

# Media

## Introduction

The issue about media reporting has been a matter that has been on discussion among organizations, groups and individuals in the society. The main topic of discussion has been whether the media reports fairly, whether it reports valid, truthful and relevant information or whether it creates the information that it reports. Some organizations have criticized the media of giving false information about certain issues while some organizations and groups have praised the media on the reports that it gives about certain issues. All these arguments crop up from the freedom that the media enjoys. This paper explores the fairness with which the media reports.

## Discussion

The media all over the world does not only report fairly but at times it creates news and gives biased information. The lack of fairness in reporting is well understood if we look clearly into the media bias. Media bias refers to a situation where journalists and news producers involved in mass media become prejudiced in the selection and production of the issues and stories that should be reported to the public and how they are brought out. Bias in the media means unfairness that interferes with the standards of journalism and the mass media practice at large (Schaefer and Thomas, 168)

The unfairness experienced in media reporting takes different forms. There is the advertising bias, corporate bias, mainstream bias, sensational bias. Unfairness in media reporting on advertisements occurs when journalists report stories and information that is meant to please advertisers. Thus the information reported may not be truthful after all. The journalists may decide to pick information and modify it not on its truth or factual basis but in order to capture the advertiser's wants and needs. This may be because the media involved may want to attract advertising jobs from those advertisers next time they want to advertise (Pippa, 121).

According to Pippa, corporate unfairness comes when the media decides to report stories that are selected to please the owners of the media. This may be done in order to secure their jobs. The journalists may be afraid that if they tell the actual truth that affects their bosses in the negative way they may lose their jobs. The fact that they fear being sacked makes them to be unfair in order to please the owners of the media. Unfairness may also result from pressure from the corporate owners of the media houses in order to make the image of their media house appear good.

Mainstream unfairness refers to media prejudice where journalists report what other journalists are reporting. It does not necessarily have to be true. The information may be all about rumors. In this journalists avoid stories and information that tends to offend people. Thus journalists may decide to create stories and news that will please the public and do away with information that may offend people even though it may be factual. Some journalists practice sensationalistic prejudice (Ruschmann, 50). They report information that favors exceptionality over ordinary issues. They bring out impressions that extraordinary events are more common than ordinary events.

Other forms of media unfairness include reporting news that either favors or attacks races, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, or ethnic groups. Journalists' coverage of controversial issues in

most instances reflects their own attitudes, beliefs and view points. It also reflects their political ideologies (Sloan and Mackay, 5)

A public opinion study carried out by the program on international policy attitudes showed some linkage between news agencies and sources and the misconceptions that they had on the Iraq war. This study was carried out in America and citizens were asked whether they agreed with the statements that news agencies gave on the Iraq war. The study showed that higher numbers of people especially those who watched fox news had some mistaken belief about the Iraq war. The fox news was found to have reported misleading information about the Iraq war. Thus people ended up believing what the news agency had reported to them (Artwick, 67)

Ricardo Puglisi of the Massachusetts institute of technology looked at the choices of editorial news of the New York Times magazine from 1946-1997. He found out that the paper portrayed some partisanship favoring democrats. He found out that the times disposed information about democratic issues for example on civil rights, labor and social welfare and health care systems but only if the president was a member of the republican party. Thus the paper portrayed the republican president as being not able to address those issues yet they knew that the democrats were better placed to do that because of their political convictions. This openly showed the preference of the New York Times to the democrats (Reich, 24).

The news agencies and journalists have been found to report their own national and ethnic view points (Schaefer and Thomas, 532). The western media for example has been on criticism by the rest of the world as being inclined to pro westernism particularly when it comes to certain political, economic and social issues. For a long time the western media portrayed the African continent as being barbaric, underdeveloped, uneducated and so much backward. The African continent was portrayed as a continent that housed diseases and poverty. The western media was inclined much more on the problematic side of the African continent. The positive issues that the African continent had were covered by the negative issues as portrayed by the western media.

The western media also portrayed countries in the Middle East as war prone areas. The media created fear among people. People came to believe that almost all areas in the Middle East were under war each and every time which was not the case. The media was unfair because as much as there exists war in some countries of the Middle East, there are some other areas that are very peaceful and worth residing. Thus the western media portrayed a bad picture of the other continents (Dye, 68). When it comes to the west, the media reported mostly of the positive things and issues that went on. The media reported about the economic and technological development and boom, it reported of the improved health care systems, the social welfare, security and political view points and ideologies.

The negative issues and events were given little attention thus portraying the west as a perfect world. It is true that the west is much developed and better off than the rest of the world but the fact that the media portrays the positive sides of one continent and gets inclined on the negative sides of another continent does not show fairness in news and information reporting.

