

Media reporting of international conflict and politics media essay



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The media make sense of the world for us. The media and especially the news media have a huge impact on the society and the way people understand the reality. Media carry out essential processes in order to achieve this social impact. They represent the main source through which people know the world, while they provide an interpretation of the events taking place. But, one of the most important processes, is the evaluation and devaluation of the facts, events, social procedures and political decisions which frame the rules and the views of its society.

This indicates an inextricably linked relationship between the media and the sources of information, which raises fundamental concerns about who is delegated to speak on social affairs, national, and social conflicts, how this communication power works and by whom (Cottle, 2001, p. 6).

This assignment will focus on the source/media relation in the context of a democratic regime taking as reference points the media reporting of international conflicts along with politics and political campaigns.

Sociological and culturalistic approaches will be taken into account under the umbrella of the liberal democratic theory. The International conflicts and the political campaigns are two interesting areas of reference in order the complexity of the above mentioned relation to be delineated.

As Palmer (2001) argued the political news as a unique media arena is subject to a political strategy of filtering information and events through editorial and media businesses decisions or political background interests. On the other hand, there is a thin line in the way international conflicts or real wars are presented by the media, because media have a responsibility

to the military in the way they are not jeopardize soldiers' lives. However, war journalists keep an important role of how represent the war events and what particular vocabulary use when they describe specific diplomatic negotiations, or when characterize the soldiers as heroes or as simple fighters etc. (Carpentier and Terzis, 2005, pp. 12-13)

As, Curran (2011) wrote the way the media handle their relation with the above mentioned sources of information power has impact on the development of modern democratic society. The rules of this mass media game in democratic societies are a multifaceted issue, which should be modified into a social, economic, historical and cultural context. The media perform and provide functions and services which are examined, criticized and classified by the democratic audiences creating specific values.

2. The sociology of the sources and the “culturological” approaches:

A Combination

In order to define and explore the relation between source of information and media it is important the significant relationship of news access and source power to be mentioned. As Cottle (2001, p. 8) noted different sociological and culturalistic paradigms have been used by researchers in order to examine this relationship and understand the necessity of the theoretical approaches.

The sociological approach refers to a strategic power which exists in all forms of news access, production practices and processes of source intervention and examines how the public knowledge is formed. Such tactics

are described in the approach of “symbolic interactionism” as named by Blumer (1969) examining how human understanding of the news is informed by symbols, labels, and definitions. It is relevant to the “frame theory” of Goffman (1974, p. 21) who argued that “the concept of frame allows users to locate, perceive, identify and label a number of occurrences”. Media use such strategic tools as a part of their power in order to “pass the message” and create specific interactions with the public. This is the point where criticism intervenes and the question “how these mechanisms link the media to the wider social culture and control?” rises.

The “Neo-Marxist theory” of dominant culture is a possible answer to the above question describing the hierarchical access as a key concept of the promotion of dominant ideas by the media. This explains the way journalists reproduce the news by highlighting the preferential patterns of news access and reproducing the voices of the powerful (Hall et al. 1978, pp. 58-62).

The multidimensional source/media relation is also obvious if we examine the sociology of news sources. As MacGregor (1997) claimed the black box of news production reveals different cultural forms of news, different journalistic and managerial practices and several state interventions.

Additionally, the “index model” of Bennett (1990, pp. 103 – 125) is another strong argument on the fact that source of information and media are characterized by a number of intervention factors. This model propounded the fact that in times of elite political consensus, the media, either news or infotainment, tend to promote and support the government policies.

Accordingly in times of political instability “more voices have access to

publicity while media adopt a more engaged and challenging stance” (Cottle, 2001, p. 17).

But, all the above media -centered approaches should be combined with culturalistic paradigms based on the news stories forms and the structures of culture (Berkowitz, 1992, pp. 82-84). This is clear if we consider the structure and the positions of various social actors into the news tabloids in order to serve wider cultural myths. The narrative can serve dynamic and socially depending purposes.

The idea of “ social drama” as Victor Turner expressed (Turner, 1980, pp. 141-168) showed how social conflicts often involve various political interests. A strong example of the “ social drama” and its political ramifications is the Greek case of the murder of 16 years old boy by a safety guard. This event was reproduced by the Greek media as huge cultural and political issue with institutional and cultural responses. The power of this social drama resulted the fall of Greek Government in 2008. It is important in such cases to be distinguished “ what real happens” from “ what should happen”, otherwise the social drama with its mediated role between source and the media can turn in to a public crisis.

