked. For example, in one experiment Facebook manipulated the newsfeeds of the users to invoke specific emotions or Twitter banned Donald Trump's account without any option to defend. Due to their international popularity and technological complexity, platforms are difficult to be regulated by democratic states, which are subject to ongoing procedures in the European Union and other countries.

B) **Influencers** - informal persons operating mostly online with their own fan base, monetization and theme. Influencers earn through advertising, product placement, paid cooperation, and other activities. One of the key problems with influencers is that there is

little control over their authority (no formal requirements or qualifications to become one), quality of information, and transparency (few requirements and norms about revealing commercial interests, affiliation,contracts etc.), which could make them both highly useful and independent (e.g. awareness campaigns about climate policy problems) as well as highly manipulative and exploitative (e.g. selling fake medicine and promoting anti-science)

Neutrality in media

Regardless of the complexity of the stakeholder interests there have been some attempts to increase the neutrality and objectivity of the media.

Case study - Fairness Doctrine

The Fairness Doctrine was introduced in 1949 in the USA as a policy intended to ensure fair representation of diverse voices and balanced coverage of controversial issues in broadcasting programs. Due to the limited broadcasting spectrum at the time, the broadcasters were able to significantly control freedom of speech and public debate. The doctrine did not compel stations to provide equal time for all, but only to present contrasting viewpoints. The Fairness Doctrine was used and abused for particular gains in the past. For example, some politicians demanded broadcasting their criticism or rebuttal in a way, that made it so problematic and burdensome for stations, that a broadcaster would rather drop the program than apply the Fairness Doctrine.

While the Fairness Doctrine was not perfectly applied in the past, it does not mean it could not be rectified and reintroduced.

Case study - Awareness Doctrine

The Awareness Doctrine requires distributors to create a state-approved "rating system to distinguish reporting from opinion and to inform the public when it is watching one or the other". The idea comes from an analogy to TV Parental Guidelines, which appeared to be a successful quasi-self-regulation. There are plenty of advantages of the Awareness Doctrine

such as easy adoption, less noncompliance, lack of backlash or government abuse, adaptability to new technologies.

Case study - Impartiality rule

Some news outlets installed their own neutrality rules. For example:

A) BBC (Editorial Guidelines, Section 4) - "more than a simple matter of 'balance' between opposing viewpoints. We must be inclusive, considering the broad perspective and ensuring that the existence of a range of views is appropriately reflected. It does not require absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from fundamental democratic principles, such as the right to vote, freedom of expression and the rule of law. We are committed to reflecting a wide range of subject matter and perspectives across our output as a whole and over an appropriate timeframe so that no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted."

B) Los Angeles Times (Ethics Guidelines) - "A fair-minded reader of Times news coverage should not be able to discern the private opinions of those who contributed to that coverage, or to infer that the organization is promoting any agenda[...]In covering contentious matters — strikes, abortion, gun control and the like — we seek out intelligent, articulate views from all perspectives. Reporters should try genuinely to understand all points of view, rather than simply grab quick quotations to create a semblance of balance[...] People who will be shown in an adverse light must be given a meaningful opportunity to defend themselves"

Case study - Allsides.com

Allsides.com is a website with news coverage gathered from at least three different sources with three different leanings (Left, Center and Right). The idea behind the site is to ensure a variety of perspectives on the events and through confrontation and comparison of conflicting perspectives achieve better objectivity and neutrality.

Case study - Anonymous authors The Economist, a liberal UK-based newspaper, holds a long-standing practice of articles without the byline (names and surnames of the authors), with few exceptions, in order to speak as one collective voice of the paper. This technique intended to avoid focusing on the bias and personal opinion of the individual writers was also criticized for its manipulative nature. The articles seem more objective, but the bias of the newspaper is widely known and declared to be liberal.

Case study - False equivalence

In the research "The relevance of impartial news in a polarised world" conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, (University of Oxford October 2021) most respondents share they expect neutrality from media and providing equal time and space for different sides of an issue. Confronted with a case about a "false equivalence", where scientifically backed opinion is presented along the one without such evidence (e.g. climate scientists vs climate deniers), the respondents still supported the opportunity to listen to all views.

Exercise for a debate class

Ask students to share their news sources (newspapers, social media profiles, television, radio programs, podcasts, newsletters, etc.) and to put them (in groups) on the political bias chart. Follow the activity with discussion:

Present the report on the same event, but produced by different news sources. What are the differences? Why? How does it influence the consumer? How would the objective "version" look like?

Investigate reasons for the biases in the particular news sources. Why New York

c) How should we consume media to be more objective and form a proper opinion about the world events? What are the good and bad practices?

CURRENT AFFAIRS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Metaverse

Metaverse is *a virtual world where humans, as avatars, interact with each other in a three-dimensional space that mimics reality (Cambridge Dictionary 2022). Metaverse uses the Internet as well as virtual and augmented reality (VR & AR) headsets. Numerous large technological companies work on the development and commercial application of the metaverse.*

Rand Waltzman in the Washington Post (August 22, 2022):

"[...] Here's a plausible scenario that could soon take place in the metaverse, the online virtual reality environments under rapid development by Mark Zuckerberg and other tech entrepreneurs: A political candidate is giving a speech to millions of people. While each viewer thinks they are seeing the same version of the candidate, in virtual reality they are actually each seeing a slightly different version. For each and every viewer, the candidate's face has been subtly modified to resemble the viewer. [...]

