

Review and study on commercial pressures media essay



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The national press has long been the backbone of national pride. Seemingly news was one of the only sources of information about all the on going activities and current affairs stories around the world. Newspapers and television news plays a huge role in everybody's lives, to be in the know we either read the paper or watch the news. However now some may argue commercial pressure from the early 1990s have changed the outlook of news production. The primary principal of any form of commercialisation is for financial gain. Society today can seem to be more focussed on economic profitability then the quality they present. Commercialization can connote excessive advertising, ' corruption, meaning to emphasize the profitable aspects of, especially by scarifying quality or debasing inherent mature.' (Jorgensen. W. K and Hanitzsch, 2009) Authors Jorgensen and Hanitzsch also argue that commercialisation of news interferes with the public's understanding of issues as mediated by the news media. ' Commercialization of news as any action intended to boost profit that interferes with a journalist's or news organization's best effort to maximize public understanding of those issues and events that shape the community they claim to serve' (Jorgensen. W. K and Hanitzsch, 2009). In this essay I will attempt to evaluate if and how news production changed after the 1990's, and if it was changing why was it changing. Had news surrendered to the commercial pressures? Was commercialising news beneficial for audiences or merely new production companies?

Looking briefly into the history of broadcasting will help assist me into determining how news production was before the 1990s and how commercial pressures influenced the way news is being produced today.

The 'Industrial Revolution' was a period from the 18th to the 19th century. The Industrial Revolution brought the emergence of the rise in technology; industrial competition was now becoming fierce. Things were slowly beginning to change in society, aspects such as newspapers were facing rising manufacture costs and people now spending their disposable income on things of a more entertaining nature i. e. magazines. Commercializing news was the way forward in making more profit. The Industrial Revolution created news production companies now to be able to print quantities in thousands; many believe this was the point in the century when commercial aspects such as 'Journalism as entertainment' and 'Yellow Journalism' began. Thussu (2007) argues:

'As the taxes and duties on the press were progressively reduced during the late nineteenth century, newspapers became an increasingly important commercial enterprise, thriving on sensationalist stories. '(Thussu, K, D. 2007)

The United States of America influenced news production in Britain significantly with firstly Penny Press to news shows such as ABC and Fox News. As Thussu (2007) notes:

'The US, the home of the idea of a mass society and mass communication, could also be said to be the inventor of the infotainment industry, starting with the 'Penny Press' in the 1830's.' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

The 'Penny Press', these were newspapers that were produced in the mid 19th century, it first arrived in 1833, one of the first newspapers was

Benjamin Day's Sun. The 'Penny Press' were newspapers that were being
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sold for one penny compared to other papers that were being sold for six cents. The papers appealed to a larger audience firstly because they were cheap but the articles were more about crime, murder and human based interest stories. Could we attempt to say that newspapers in early 1990's and present decided to go back to a similar style of producing news? This maybe what Gitlin (2005: 51) is arguing about:

' For a constituency being conditioned by trashy crime pamphlets, gory novels and overweight melodramas, news was simply the most exciting, most entertaining content a paper could offer, especially when it was skewed, as it invariably was in the penny press, to the most sensational stories. In fact, one might even say that the matters of the penny press invented the concept of news because it was the best way to sell their papers in an entrainment environment.' (Cited in Gitlin, 2005: 51) (Who has been cited in Gitlin)

The 19th century saw the British newspaper take a dramatic turn, the media alongside news production become increasingly commercialised. News was now seen as a commodity, something that could turn commercial, and bring profitable advantage. Before the commercial change news production had editors focused on arguing about politics and power. However by the century's end editors looked at writing stories for profit. Which story would bring in the most money? As Baldasty (1992: 139) notes: ' The newspaper had emerged as a business dedicated to presenting information within the parameters of profitability.' Baldasty further contends that:

' The commercialization of news in the nineteenth century was the result of changes in three important areas of the newspaper: its finances, the vision of what the press could and should do, and the exigencies of doing to day-operations.' (Baldasty, 1992: 04)

Looking into more closely the production of news in the UK we will begin with the British Broadcasting Company. The BBC began the broadcasting monopoly, in 1922. The BBC was primarily funded by the licensing fee. The BBC wasn't concerned with any advertisers which made it distinctively stand out as a non commercial channel. Lord Reith developed the BBC; he promoted the ' philosophy of public service broadcasting' both with television and radio. The BBC was awarded the first Royal Charter in 1927 and they began broadcasting in 1936, however in 1955 they lost its monopoly with the launch of ITV. ITV being an independent television channel, it was solely funded by advertisement, which gave the aspect of ITV being a more commercialised channel. However ITV also had to meet public-service obligations.

