

# Media and society in relation to newspapers as a form of news media

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STUDENT I. D: 383155 NAME: EFETURI EMAKPORE MODULE: MEDIA AND SOCIETY TOPIC: MEDIA AND SOCIETY WITH RELATION TO NEWSPAPERS AS A FORM OF NEWS MEDIA DATE: 10 DECEMBER 2009 INTRODUCTION In this research paper, I am going to talk broadly on my understanding, after doing all research, of media and its effect in the society with relation to newspapers as an important and integral form of news media in the society. I will give a brief but concise introduction of newspapers in general. I will talk about the importance of newspapers to the society and how over the years, it has enforced itself on the society and how it has achieved that.

I will see whether theories such as the ‘ Hypodermic Needle Model’ and ‘ Public Sphere’ theories can be applied when focusing on newspapers. In addition, I will talk about Bignell, J (1997) and his views on ‘ Media Semiotics’ concerning newspapers. In addition, to conclude this research paper, I will give a detailed explanation on what I believe should be the role of newspapers as a form of news media to the society. Whether they have achieved all that society expects from them, or, they are yet to attain that maximum point of satisfaction from the society.

Lastly, I will talk about the depth in which newspapers are actually influencing the society and how they can help in changing the views of the masses thereby helping to shape up the society to becoming a more positive one. INTRODUCTION TO NEWSPAPERS A newspaper, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is said to be a “printed publication, now usually issued daily or weekly, consisting of folded unstapled sheets and containing news, frequently with the addition of advertisements, photographs, articles, and

correspondence; the organization or office issuing such a publication. ' A wide variety of material has been published in newspapers, including editorial opinions, criticism, persuasion and op-eds; obituaries; entertainment features such as crosswords, Sudoku and horoscopes; weather news and forecasts; advice, gossip, food and other columns; critical reviews of movies, plays and restaurants; classified ads; display ads, editorial cartoons and comic strips. Newspapers are very essential to the society, over the past centuries; have been relayed to the society in different ways, and have been evolving ever since.

In the beginning, the first newspapers were more like government announcement bulletins and authorised by Julius Caesar. This means they were probably fully controlled by the government. This was in Ancient Rome and were called " \_Acta Diurna", they were carved in metal or stone and posted in public areas. Moveable type newspapers came during the modern era, at the beginning of the 17th century. However, the first officially recognised newspaper is that of Lohan Carolus' "Relation aller Furnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien\_\_", published in 1605 in Strasbourg.

By the early 19th century, many cities in Europe, as well as North and South America, published newspaper type publications and the contents were vastly shaped by different views such as regional and cultural preferences. In addition, advances in printing technology related to the Industrial Revolution, enabled newspapers to become an even more widely circulated means of communication. For example, in 1814, ' The Times' (London) acquired a printing press capable of making a thousand impressions per minute. In

newspaper production, there are different categories of newspaper printed and published for reading.

We have daily newspapers, which are issued every day sometimes with the exceptions of Sundays and national holidays. There are weekly newspapers and these tend to be smaller than daily papers and in some cases, there are some papers published twice or three times a week. Then we have national newspapers, which circulate nationwide. There is also a group of newspapers, which can be categorised as international newspapers. Some, such as The International Herald Tribune, have always had that focus, while others are repackaged national newspapers or "international editions" of national-scale or large metropolitan newspapers.

Often these international editions are scaled down to remove articles that might not interest the wider range of readers. Lastly, with the introduction of the Internet, Web-based "newspapers" have started to be produced as online-only publications. Virtually all printed newspapers have online editions, which depending on the country may be regulated by journalism organizations such as the Press Complaints Commission in the UK. THEORIES INVOLVED IN NEWSPAPERS AS A FORM OF NEWS MEDIA THE HYPODERMIC NEEDLE MODEL

This theory, also known as the hypodermic-syringe model, is a model of communication also usually referred to as the "magic bullet" perspective or the "transmission-belt" model. The essence of this model holds the fact that an intended message is directly received and wholly accepted by the

receiver. However, this model is rooted in the 1930's 'Behaviourism' created by the Frankfurt School in German and is now considered by many to be obsolete. The Hypodermic Needle theory implied that mass media had a direct, immediate, and powerful effect on their audiences.

The mass media in the 1940s and 1950s were perceived as a powerful influence on behaviour change. Several factors contributed to this "strong effects" theory of communication, including: the fast rise and popularization of radio and television, the emergence of the persuasion industries, such as advertising and propaganda, the Payne Fund studies of the 1930s, which focused on the impact of motion pictures on children, and Hitler's monopolization of the mass media during WWII to unify the German public behind the Nazi party.