News reporting has been seen as a result of personal judgment which means that news are created and not reported in most cases. This has been confirmed by the fact that different news rooms and journalists have been found to report different versions of the same story. Some journalists in the media can report news based on the real and factual information that is based on what they experienced first handedly (University of Michigan., 381).

This may carry their subjective feelings and view points of what they saw resulting in different information from the same event. This is made even more complicated when other journalists form their reports based on information that was rumored to them or information that they got from second hand sources. The truth part of the information that journalists get and report may be distorted because second hand sources are not always very accurate. News reporting also entails the interpretation of the information that a person said. This complicates the whole notion of media fairness. In some instances, what people say is not always what they mean and the interpretation of another person`s utterances may be distorted because one may not understand what the person wanted to bring out (Kishan and Thussu, 155).

Journalists are human beings like other people and although they are trained on how and what to report, mistakes are not an exception for them. They are bound to get wrong interpretations of what a person said. If this happens then the journalist is more likely to report information that is incorrect and inaccurate. Because of this the journalist will have created the information that he or she reports and thus the reporting as a whole will be unfair to the person that gave the information and to the general public who are the consumers of media reporting.

David Murray states that newsworthy stories and information are sometimes ignored by the media. If this is the case then it means that unworthy news sometimes become headlines when reporting news. If this is the case then it means that news reporting is not always fair and it is a matter of creation of news rather than getting what is factual (Reich, 119).

The media fraternity embraces the idea that it should not report news that will agitate the public. For instance in ethnic violence stories, the media is not expected to report and show pictures of people being killed by other people from other political or ethnic affiliations. This is to discourage any further violence from the groups that may want to revenge. Although this might be for humanity`s sake it portrays media`s unfairness. It means that the media will be inclined not to report factual news and instead opt to keep the truth as a secret or decide to give information that is not true about the situation. This may work in favor of one side bringing media fairness and reporting of factual news to questionable standards (Artwick, 97).

The media has also been accused of giving false information about real estate. As Bernice Ross comments, the media was seen to be misusing the foreclosure data on real estate. The misuse of data diverges from the reality making the misleading information have a self fulfilling effect on media reporting that creates results that are non existent.

Globally, research has indicated that the media is still sexist in its reporting of information. Most findings indicate that news coverage and reporting favors men than women. The global media monitoring project research indicated that nearly 76 percent of the people that make up the news which is reported are men. This is the case especially when it comes to issues concerning politics. This figure cuts across the whole world and different cultures (Reich, 4).

The media tends to follow up the male politicians and their activities mostly than it does when it comes to female politicians. Thus the media has been speculated to be sexist. It favors the male gender as opposed to female gender. In issues touching on morality, the media has been observed to favor men to women. In prostitution and promiscuity, the media reports women who engage in it to be decadent morally than the men who go for their services. Women who engage in lesbianism are portrayed by the media to be doing the wrong thing compared to gay men. (Kishan and Thussu, 67).

In an interview with Graeme Wilson, he stated that the media is a channel through which nations can have dialogue with its people. However this is challenged by instances where news are reported and published without verification of its factual content. He stated that he was surprised with some important news not being included in the news that is reported to the public. He stated that he had instances where he read or heard information that had only one side of the whole story. In the interview he avowed that the practice where reporters do not check the factual base of their stories creates a lot of questions on media fairness in reporting (Murray, Schwartz and Lichter, 120).

Wilson encouraged the journalists not to leave readers or the audience with questions but instead take the questions themselves and develop the best before reporting. He emphasized on the importance of cross checking news and information with alternative sources, other view points and information in order to ensure that they report factual information and do not make up irrelevant news.

## **Conclusion**

Although the media had faced criticism over its unfairness in reporting and creation of information, it has also had a share of fair reporting and relaying of truthful and factual information to the public. The media has helped inform people of what is taking place around them and in the entire world. This has provided considerable benefit to people. People have had the advantage of knowing things such as outbreaks of contagious diseases and are able to protect themselves from that.

The media has helped warn people of dangerous events such as floods, earth quakes and drought. It has also helped in informing people of war attacks enabling people to get the necessary help. The media has played an important role in informing people of political, social and economic issues enabling them to make informed choices and decisions. It has been an important influence in encouraging peace keeping missions and strategies urging people to love and respect one another despite their diverse differences. What needs to be done is to ensure that the media respects the freedom it has been given and avoid succumbing to any kind of pressure whatsoever. Journalists and other people in the media fraternity should ensure that they report factual information based on more consultations, clarifications and considering various view points on certain issues. The media should ensure that it does not mislead the public because most people depend on it for important information. The journalists should respect their code of ethics and professional guidelines but not subjectivity.

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