Channel 4 was created by an Act of Parliament; it began regular broadcasts on 2 November 1982. Like the nation's long-established public-service broadcaster the BBC, it had gifted broadcasting frequencies, but like ITV it doesn't receive funding from the television licence income. It is publicly owned not profit broadcaster, today all programming is financed through its commercial activities, which include the sale of on-air advertising. Although the channel was funded through advertisement the channel ' retained and even widened the public- service ethos, particularly in relation to the provision of news and current affairs.' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

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For this section of the essay I will be investigating why newspapers essentially became commercialised. Firstly I will look at the rise of advertising.

As Thussu (2007) argues:

' The growth of advertising- one result of industrialisation - provided a major source of revenue for newspapers for newspapers in the late ninetieth century'. (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

Advertising in the late nineteenth century had become a powerful element. Newspapers were facing financial panic and turned to advertiser for financial support. Advertisers needed publicity so they would pay newspapers to publicize their products or services in the newspaper which newspapers would charge for. The rise of advertising came into action as advertiser looked upon newspapers as the source that would bring them circulation all over the country. Newspapers were cheap however they were one of few resources that could communicate something on such a large scale. Thussu notes:

' The global expansion of television and other media could not have been possible without the support of advertising revenue.' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

Advertisers wanted to use newspapers as their tool for reaching the consumers, and newspapers needed their financial input. As Baldasty observed:

' Advertising emerged as the chief financial supporter and shaper of the press.' (Baldasty, 1992: 139)

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The rise of popular culture increasingly became a reason why newspapers had to conform to the rules of commercialisation. Popular culture can be seen as commercial culture, culture of the masses. Culture that has been severely influenced by the mass media, popular culture has seen a downgrade in aspects of literacy, reading, television, film and so much more. Newspapers needed to accept and acknowledge their new audience and the demographics. So many can argue popular culture aroused the formation of popular press.

Newspapers were formed primarily for the two aspects of informing the world of important events, issues and crimes. Secondly making profit from this. Newspapers in the 1990s saw a change in the trend, a percentage of readers now wanted newspapers to be more entertaining. Baldasty noticed this as: ' Many came to see the newspapers as a business rather than a political tool'. (Baldasty. 1992. p139)

The readers required articles about celebrities, sport and wanted images to look at. If newspapers wanted to survive they had to give in, it would have been inevitable for them to play the game and accept the needs of their readers. Working class newspapers were now being replaced by popular newspapers such as the ' The Daily Telegraph' with ' The Sun.' Lord Northcliffe an infamous press baron took the newspaper industry by storm. He invested in declining newspapers and then turned them into more entertaining and profitable press; he detected the gap in market and knew how to gain from this.

The United States saw television become as important part of their American life after World War II, the evening news now became a regular feature in many households during the late 1940s and 1950s.

As Bernhard argues:

'The US government used television networks to sell the ideological war against communism to the American public, persuading networks to broadcast news and current affairs programmes approved by the government agencies and thus making them act as unofficial state propagandists.' (Bernhard 1999)

The predominant change in the nature of newspapers began with their need for financial gain, the papers began to support political parties; this was one small step towards gaining more financial help. The newspapers would write passively about the party and influence their readership. An example of this was when press baron Rupert Murdoch shared his liberal views with the readers of newspapers 'The Sun' and 'Daily Times'. Murdoch identifies himself as a libertarian, he used the newspapers to promote and highlight the left wing politics. Murdoch was also rumoured to have a close alliance with Margaret Thatcher. 'The Sun' was also said to be responsible for the unexpected victory of John Major, in the elections 1992.

Another reason why newspapers had the increased pressure to commercialise was caused due to the rise of technology. Technology has affected everything we know, news production suffered as we welcomed the internet.

The internet changed the way we consumed news, we now had news 24

hours a day worldwide. There was no longer the need to walk to the corner
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shop to buy the paper. Technology and the internet not only changed the way news was being produced it was changing the way news was now being gathered. Mid 1990s saw news production turn to the World Wide Web, the World Wide Web was operational in the 1990's and become a phenomenon. The web was now another source used to illustrate the news stories. Things such as magazines, newspapers and television news programs all faced the dilemma to join the ever developing internet. Lasica argues:

' News organizations and television networks built virtual newsstands carrying up-to-the-minute headlines' (Lasica, 1996)

Modern technology allows people to be just like a real news presenters. Mobile phones and the video function create instant coverage of news taking place anywhere around the world. News reporters are no longer efficient or accurate with the production of the latest news. In 2006 the ' balance of power' in Senate was affected in the recording from a cell phone. It was a recording on a cell phone that recorded ' George Allen's infamous ' Maccaca' comment in the mid term elections.

People always are now using social networking sights to blog entries, this can seem to be very appealing to the new generation as they can just log onto the internet and read a blog. Commercial pressures such as the rise of technology created the news to no longer be quick enough on news coverage. This can be seen as one of the influential decision on why news had to change and become more commercial, to gain their audience back.