This view of propaganda took root after World War I and was championed by theorists such as Harold Lasswell in his pioneering work *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927). He argued that the people had been duped and degraded by propaganda during the war. Lasswell based his work on a stimulus-response model rooted in learning theory. Focusing on mass effects, this approach viewed human responses to the media as uniform and immediate. E. D. Martin expressed this approach thus: "Propaganda offers ready-made opinions for the unthinking herd" (cited in Choukas, 1965, p. 5). The "Magic Bullet" or "Hypodermic Needle Theory" of direct influence effects was not as widely accepted by scholars as many books on mass communication indicate. The magic bullet theory was not based on empirical findings from research but rather on assumptions of the time about human

nature. People were assumed to be " uniformly controlled by their biologically based 'instincts' and that they react more or less uniformly to whatever 'stimuli' came along" (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p. 00). The phrasing " hypodermic needle" is meant to give a mental image of the direct, strategic, and planned infusion of a message into an individual. However, as research methodology became more highly developed, it became apparent that the media had selective influences on people. The most famous incident often cited as an example for the hypodermic needle model was the 1938 broadcast of The War of the Worlds and the subsequent reaction of widespread panic among its American mass audience.

However, this incident actually sparked the research movement, led by Paul Lazarsfeld and Herta Herzog, which would disprove the magic bullet or hypodermic needle theory, as Hadley Cantril managed to show that reactions to the broadcast were, in fact, diverse, and were largely determined by situational and attitudinal attributes of the listeners. PUBLIC SPHERE THEORY The notion of the 'public sphere' evolved during the Renaissance in Western Europe and the United States.

This was brought on partially by merchants' need for accurate information about distant markets as well as by the growth of democracy and individual liberty and popular sovereignty. The public sphere was a place between private individuals and government authorities in which people could meet and have rational-critical debates about public matters. Discussions served as a counterweight to political authority and happened physically in face-to-

face meetings in coffee houses and cafes and public squares as well as in the media in letters, books, drama, and art.

Habermas saw a vibrant public sphere as a positive force keeping authorities within bounds lest their rulings be ridiculed. In Habermasian theory, the bourgeois public sphere was preceded by a literary public sphere whose favoured genres revealed the interiority of the self and emphasized an audience-oriented subjectivity. Today, in contrast, there is scant public debate, few public forums, and political discussion has degenerated from a fact-based rational-critical examination of public matters into a consumer commodity. There is the illusion of a public sphere, according to Habermas.

Citizens have become consumers, investors, workers. Real news (information that helps free people stay free) is being elbowed out by advice, soft porn, catchy garbage, celebrity antics, and has become infotainment, that is, a commodity competing in a mass entertainment market. It matters less whether news is right or wrong, and matters more whether it is gripping. Habermas' sociological and philosophical work tries to explain how this transformation happened by examining a wide range of disciplines, including political theory, cultural criticism, ethics, gender studies, philosophy, sociology, history, and media studies. The basic belief in public sphere theory is that political action is steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere.

Democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate. Much of the debate over the public sphere involves what is the basic theoretical structure of the public sphere, how

information is deliberated in the public sphere, and what influence the public sphere has over society.

## ANALYSIS OF THE HYPODERMIC NEEDLE MODEL AND PUBLIC SPHERE

THEORIES IN RELATION TO NEWSPAPERS Firstly, I would like to speak about the ‘Hypodermic Needle Model’ before I go on to talk about the ‘Public Sphere’ theory. This theory can be linked with newspapers in concerning how it focuses on how news media influences the public in certain ways or directions and how it also has a direct, immediate, and powerful effect on the society. From what I have researched on the theory, it is clear to me that in earlier years, (the 1940’s to the 1950’s), newspapers were a huge influence on the society.

This is emphasised in many different ways, which have been cited above. What was printed by newspapers in those times, whether positive or negative, was greatly accepted by the society. In fact, some theorists even claimed that people were being duped by the information being given in newspapers. Nowadays however, the society’s (though not everyone) views on information in newspapers are not wholly believed and in recent times, people have begun to question whether all written in the papers is a concentrated or a diluted version of the truth.

Newspapers now have selective influences on people in the society as individuals have developed minds of their own especially since nowadays, newspapers are not so much controlled by the government as they used to be and some independent newspapers give their own opinions of certain



events while others are still a little vague about passing judgment on same events. Now, I will move on to the public sphere theory. This theory can also be directly applied to newspapers.