Similar culturalistic approaches linked with the source/media relation is the Habermasian concept of the “ public sphere”. As Kellner (2006) described it is about a space of institutions and practices between the interests of everyday life in a society and the dominance of state power. “ The public sphere mediates between the public interests and the dominant or elite intentions”. The media are called to play this mediating role in every day life.

For Habermas, the functions of the media have been transformed into shaping, and controlling public discourse to the issues approved by media corporations. Hence, the interconnection between a sphere of public debate and individual participation has been turned into a realm of political information, in which democratic citizens assimilate inactively both information and entertainment.

3. Politics and Political Campaigning: a strong media relation

The mass media have become an essential part of political communications. As Blumler (2008 pp. 19-20) argued politicians do have some measure of control over the contents of the media and also they aim to win support to the mediascape. The relationship between politics and media is an ambivalent, interactive bond between the political personnel (e. g. political parties) and the media personnel (e. g. media organizations and corporations). The media have a mediating role in the relationship between the public and the politicians in the context of a democratic structured society taking the Parliament's place as the intermediary of this relationship. This makes the importance of political communications and their strategy even more crucial regarding the political planning and campaigning (Kavanagh, 1995, pp. 10-11).

The political behavior in a democratic process is a complex issue. Butler and Collins (1996, pp. 63-77) argued that economics play an important role in order to explain politics. The use of term “ market” is representative of the way elections are considered. It is a market arena where each political party is a product; the public is the consumers while the Parliament could be a

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kind of bourse. Like every market needs a marketing policy, so the politics market requires a political marketing strategy. This marketing approach based on the analogy that persuading the voters is similar to selling to consumers (Newman, 1999, p. 260). Political campaigns carry out specific ideologies, values, and messages. Each campaign is a unique product which is presented to public. The democratic audiences evaluate and criticize the campaigns based on their beliefs, the cultural background, the educational level and their social status. This is the point where the media come to play the role of the mediator who conveys, promotes and presents the “ product” in order the “ consumers” to choose what to “ buy”.

According to Maarek (1995, pp. 34-39) the political marketing model includes several stages such as the field analysis, the target research, the segmentation of groups, the differentiation of images from the communication plan and finally the implementation. The above model clearly shows how politicians use the media as the main part of their strategy. This strategic model is applied to any kind of media such as: printed press, radio, television, and advertising. The balance between the position of the message and the media space depends on the target, the cost and the reliability of both the message and the creator (e. g. the specific political party and its strength on audiences). The above mentioned dependent variables are interrelated with the source of political message and the media. As Palmer (2001, p. 8) contended, in communication industry the cost is a factor of the budget available, while targeting is subject to the relation of voters with the use of media. The matter of credibility is “ a coin with two sides” issue. In a democratic context, the paid media usually reduce the credibility of the

message promoted but, on the other hand, the free media space shrinks the control of the source of information over the content of the message and also affects the saliency of the political message.

So, the way mass media present the political messages (either through the space given or through the way of promotion in two or more forms of media), is the key factor of the success or the failure of a campaign in combination with the gallop researches and the exit polls promoted by the media. Based on these facts Meyer and Hinchman (2002, pp. 77-89) argued that politics and the media have created a partnership to make their businesses by adopting well-tested political communication strategies.

Crucial role to these strategies play the news values as an imperative for the media process. According to Galtung and Ruge (1970) the news values are those qualities of events which make them worthy of publicity. It is about a universal news criteria system which characterizes the media industries globally. Palmer (2001, p. 13) enumerated these news criteria/values as following: fitting with the daily publishing cycle, having a clear nature, being comprehensible, unexpected, negative and personifying the general social message. This explains the fact that usually news values are also publicity values.

So, as a corollary the news values are considered as journalistic imperative while media organizations are looking for resources that are likely to provide newsworthy information. In the area of political campaigning newsworthy usually means featuring disagreement, conflict or contrast. As Matthews (1978, p. 55) stated “ political campaigns have become little series of

performances calculated to attract the attention of television cameras and their audiences.” In addition, political parties and governmental press offices use specific ways to distribute the political information to journalists. The new strategy is to make the information productive by using formats which need minimum further work and by preparing edited videotapes and visual material for the coverage of the political event. Politicians try to make the work reality of journalists easier expecting on their part, a more favorable media treatment or “ front page coverage”.

All the above suggest that political parties’ existence is depended on the media, while the traditional party democracy is transformed into a “ media democracy”. The governments and political elites pin their hopes to the influence and the publicity of mass media to citizens in order to develop their public image. Media as conglomerates have created a unique marketing policy around politics with huge interests and profits at stake.

