

Democratic or liberal guest

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



One of the most common criticism of the internet based 'new media' is that compared to 'old media' such as print and television, those at the helm of 'new media' feel little need to project a balanced view point. While traditional news media outlets are also seen as being advocates of one thing or the other, they do traditionally offer some place to opposing viewpoints. Even in the case of news channels like Fox News, for example, which is widely seen as heavily biased towards the republican party, Democratic or liberal guest do appear now and then to offer their viewpoints.

The 'new media' on the other hand has blogs, websites and internet video channels devoted to showcasing just one opinion only. This then perpetuates a uniformity of thought and an absence of critical thinking. On these new media platforms like minded people get together and repeat the same opinions over and over again creating what is called an 'echo-chamber' effect. This 'echo-chamber' effect is particularly effective in legitimizing fringe political and social opinions in the minds of the 'new media' consumers to the extent they may seem to be inhabiting a world different from everyone else.

An example of this can be seen on various message boards and blogs dedicated to conspiracy theories such as the idea that the moon landing was faked or the idea that the ruling classes of all countries of the world are actually reptilian aliens from another planet in disguise. 'New Media' also has the power to distort media coverage heavily in favour of Digital 'haves'. For example after Iran's presidential elections in June 2009, news organizations such as CNN, BBC and Fox News featured blog posts, twitter 'tweets', pictures and amateur video footage from anti-government protesters.

The whole media coverage was dominated by the idea that the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad was extremely unpopular with the population of Iran and that there was no way that he could have won a majority in the country. However several independently conducted studies belie this idea. A pre-election survey by the non-partisan, not-for-profit organization Terror Free Tomorrow showed President Ahmedinejad leading his main rival by a large margin (Balen ; Doherty, 2009).

Analysis of post-election surveys also shows that most Iranians regard Mahmoud Ahmedinejad as their legitimate leader (World Public Opinion. ORG, 2010). Obviously the foreign policy agenda of the western governments has a lot of effect on the western media's coverage of the Iranian elections. But there is another factor at work here as well. The factor is that of the ' digital divide'. Only about 40% of the Iranian population live in large cities. Large cities are also where the main population base of the opposition figures lie (Balen ; Doherty, 2009).

Internet access is available to at most about one third of Iranians. Most of these Iranians are young urban and affluent (Balen ; Doherty, 2009). Like in most other countries, urban Iranians tend to be much more liberal than their rural counterparts, similarly university students and graduates tend to be the most liberal sections of the society. According to the experts behind the first survey: " The only demographic groups in which our survey found Mousavi leading or competitive with Ahmadinejad were university students and graduates, and the highest-income Iranians" (Ballen ; Doherty, 2009).

Denizens of large cities form a minority of the Iranian population, however partially due to the fact that they have access to the internet, they are able

to take over or dominate the global discourse on the issue of the Iranian elections and present their views as the views of the majority of Iranians. Another example is the issue of Female Circumcision, which is often referred to pejoratively as 'Female Genital Mutilation' in the Western media. The campaign against Female Circumcision is lead mostly by western feminist organizations, along with a few female African immigrants to the west.

In many African countries there is widespread support for the practice among women (AWA-FC, 2009). According to the beliefs of some traditional African societies, the clitoris on a female is like a vestigial penis, which has to be removed in a traditional ceremony in order for a young girl to grow into womanhood. In African countries like Sierra Leone, women have carried out protests against what they perceive as west-inspired anti-female circumcision campaigns.

However the discourse in the western news media is entirely in the hands of feminist organizations that have a prejudiced belief that Female Circumcisions are something imposed on the African women by the 'Patriarchy'. News stories of the issue in Western media often give voice to the sexual anxieties of African Immigrant women to the west that through assimilation in the western society, have come to believe that their bodies have been mutilated. The sexual anxieties of traditional African women who may believe that they need to undergo excision of the clitoris in order to be complete women are completely disregarded.

In the words of Dr. Fumbai Ahmedu, an American researcher of Sierra Leonean heritage: " I am concerned that current U. S. and global polices on African forms of female genital surgeries discriminate against the bulk of

<https://assignbuster.com/democratic-or-liberal-guest/>

circumcised women because of their social, ethnic, cultural and gender identity. This is made possible because of the high levels of illiteracy and low socio-economic status of circumcised women in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the socio-political disenfranchisement they face as immigrants in western countries.

In particular, I am concerned about the official and exclusive reservation of the term "mutilation" to describe circumcised African women. Not only is this institutionalized discrimination but it is personally offensive to the majority of circumcised African women and to the cultures which practice female (and male) initiation" (Tierney, 2008). In this case too, the lack of access to any sort of international media that would air their views renders the traditional African women voiceless. People who presume to speak in their name do not actually represent their views.

If these women had access to the internet it would be a lot less easy for mainstream news media to disregard their voices to be and vilify their cultural practices in a completely biased and one-sided manner. Thomas Friedman in 'The World Is Flat' argues that the outsourcing of business processes to developing countries with a large base of educated people leads to an evening of the playing field between the people of developed and developing countries and contributes to the 'flattening of the world' (Friedman, 2005). Most forms of outsourcing depend on instantaneous digital communication between countries.

This means that developing countries that have not invested heavily in laying down the infrastructure for high speed internet access and in creating an "internet literate" population are likely to miss out on the opportunity to

close the gap with developed countries with the aid of business process outsourcing. As digital communication costs come down, the digital divide is reduced as well (Dyer-Witheford, 2002). However will the decrease in the digital divide foster an increased understanding among the people of the world or will it only serve to harden existing attitudes and confirm existing biases and prejudices is anybody's guess.

Works Cited African Women Are Free to Choose (AWA-FC). (2009, February 20). Statement by African Women Are Free to Choose (AWA-FC), Washington DC, USA. Retrieved February 08, 2010, from The Patriotic Vanguard: http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/article.php3?id_article=3752

Ballen, K. , & Doherty, P. (2009, June 15). The Iranian People Speak. Retrieved February 05, 2010, from The Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/14/AR2009061401757.html>

Dyer-Witheford, N. (2002) ' E-capital and the Many-Headed Hydra', pp. 129-163 in G. Elmer (ed) Critical Perspectives on the Internet.

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Friedman, T. L. (2005). The World is Flat. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux

Tierney, J. (2008, March 19). A Compromise on Female " Circumcision". Retrieved February 05, 2010, from The New York Times: http://tierneylab.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/03/19/a-compromise-on-female-circumcision/?_page=2

World Public Opinion. ORG (2010, February 2) Analysis of Multiple Polls Finds Little Evidence Iranian Public Sees Government as Illegitimate. Retrieved February 08, 2010, from World Public Opinion. ORG: http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/incl/printable_version.php?pnt=652