From my research, I have been able to see that once again, public sphere was taken more seriously in past decades than it is nowadays. In those periods, the public sphere was seen as an integral part of news media and controlled the excesses of the government as a good government was seen to be one that paid attention to what the public sphere had to contribute to society. Then, the public sphere had a great influence on the society. Articles were printed regularly in newspapers concerning public matters and were written with a rational and critical fashion.

Nowadays however, the society has lost touch with what the public sphere was truly about and now give in to whatever 'latest rumour' is given out to them. The public sphere has been disregarded and has become a sort of illusion. (Habermas). There are hardly any honest public debates now, public forums have declined over the years, and sadly, political discussions have degenerated from a fact-based rational-critical examination of public matters into a consumer commodity.

Now newspapers are competing against each other and now print only what they believe will sell and increase their customer range, rather than the important and crucial things that are going on in the society. THE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPERS In his book, "'\_ Media Semiotics: An Introduction','\_ Bignell (1997), discusses the ways in which semiotic analysis

approaches newspaper as a medium. He considered the linguistic signs used in newspapers, the iconic and other visual signs in newspapers, and the relationship between linguistic signs and visual signs in newspapers.

The medium of the newspaper is particularly interesting as signifiers are presented simultaneously thus offering a concrete display of signs which the reader can consume at his/her own pace and can also be re-read, as opposed to television or radio news which can only be watched or listened to at particular. A newspaper is not something that is just filled with facts, but it portrays news as representations produced in language and other signs like photographs. "A semiotic analysis will therefore include discussions of the connotations of linguistic and visual signs used in news stories." Bignell (1997: 79) The process of selection is central to the production of all newspapers. This involves selecting events which are considered to be worthy of being printed as news, and excluding news which is considered to be irrelevant, insignificant or unworthy of news coverage. Thus news is a social construct dependent on what is deemed important by those who work in the 'news industry' based on certain codes of behaviour, which have been learned by news workers in order to do their job. The codes of behaviour undoubtedly depend on the particular newspaper for which they are working.

The reader comes to the newspaper with a set of codes with which to decode the text, and these codes may differ from individual to individual. This leads to the point that the text is open to a variety of interpretations depending on the ideological standpoint of the reader, and whether the reader is familiar

with the newspaper and the codes which it employs to communicate the 'news' which it has selected. Connotations of the linguistic and visual signs that are presented by newspapers are central to the meaning of the news item to the reader.

The connotations of the news item are perceived within a coded framework and there are recognisable codes within different newspapers. It is clear that different newspapers use particular narrative codes when representing the same item of news. The headlines are linguistic syntagms, which aim to attract the attention of the reader to the topic of the news story, and the linguistic signs that are employed in the headline suggest to the reader the appropriate codes that are needed to understand or decode the news item. It is clear that the newspapers use different linguistic codes as a means of representing the news item.

For example, and in further discussion and differentiation, we are going to be focusing on three major newspapers in the UK- 'The Times', 'The Telegraph,' and 'The Sun'. 'The Times' and 'The Telegraph' are similar in their use of language. However, both differ dramatically with 'The Sun'. It is clear that The Sun uses orally based vocabulary, and dramatic and sensational language. Another drastic difference between the newspapers representations of news items are the typographic devices used to break up the text.

Again, 'The Sun' differs dramatically to 'The Telegraph' and 'The Times' using bold text to start the article, serving to extend the role of the

headline in attracting the attention of the reader to the topic of the news story. The use of bold and one word sub-headings which are employed throughout the text serve to direct the reader in making meaning of the text and make blatantly obvious the points which the newspaper deem to be of particular significance to the understanding of the news item. 'The Telegraph' and 'The Times' do not employ the same typographic codes as 'The Sun', apart from bold type which is used for the headline, and the bold type used to name the journalist/s of the article. The narrative of the news story uses the same type and size of font throughout the item. Arguably, this connotes authority and formality to the reader, which is also demonstrated by the fairly long sentences, the correct spellings, and the lack of colloquial language that is used in 'The Sun'.

This perhaps implies that the 'quality' press such as 'The Times' and 'The Telegraph' provide better news than tabloids such as 'The Sun'. However, this kind of value judgement is inappropriate as both types of newspaper are constructions of the news with the 'quality' newspapers aiming to connote authority and formality and the 'popular' tabloids aiming to connote an attitude of 'telling it how it is'. Thus, both types of representation of the news items present mythic meanings.