The “ media democracy” as McChesney (1998) described is a media system that spins out of control in a hypercommercialized fever. The concentration of media power in large conglomerates in the general context of globalization of media culture is considered disastrous for the democracy. McChensey proposed some special incentives for nonprofits, progress of broadcast regulation and further development of public broadcasting as possible solutions for media reform. Democracy needs a media system that offers a wide range of debate on vital issues and promotes the diversity of citizens.

On the other hand, private ownership and advertising dependence of media is already restricted due to digitization of information and alternative media explosion. As Kumar (2006, p. 1) argued media development struggles to achieve “ the ideal of a Fourth Estate, in which the press has a balanced role between the three branches of power-legislative, executive, and judicial”. The Fourth Estate, is supposed to hold state power accountable by documenting the government’s actions and encourage democracy by promoting an open but respectful exchange of ideas and opinions without political interventions.

4. International conflicts, wars and media coverage: a fragile interplay

The majority of information and public knowledge regarding the foreign events and international crises derived from mass media. The media coverage of such events is important for the democratic citizenship since “ all citizens have the right and the responsibility to participate in political life” (Taylor, 2001, p. 5).

Taking into account the historical perspective of media coverage of international conflicts as described by Taylor (2001, pp. 6-7) it is no coincidence that the change of modern military censorship is linked with modern war correspondence. The last century, the sources of war information used to be the soldiers who participated in battles as “ official eye witnesses”. The traditional role of media as informers and educators has radically changed the past 30 years with the development of journalism and technology upgrade. Today, there is a new context in which media act and report the events taking place all around the world. The relation between the

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media and the military transformed entirely, due to the rule of the mass media in communication globally and in the general context of democratization. Journalists can now be eye and ear witnesses of the war events transmitting the harsh images of war through the television or internet or publishing the process of important negotiations as they happen.

According to English (2005, p. 5) military should engage the media “because as a part of a democratic government, the military requires public support to sustain its operations”. The mass media have the role of watchdog to governments and therefore help to outline the views of citizens. The public opinion shapes the political debate and further affects the national and international policies. This fact has direct influence on the military and the reasons they fight for and also on the internal military strategies.

The relationship between military and media is very complex and full of contradictions. Kaplan (2004) wrote that media and military have distinct cultural and economic backgrounds. Military’s culture is proper to its task to defend the homeland, through the forceful use of its strength. The nationalism excels cosmopolitanism while the social class of the soldiers used to be the middle-class.

On the contrary, media have to explain what is happening in a different world, far from their social and economic background or the background of the political elite which govern their country. Additionally, journalists face another difficulty which is the co-existence of professional objectivity along with their life experience. A journalist may hunt for different points of view in

various information sources, but at the end the dominant viewpoints are those which derived from each journalist's values and experiences.

According to English (2005, p. 5) “ the military must bridge this cultural divide, which separates journalists from the military”. The military should realize that the media is a free market full of competition and journalists have specific time deadlines to produce stories. The military as a source of information should provide them with the necessary enumeration and registration of the events and specific details in order to meet their suspense. If the military does not provide that information, then the stories journalists' produce may not best represent the truth in its entirety. Hence, the military should engage the media in order to avoid false reporting and assist in the presentation of the truth.

But, as mass media considered businesses, media conglomerate's marketing strategy play an important role in the way the media cover significant international conflicts. This leads in an ongoing tension between journalists' duty to report on conflicts and military fears about war information security. As Young (1991) argued the majority of journalists accept the need for some confidentiality regarding military operations. However, it is a common truth that this secrecy and governmental control on the war coverage is forced for reasons of political convenience in order not to be mentioned political errors. The military is in the business of secrecy, while the journalists' priority is publicity. This brings to front the contrast between the “ real war” and the “ media war” as Taylor (2001, p. 23) described. In real wars, people die while in media wars the notion of death has different meaning and importance

since the audience does not participate in the battlefield. Media war is a mediated representation of war cruel reality.

This complex relationship of mass media and today's conflict has even more contradictory perspectives in the way the mass media effect on the military events. According to Puddephatt (2006, p. 4) media can play two different and opposed roles. Either they have an active role in the conflict and are responsible for promoted violence, or they stay autonomous and out of the "battlefield", contributing to the resolution of conflict. This means that the media can contribute both to conflict escalation and de-escalation, either directly or indirectly. As Young (1991, pp. 52-65) described "the presence of cameras will prompt the sides to start shooting. Terrorist attacks may be calculated to draw media attention, while in the absence of media coverage, many types of terrorism would be useless". The dominant media strategy, promotes the power of image as a way to attract the attention of audiences. So, war coverage is focused on video recording of bombings, dramatic scenes (the "social drama" approach as mentioned previously) and violence in general. A strong example is the media coverage of the Kosovo war in 1998 where millions of television viewers watched the horrific war scenes of the bombing of the city of Pristina by NATO warplanes. Media brought the war in the homes of the democratic citizens all around the world in the rawest way via live broadcasting.

