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THE DEATH OF THE FOURTH ESTATE: CORPORATE MEDIA AND NEWS PRODUCTION

The notion of the fourth estate is the ideological foundation of journalism in the West. It implies that journalism is something that fulfils and supports the public interest, and acts as an independent check and balance against the excesses of the state. However, changes in the news production cycle and process and ownership have seen the destruction of the fourth estate in practice. This paper accounts for some of the reasons why the fourth estate cannot be considered as being a functioning mechanism in the current times.

Key words: fourth estate, journalism, news, Western media, corporate media, public relations, decline of journalism.

Introduction

The notion of the fourth estate is critical to Western journalism and forms a cornerstone of the espoused guiding ideology. As such, this places journalism and news as critical elements in society by informing and protecting the public interest. This is the ideal setting for the way journalism and news should be formed and their roles in society. However, currently the ideal is very far from being a reality. It is not uncommon to hear academics say that the fourth estate is dead or at least on life support.

It is the intention of this article to investigate the 'ideal' nature of journalism and news within a liberal media system. Then to study those elements that have a tendency to undermine those ideal values and states of being. What are the internal transformations within the news production system of mass media outlets that harm or affect their ability to discharge their fourth estate role? Most of the cases drawn for this article are from the English language and Anglo-Saxon dominated information environments.

As an initial point of departure, the nature and role of journalism and news are discussed. This shifts to the significance of historical key driving ideological factors that shaped and acted upon journalism in the West. The next section shall discuss those factors that have had an adverse impact upon the 'sacred' values that are enshrined in the notion of the fourth estate and journalism in its ideal profession. The final point to be discussed is the consequences for mass media and journalists for straying from their historically defined path and role in society.

Journalism: What is in a Word?

The exact meaning of words are potentially a very delicate, contested and at times, divisive. This relates to their properties to convey or usurp legitimacy or to give a sense of credibility or to influence the way an intended audience is to think

and react. What is 'legitimate' and 'common knowledge' for one group may not be so for another. Hence conflict may arise over the precise definition and therefore meaning of words. Denis McQuail [25, 561] gives a clear definition of journalism.

Literally taken, this refers to the product or the work of professional 'news people'. As product it typically means informational reports of recent or current events of interest to the public. In this sense, journalism is another word for 'news', with its many typical and familiar features, especially the aim of being up to date, relevant, credible and interesting to a chosen audience.

A number of points emerge from McQuail's definition, which entangle journalism and news production. One of the major points is that journalism is to serve public interest with accurate, relevant and reliable information. These very points are also stressed by other authors, such as Ettema and Glasser [12], Berry [7], Fitzgerald and Housley [14] and Allan [2]. The importance of journalism and the written word was stressed by Walter Lippmann [22], when he argues that the public learn about politics and society not necessarily from their own experience, but more likely by words written by others.

However, when news production and journalism are not objective and serving the public interest, it can be a vehicle for influencing target publics. The situation that transpires in this case is that hidden select interests are served by the power, real or imagined, of the mass media. Herman and Chomsky [18] discuss the role of mass media in creating a desired effect through influencing public opinion within the frame of their propaganda model. Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston [6] provide a number of case studies, including building the case for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, when the mass media failed to protect public interest and worked actively for a narrow set of political and economic interests. One of the threats identified in terms of narrowing the pluralism of views and opinions is the concentration of mass media ownership into fewer and often corporate hands that tends to aid the control of news flows [4, 11].

Historical Backgrounds of Western Journalism

In the Western ideological setting of journalism, the concept of the Fourth Estate is rhetorically held as being sacred and a driving force of journalism. In the late 18th Century, Edmund Burke coined the term Fourth Estate: "in this model the journalistic media are also watchdogs, comprising in their collective function a 'fourth estate': an independent institutional source of political and cultural power which monitors and scrutinises the actions of the powerful in other spheres" [24, 19–20]. This gives journalism and journalists a sense of legitimacy and moral ascendancy in society.

In keeping with their 'sacred' role Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel [21, 5–6] list the elements of journalism, which gives a utopian understanding of what journalism should look like from the Western understanding of its development.