Information I gathered on the 20th century informed me that we saw gradual change in the popularization of television, radio and the persuasion industry
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such as advertising and propaganda. This brought me to the conclusion of television news being the subject of commercialisation also being a reason for commercialisation. 1955 saw boom in television news with the arrival of ITN, Independent Television news. The growth of television is one of the vital reasons of news production i. e. newspapers becoming more commercialized. Television saw dramatic change when we switched over to digital television. This brought with it numerous channels dedicated to news. On June 1st 1980 Ted Turner introduced CNN (Cable News Network) this was a channel that produced news 24hours a day from just one click of a button. Digital television became an overnight success everybody wanted the countless number of channels however this put a major strain on newspapers.

Original news shows such as the BBC news seemed to be changing aspects of it to become more appealing, Thussu argues:

' The BBC's flagship current affairs series Panorama, broadcast since 1953 had set the standards for current affairs reporting for half a century, with a dedicated audience of up to 10million in its heyday in the late 1950's. It too was shifted to a late weekend slot and its content diluted to retain steadily declining viewership.' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

News now contents now could be argued to be infotainment, news being a information based program that now seems to include entertainment contents to enhance viewership. Thussu notes:

' Infotainment was deemed a necessary mechanism to connect with the rapidly fragmenting news audiences.' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

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An example of infotainment in news was the O. J Simpson case. This case was said to be one of the most published criminal trials in American history, this trial was published all over newspapers. Time magazine published a cover of O. J Simpson; it was a mug shot of him where he appeared much darker than he actually is. This caused lots of media controversy, was he made darker in the picture to appear more threatening? However many argue this was only done to influence readers that this man was guilty and a menace, newspapers now seemed to be appearing biased, was this to gain more readership? Thaler 1992 described the ' Simpson saga as a mega spectacle, a key in the decline of journalism' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

Douglas Keller distinguished:

' For TV news, 1995 was the year of Simpson spectacle, thus making clear that the priorities of corporate journalism are infotainment and profits, merging news into entertainment and journalism into business.' (Thussu, K, D. 2007)

All these commercial pressures combined gave me the impression that news now had become more entertainment based and had 'dumbed down'.

TV news was a product of commercialization newspapers now decided to follow, by quality papers becoming more like tabloid trash. Thussu argues that newspapers now had multiple ' storylines involving murder, sex, celebrity and race.'(Thussu, K, D. 2007)

I gathered quantitative content analysis from the book ' Tabloid Tales' (Sparks. C, Tulloch, J. 2000) Information was carried out on newspapers

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Times, Guardian and the Mirror. This was to examine the indications of how tabloidization was occurring over time. Broadsheet papers such as the Times, Guardian were compared to the Mirror a tabloid newspapers. Things that were tested were aspects such as how many fewer international news stories were present, the usage of more images and less text and lastly the increased amount of human/entertainment stories.

' A continual decrease in the numbers, from a high of 3. 7 stories per page in 1957 to a low of 0. 4 per page in 1997.' (Sparks. C, Tulloch, J. 2000)

The Times:

' increase in the number of photographs per page in the newspaper with a low of 0. 4 in 1952 to a high of 2. 1 in 1982.' (Sparks. C, Tulloch, J. 2000)

The Guardian:

' Results show a steady increase from 0. 5 photographs per page in 1962 to approximately 1. 5 in the 1970s and early 1980's.' (Sparks. C, Tulloch, J. 2000)

Over the last fifteen years the Mirror has had steady increase in photographs per page. Research shows that the Times and Mirror both show:

' 1. 5 pictures per page in the 1990s. ' If we take an increase in photographs as being a reliable indication of tabloidization, then maybe this could suggest that this particular broadsheet newspaper is becoming more tabloid- like in form.' (Sparks. C, Tulloch, J. 2000)

Sparks and Tulloch also examined the amount of entertainment and human based stories in the newspapers.

‘ The percentage of entertaining news stories has increased dramatically over this time period, from just over 6 percent 1952 to 17 percent in 1997. This can indicate to me that readers are now more interested in public interest stories than actual news. (Sparks. C, Tulloch, J. 2000)

Competition early 1990s was increasing with new digital media and 24hours news coverage available online. News production appeared to now have the attitude of ‘ give the readers/viewer what they want at any cost', even if this meant losing journalistic range of hard news stories. The early 1990s saw a new form of culture forming celebrity culture. New generations are now seemingly more obsessed with glossy magazines or newspapers that feature human biased stories or have a celebrity spread. Sothard argues:

‘ Many of these young people do not read if they can avoid it, they are not interested in politics or current affairs; they do not go to opera or the theatre... They are post-modern, post serious, post-literate,- and post-broadsheet, which means that the audience for serious journalism is disappearing'. (Sothard, 1997)

When society decided to change, news production had to conform or lose business. News can be argued to be losing its value and no longer having hard news stories that once a public loved to read. Sadly however news like everything else in this world is a profitable business where the main concern is financial gain. The news is only giving you what you want. Commercial

pressures such as technology, popular celebrity culture and a new dumbing
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down market created a new outlook for news production. News can be looked at as less informative, tasteless and more focussed on entertainment than political concerns. However were we the public and the readership not to blame for this?

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