Linguistic and typographic codes are not the only codes employed in newspapers. Graphic codes must also be considered. The photographs used in the newspapers have also undergone a process of selection. One image will be chosen over another as it connotes a message that the selectors of the photograph want to communicate. Barthes (cited in Bignell, 1977: 98)

suggests that the newspaper photograph is ' an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation. ' \_ The ' treatment\_ ' \_ of photographs, which is referred to by Barthes can be seen in the different newspapers that I have chosen. Interestingly, each version of the news item has used the same photographs, but treated them differently according to the required connotation. Again, The Times and The Telegraph use similar codes and The Sun employs a drastically different strategy despite using the same original photographs. The most drastic difference is that The Sun presents the photographs in colour, connoting realism and the dangerousness of the offender.

This is also connoted by the size of the photographs, with the graphic representation dominating a large proportion of the overall available space on the page, which is another drastic difference between The Sun's representation of the news item and the other two newspapers. Despite these major differences, it is significant that the newspapers have all used the same photographs, and it is interesting to look at why these particular photographs might have been chosen.

Paradigmatically, photographs involve connotations, and thus the significance of the particular photographs, which have been chosen, can be seen more clearly when considering what other paradigmatic connotations might have appeared in their place. As Bignell (1997: 99) suggests, the caption underneath the picture enables the reader to ' load down the image with particular cultural meanings and the photograph functions as the proof

that the text's message is true. The pictures are also shown in different contexts in the three newspapers with 'The Sun' using a different strategy to 'The Telegraph' and 'The Times'. The Telegraph and 'The Times' use similar sized pictures of the individuals involved. In 'The Sun', the size of the photographs of the individuals differs considerably. This discussion of several newspapers' representations of the same news item show how semiotic analysis can determine the meanings of such news items, as a result of the linguistic and visual signs used within the texts. However, semiotic analysis cannot determine how an individual reader might interpret the representations of the news items in a real social context.

Semiotic analysis does offer an insight into the factors at work in the production of a news item and distinguishes the various codes, which are employed by different types of newspaper when representing a particular news item. CONCLUSION To conclude this essay, from all that I have researched, I now know that newspapers have indeed come a long way I am going to give my opinion of what I believe should be the role of newspapers as an integral form of news media to the society. Newspapers are expected to keep the people informed about the political activities of their government.

They should give in detail, the statements of speeches made by the rulers at public meetings or on the radio or television. They should also report the activities of political parties and leaders. Standard newspapers should be able to criticize the policies and statements of the government or of the

political parties in a fair and just method. Newspapers should also describe the economic policies of the government. For example, they should describe its import and export policies, its plans for future economic development, and the prices of different things fixed by it, and so on.

In addition, newspapers should always report in detail, the economic policies of the government in the fields of agriculture, industry, and commerce, should be more detailed about matters concerning the problems of labors, farmers and other working people, and suggested their solutions.

Newspapers should give a true and correct picture of society. They should describe the activities of the people in different fields like education business industry, law, medicine, science, and so on and also tell us about the activities of students and teachers, businessmen, industrialists, lawyers, doctors, scientists and all categories of working people.

They should convey information regarding the different crimes taking place every day. Newspapers ought to tell about the political, economic, and social changes in different countries and give descriptions of changes in government and revolutions in different parts of the world. Lastly, they should give descriptions of changes taking place in other societies in education, science, and medicine industry agriculture and defence preparation. These are a few suggestions I believe that are suitable ideas and courses that newspapers should begin to focus on instead of the media frenzy seeking status they seem to be attaining nowadays.

I do not believe that newspapers have reached the point of maximum satisfaction in the views of the society. Centuries ago, it was understandable that newspaper agencies could only print certain facts as some of them or most of them were government owned and operated. However, with freedom of journalism, one would expect that they would become more transparent in the way they convey out news to the society. However, news relaying has been turned into infotainment. It matters less whether news is right or wrong, and matters more whether it is gripping and this is not the ways newspapers should be going nowadays.

Newspapers are probably the main source of handy information that provides up-to-date information on a daily basis that everyone can afford to buy. It gives the sophisticated approach towards life in social, political, economical and entertainment framework. Provide knowledgeable information available to all ages and societal status. Newspapers influence the society greatly because it is not necessary that everyone have TV, or internet resources, radio, as these are the technological resources, but everyone gets to read the newspaper every now and then.

Newspapers are the global need of every culture, and should therefore promote freedom of journalism to project the truth in the society.

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