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth
2. Its first loyalty is to the citizens
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification

4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion
9. Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience
10. Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news

The journalists assumption that in order to remain 'objective' there needs to be some kind of emotional distance or remoteness from the event, may actually prove to be an additional disadvantage on occasion too. This form of self-imposed isolation may also incur some kind of remoteness from grassroots issue concerns and attitudes to those issues, which in effect can isolate a media outlet from its consumer base (readers, listeners and viewers). A lack of empathy on the part of the journalist towards the plight of those being covered in the news (in case of some sort of emergency, disaster or crisis) may be perceived by the community as well. Thereby they are erecting a wall between professional ethics on the one hand and basic human emotions on the other.

How journalists see their professional mission also has an impact on the way they set about engaging in their work. The mass media is the source from which the public 'experiences' events that occur remotely, in a physical sense from their lives, and which they may not normally witness otherwise. If the ability to gain information on an event is difficult to source, for any number of reasons, an impact is exerted by the nature (or lack) of information that is acquired. The mass media, especially in the late 20th century, have come to be viewed as being an all-powerful influence on society.

"As the late twentieth century history of moral panics and food scares demonstrates, the journalistic media have become steadily more important as 'reality defining' institutions. They have become synonymous with the public sphere — that intermediate zone between governors and the governed where public opinion is formed and reformed. The journalistic media are the main source of our information about politics and public affairs in general as well as setting the agenda. Politicians and public organisations — social actors in general — have gradually come to understand this and adapt their organisations and practices accordingly" [24, 55].

This potential power has not gone unnoticed by those seeking to influence the news content and agenda. In the United States one of the noted trends that are occurring is the establishment (bankrolling) of start-up news organisations around the country by conservative groups. These news organisations are aggressive in their coverage of government and politics, which comes precisely at the time when newspapers are cutting back their statehouse bureaus. The new news organisations almost exclusively use the internet and appear (visually) like traditional news media outlets. On the political level, this type of journalism is viewed with scepticism and organisations that issue press credentials for statehouse reporters have denied some of the outlets membership. This decision is motivated by citing their links to pressure groups [26].

Death of the Fourth Estate

An important point that is brought out in this quote is the aspect that mass media can act as a 'bridge' between the authorities and the public. The exact way that the mass media goes about acting as a 'bridge' is determined by a number of different factors. Those who bring the public the news are an important factor in the news production cycle. Journalists are influenced by the environment in which they work, the influences being drawn from the nature of their profession, their workplace and an individual journalist's particular world view. Brian McNair highlighted the importance of journalists in the frame of the nature of the effects upon communication.

"Journalism, therefore, like any other narrative which is the work of human agency, is essentially ideological – a communicative vehicle for the transmission to an audience (intentionally or otherwise) not just of facts but of the assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and values of its maker(s), drawn from and expressive of a particular world-view" [24, 6].

The effect of the human element upon the news production process is an important one to consider, and it is likely to ensure that the utopian ideal of 'truly' objective news is unlikely to be reached. Therefore a question that should be asked is high quality news needed in order for a citizen to be adequately informed and to make sound judgements based upon that information? If this good quality news is absent from mass media, does this mean that this adversely affects the public from making the appropriate decisions?

A number of studies have shown that newspaper content has serious concerns about its quality. The University of Technology in Sydney, Australia conducted a six month survey of content of ten newspapers, seven of which were owned by Rupert Murdoch's *News Corporation*. The aim of the study was to gauge the level that Australia's major newspapers relied on PR to generate stories. Some 2203 articles were analysed over a five day period.

- Nearly 55 per cent of the stories were initiated by public relations;
- More than 24 per cent of stories "had no significant extra perspective, source or content added by reporters";
- 70 per cent of the Daily Telegraph (Murdoch owned) stories were PR driven, the worst performer;
- 42 per cent of the Sydney Morning Herald (Fairfax) content was PR driven, the best performer [34].

These findings, albeit for a period of one week only, reveal a dismal performance of Australian newspaper journalism, some relying heavily on sources that have a vested interest. This raises an important point and question, is this case an isolated one? Other studies of this nature have been conducted. One of them was done by Nick Davies of Cardiff University (in research for his book *Flat Earth News* from 2008). The origins of some 2000 UK news stories from five newspapers were surveyed by Davies and his team.

- 12 per cent of stories were wholly composed of material researched by reporters;
- 8 per cent of stories, the origin was not certain;

- 80 per cent of stories were found to be wholly, mainly or partially written from second hand material, provided by news agencies or the PR industry;
- 12 per cent of news stories had evidence of the facts being thoroughly checked [34].