That is both good news and terrible news. Good, because it will allow for better communication. Terrible, because it will open users to the full range of deceptive influence techniques used in the physical world — and to what might be even more intense, virtual versions of them.

The metaverse will usher in a new age of mass customization of influence and manipulation. It will provide a powerful set of tools to manipulate us effectively and efficiently. Even moreremarkable will be the ability to combine tailored individual and mass manipulation in a way that has never before been possible [...]"

Motion for the debate: This House believes that metaverses will do more harm than good

Trump, Musk and Twitter

Seth Fiegerman for CNN Business (November 20, 2022):

"With his decision on Saturday to restore the personal Twitter account of former President Donald Trump nearly two years after it was permanently banned, Elon Musk could plunge Twitter deeper into chaos — and that may be the point [...]

Some advertisers had previously indicated they could halt spending on the platform if Trump were to be reinstated, potentially dealing a further blow to a company that generates nearly all of its revenue from advertising.

Before buying Twitter, Musk had repeatedly said he would reinstate Trump's account and rethink the platform's approach to permanent bans as part of his maximalist vision for "free speech." But Musk also sought to reassure brands and users that he would establish a "content moderation council" to determine whether Trump and other banned account holders would be brought back on the platform.

There is no indication that group was even established, let alone involved in the decision to restore Trump. Instead, Musk tweeted a poll Friday, asking followers to vote whether or not to restore Trump's account. "Yes" won, and Musk tweeted Saturday: "The people have spoken. Trump will be reinstated. [...]

Throughout his time as president, Trump was the most high-profile and often the most controversial user on the platform, forcing Twitter to think about how it should handle a sitting world leader taunting North Korea with threats of nuclear destruction (allowed) and

encouraging a violent pro-Trump mob to attack the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 (which got him banned)."

Motion for the debate: This House prefers that speech and user content on social media be regulated by the government as opposed to set independently by the platforms

Business models transformation

Free access to information and online social media dominance in news consumption forced media outlets and platforms to rethink their business models and revenue streams based predominantly on advertisement. Successful examples like New York Times, which prioritized its subscriptions (esp. digital subscriptions) over ads paved the way for other newspapers but also pushed social media companies to rethink their strategy. The costs, revenues, and incentives were the core reason for the evolution of the media and its content. What would be the consequences of subscription-based media?

Laura Forman in the Wall Street Journal (Oct. 31, 2022):

"Consumers are spending a record number of hours on social media, but the platforms have had difficulties profiting off of your time lately. Long booming online ads businesses, historically the predominant way social-media companies made money, have cratered this year thanks to a weakening economy and Apple's ad tracking changes that have made it more difficult for platforms to demonstrate return on advertisers' investments

[...] Will the social platform with the most users (Meta, collectively) be best at the subscription game? Or the one that enjoys the most time spent (ByteDance's TikTok)? Or maybe the one used for work rather than for play (Elon Musk's Twitter)? If the online dating industry has taught us anything, consumers will probably continue to dabble in many but opt to pay for the one or two that they care about most at any given time.

That would suggest total user numbers might be less relevant than engagement. [...]Subscribers might never be as lucrative to social media platforms as their advertisers, but the sector will struggle to grow without them."

Motion for the debate: This House prefers ad-based models over subscription-based models for funding news media outlets

SUMMARY

1. Media serves four important roles:
   a. Information
   b. Entertainment
   c. Public forum
   d. Watchdog

2. Media evolved and changed mostly thanks to technological advancements, which resulted in lower costs of production and distribution of news as well as because of social transformations, which allowed people to spend more time on leisure and social or political engagement.

3. Fake news is a part of disinformation, which exploits similarity to the news format, strong emotive messages, users prejudices and biases as well as its virality and difficulty to moderate enormous amounts of information. There are competing and supplementary solutions tested across the globe e.g. preventive algorithms, labeling, crowdsourcing or legal bans.

4. Among the most important stakeholders in the media market are
   a. Media owners (state, private owners, special groups of interests)
   b. Media consumers
   c. Media employees (incl. journalists)
   d. Media strategic partners (sources, informants, sponsors)New media stakeholders (e.g. influencers, platforms)

5. Neutrality and objectivity in media is an expected ideal impossible to achieve due to inherent biases, conflicting and strong interests, and incentives as well as the complex nature of truth and reality. There variety of applied models for neutrality (e.g. BBC impartiality rule, Fairness Doctrine, AllSides.com, etc.)

OTHER MOTIONS TO BE USED IN THE CLASSROOM

1) This House prefers social media (e.g. Facebook) to manipulate users' news feeds in order to promote contents that are opposed to their beliefs.

2) This House prefers a world where all news outlets disclose their political leanings and abandon impartiality

3) This House prefers a world without state-funded news organizations (e.g. SABC, BBC, AlJazeera, Deutsche Welle, etc.)

4) This House would ban political advertising on social media

5) This House would prosecute production, distribution and sharing of the fake news

6) This House believes that social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), should actively remove content they deem to be fake news from their platforms

7) This House believes that progressive activists shoud use deepfakes to advance their cause

8) This House would impose gender quotas in the media debates

9) This House believes that CEOs of major news companies should be democratically elected

10) This House prefers ad-based models over subscription-based models for funding news media outlets

11) This House would require social media platforms to pay news publishers for sharing their stories.

12) This House would ban media coverage of ongoing celebrity trials

FURTHER READING

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- Fake News, Bente Kalsnes, 2018, Oxford Research Encyclopeadia, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.809 Access: https://oxfordre.com/communication/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228 613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-809

- Digital News Report 2022
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