

This be in the
business of delivering
news



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This study will focus on two different forms of media. The first one is a television news program popularly known as CNN or Cable News Network and the second is a website of FoxNews. com, a site delivering online news content. Although the first one uses television and the second uses the Internet and the World-Wide-Web to deliver content to consumers it must be pointed out that these two are rivals and basically has the same goals. They also share the same passion which is to be in the business of delivering news to people all over the world. It is therefore interesting to find out that even though CNN and FoxNews.

com were both created to deliver news content there is now an emerging pattern that can be easily observed by merely looking at the programming at CNN and the layout of FoxNews. com's website. Their programming and content is based on the need to increase their ratings and to ensure the profitability of their respective organizations. CNN has a reputation for delivering news coming from all corners of the planet and one can still see the dominance of that type of content in their programming.

A regular 24-hour schedule is usually taken up by what CNN calls " World Report", current events reporting from all over the globe. However, one can also see the " Larry King Live" show and Larry King does not always interview politicians or even CEOs. He is also known to interview celebrities such as movie stars, artists, athletes, and those who gained fame through controversial means. Aside from this type of show CNN devotes at least two hours a day to talk about sports on " World Sport." On weekends there is a show called " Revealed" and again celebrities and pop icons are featured there.

A pattern is beginning to emerge. CNN was made popular by daring delivery of hard-hitting news but now it seems content to dish out light topics for a good reason. And it has something to do with ratings and advertising money. The same thing can be said about FoxNews. com. A mere glance at their website will reveal that there are twelve major tabs that users can click in order to access content and these twelve tabs are revealing because five of these should have been more at home in a magazine's website rather than in a news website. These five tabs are labeled as follows: 1) Entertainment; 2) Leisure; 3) Health; 4) SciTech; and 5) Sports. Another tab named "Opinion" can be misleading because it is not strictly about political opinion – for instance there is an article making fun of Donald Trump's hair (FoxNews. com, p. 2). It is "infotainment" at its best.

Bottom-Line

It can be simply explained as the consequence of the law of supply and demand. Viewers and consumers of online content will tune in a lot longer and click more web pages if the content has the right mix of "infotainment" and not just straight and plain news. This is a new mentality that news companies such as CNN and Fox has to deal with. The reason of course is the need to increase ratings for CNN and online traffic to FoxNews. com.

This was clearly explained by one researcher who said that in the minds of executives without good ratings there are no good profits (Anderson, p. 156). The delivery of news has now been reduced to a numbers game direly related to advertisers and investors needs as well as the demand of the general public. This is nothing new as early as the 1990s, researchers

discovered that new stories were being framed to be dramatic and entertaining and thus the policy-relevant aspects of the news were often overshadowed (Thussu, p. 27).

This is not a good thing considering the ability of mass media to influence policy-making and its power to move people to action by simply focusing the spotlight on certain issues. This new phenomenon was succinctly explained by one researcher who said, “ Over the past two decades the content of news in daily papers, television newscasts, and magazines has shifted from substantial levels of reporting on government activities and policy problems to an increasing proportion of soft news features that resemble entertainment formulas more than the kind of hard information that citizens might use in grasping the political events that affect their lives” (Kaid, p. 283). But again, the eyes of the executives are on the bottom-line.

Infotainment

A few months ago CNN and Larry King Live went to Akron, Ohio to interview not the mayor, the governor or even the biggest employer in that corner of the globe. Instead, the resources of Larry King Live and CNN were needed to interview a basketball player.

He is no ordinary basketball player though, he is a super-athlete named LeBron James. However, he was not on the verge of retiring, did not commit a heinous crime or announced the discovery of something that was earth-shaking that he deserved that level of attention especially from someone with the caliber of Larry King. And yet they went. There were other more important topics to discuss.

Larry King's talent could have been used to increase awareness of a particular issue. Since the host of the show had to go to all the trouble of leaving the comfort of his home and travel long distance to a town in Ohio it would have been better if the purpose of the visit was to help the poor children of Ohio or the homeless families forced to live on the streets or even the need for more funding to improve education in the said city but that was not the main goal and the main result of the interview. Nevertheless, the people who watched the show were entertained and they knew more about Lebron James. In the FoxNews website one can see the words " news" and " fair and balanced" emblazoned in the logo.

Thus, it is interesting what one can find if they would click the " entertainment" tab - will there be news-worthy material in it? But those who did click on this tab will discover the headline: " Oprah Gives Entire Studio Audience 8-Day Australian Vacation." It is clear that this is not news and so what is it doing in a website that was supposed to deliver substantial news that will help in policy-making and help in discussing crucial issues faced by the nation today? This is a good argument but at the same it has to be pointed out that many will want to read why Oprah gave them eight days of vacation to Australia. In the middle portion of the website there is a series of images containing the faces of celebrities like Lady Gaga with her bright-colored hair and Ana Kournikova in a swim suit. This is already interesting because Fox News.

com is now on the verge of copying a formula usually reserved for tabloids. But FoxNews. com is not yet finished on the far right of the said picture gallery one can find the images of Jesse James the ex-husband of Sandra
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Bullock and TV star David Duchovny with the title “ The Guide to Sex Addiction.” It is easy to understand why it was placed there, the organization knew that people will click on these images to know more.

Conclusion

CNN and FoxNews. com it seems are lost when it comes to long held standards about journalism and the need to bring out relevant and important information to the general public. This may have been the case when CNN aired a one-hour special featuring Lebron James and why FoxNews. com is increasingly moving towards tabloid type of reporting. CNN and FoxNews. com did evolve but it is not because they have forgotten the standards.

These media conglomerates had to change because they knew what was at stake. They are driven by the need to make money because if they cannot produce it then they will have to disappear. There is a need to discuss more important issues but investors and advertising money coming in, CNN and FoxNews will cease to exist.

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