But, on the opposite side, media can also contribute to defuse war events and promote a "peace-building" profile. This is also a part of media strategy in order the media values to go along with democracy ethics. According to Adam and Holguín (2003) the media power could be used pro-actively by <https://assignbuster.com/media-reporting-of-international-conflict-and-politics-media-essay/>

journalist and media managers in order to promote peace. They also propose some media patterns in order this positive use of media power to be achieved, such as: the detailed understanding of the conflict, the fair and lawful media intervention in circumstances in which the democratic values are hit, the multi-media approach, the avoidance of simplistic representations, the powerless voice representation and the promotion of the successful aspects of negotiations.

Mass media are major instruments of propaganda, but they could take advantage of this power by increasing propaganda for peace. As Snow (2004, pp. 22-24) argued: “ It is the monopoly concentration in media that allows the propaganda refrain: « War is inevitable» to stick in our minds”. Increasing propaganda for peace is accompanied with the increase in media access and information platforms in general. The digitization of information and the alternative media explosion such as the social media give the opportunity to all democratic citizens to have full access to different point of views regarding an event and finally compare and contrast the facts in order to define if the propaganda of media is for the benefit of the democracy or in the name of the democracy.

Conclusion

The media system is interrelated with the society in which acts. As McQuail (2000) composed in his functionalist approach based on the “ public interest” in democratic regimes, the media system activates on the basis of the same values characterizing the rest of society, such as: justice, equality, traditional and cultural values, national ethics and the principles of

democracy. The media expected to serve society for its general benefit and this is feasible via the good practice of media relations (Baù, 2009, p. 6).

Effective source/media relation is the ability to create and make available to journalists and editors professionally formulated messages which meet the deadlines of the media involved (Motion and Weaver, 2005, p. 247). The main goal of media conglomerates is to gain access to larger audiences and make them keener of the public media, by creating and promoting attractive stories. As it is concluded of the above analysis of politics media coverage and international crisis reporting, journalists have a news values code which underpins all forms of information. This system of criteria is used to include or exclude aspects of stories and events. It is about a symbolic system as Palmer (2000, p. 62) named in which the access to news space and “below the line” publicity is negotiated between journalists and sources.

Politics and political campaigning is a large arena in which media have a leader role. As Swanson and Mancini (1996, p. 11) noted the transformation of mass media in an independent power center has direct impact on modern democratic policies. Media organizations and their strategies are linked with the institutions of democracy and vice versa the political tactics are tailored to the requirements and interests of mass media. For example, the new election campaign models are closely tied to media and especially television. This gives the opportunity to politicians to pass their messages through television in millions of voters, especially in technologically advanced democracies, where there are more forms of media interaction with the public opinion.

Additional to the close relation between the media and the sources of information is the case of war reporting as described in the previous chapter. War correspondence has always required a balance of censorship, but with the development of technology and the use of embedded reporters, the problem has grown quite complex. As Ashraf (2012) claimed the media and the military have never had an easy relationship. Free media access to the conflict zone is globally considered a threat to national security. This fact has led militaries to cobbler journalists and soldiers together, but contradictory interests have always kept this relationship vague. The media's goal is the publicity of the events while the military needs for some discretion and secrecy regarding crucial military operations and tough negotiations. Both sides need to make some compromises in order the reporting of international conflicts inform the public rather than put obstacles in the conduct of national operations. The security forces need to learn how to handle journalists professionally and responsibly while the journalists should report the true facts with discretion wherever it needs. As Taylor (2001, p. 24) underlined this is what the democratic society expects from journalists: "to tell truth, even when the whole truth can rarely be told". But, many journalists have died in their effort to give the citizens their "right to know" and this is the real challenge for modern democratic media, to find the golden line between their professional duty and the dangerous and fragile military issues.

Conclusively, the source/media relation is a multifaceted issue with more than one parameters involved. This is more obvious in democratic societies where free press and autonomous media organizations provide a variety of

information to the public. The progress of technology and the free flow of information make the access easier, while the mass media management and the new trend of “infotainment” require the adaptation of information in the new media reality. As results from the above, it is an undisputable truth that the practice of media relations plays a significant role in the successful functioning of liberal democracy. But, as Dennis and Snyder (1998, pp. 10-15) highlighted media in a democratic system must be reliable and credible and this can only be achieved with the effective independent media which promote the freedom of the press taking into account the democratic values that underpin the modern civil society such as: the individual rights, the political and social policies and the private interests as leverage for economic growth.

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