These studies show that there is a likelihood that the poor standards of journalism are not isolated cases, which paints a worrying picture in terms of the role being played by mass media in society. One line of argument exists that if there is at least some access to good quality information, and blanket coverage of poor information does not exist, the public should still be able to make well-informed decisions [9, 17, 20]. However, this line of thinking implies that the audience in question possesses a sufficient degree of media literacy to know when the quality of news is poor and where to look for alternative (good quality) sources.

It is not just the use and reliance on information provided by PR agencies and other sources that have a vested interest in releasing that particular information. There is an increasing tendency to rely on the use of a narrow group of pundits in order to generate opinions. However, in doing this the effect is that mass media tends to generate more opinions than facts. Jeri Karcey, a Republican from Ashland (Oregon) characterised the problem further down the news production track. “It is never what they are saying that is the problem. It is what they are not saying. That is where the lack of balance comes in. It is distortion by omission” [1]. Thus the issue of censorship through omitting alternative views and information may also be a problem, although a less obvious one to an external observer.

Within the traditions of the Western Liberal Press theory is the idea of the Fourth Estate, which is meant to (ideally) be the check and balance of the executive, legislative and judicial power. However, there is a rich supply of cases that demonstrate that those checks and balances are replaced by collusion between key figures in the mass media and politics. One of the influential media figures is Roger Ailes, the head of *Fox News*, which is part of Rupert Murdoch’s *News Corporation*. In an interview with *The New York Times Magazine* in 2008, President Barack Obama said that the so-called Fox Effect had cost him two to three points in the polls. In another case, a Republican candidate in the 23rd Congressional District in upstate New York withdrew after an independent candidate was endorsed by *Fox News* [8]. This demonstrates the potential of those in the mass media to use its potential to shape the political landscape, according to their particular tastes and interests.

One of the assumptions to be held is that the corporate owners of mass media assets are much more interested in money (profit making) than in ideology. However, this is not necessarily the case, especially when the long-term perspective is considered over the short-term one. Rupert Murdoch of News Corporation has supported a number of leading political figures, including Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, helping in shaping opinion and political ideas in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States.

Murdoch’s media assets supported free market thinking, and in the past newspapers such as the *New York Post*, *London Times* and *The Australian* lost millions of dollars (US\$) in supporting this position. He was once attributed to having we said that

those in the media business are “ruled by ideas”. *The Weekly Standard*, like its owner Rupert Murdoch, was a strong supporter of President G. W. Bush and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The magazine received an annual subsidy of US\$1 million per year (corporation revenue was US\$32 billion), and Murdoch’s speech writer, Bill McGurn was also Bush’s chief speech writer [23]. This situation demonstrates that a union between politics, business and media is not only feasible, but a reality.

The above mentioned situation has a flow on effect on the public’s consumption of mass media output. A survey in 2010 found that 92 per cent of Americans get their daily news from multiple sources. The Project for Excellence in Journalism report rated the internet as the third most popular news medium. Local and national television topped the list, newspapers and radio broadcasts trailed the internet. Some 59 per cent of respondents get their news from both on-line and off-line sources. Only seven per cent relied solely on either the internet or local television as their news source. Interestingly enough, some 69 per cent of respondents consider it their social or civic obligation to get the news. This survey also found an attitude towards news organisations. 63 per cent consider that news organisations do a good job covering subjects that matter. However, 72 per cent think that news sources today are biased in their coverage [28].

Media outlets are beginning to position themselves in order to adapt to the new age of news gathering and production. Among the outlets that have announced structural and procedural changes designed to evolve to the new news environment is AOL. In December 2009 AOL launched *Seed.com*, which is aimed at grooming freelance writers to cover a diverse range of subjects and interests. Saul Hansell, Programming Director at *Seed* said that “AOL is repositioning itself as a news and information company” [9]. The motivation for using this particular model of operation seems to be its cost effective means (as opposed to the establishment of an off-line/traditional media operation) of entering the news business.

The ability of a frank and open debate is for the most part not possible in the mainstream mass media. There is a tendency to ‘weed-out’ views that do not conform to the media outlet in question. To illustrate this point I shall use an example from Sweden. In terms of freedom of speech and freedom of press, Sweden consistently ranks in the top countries [31]. This means that there is little or no state interference in the content of the mass media.

Yet censorship still does exist. A debate article appeared in the Swedish newspaper *Expressen* [13], which concerned the Latvian economic crisis and the Swedish bank *Swedbank*. Perhaps the most interesting part of this article is the reader comments. Some of which included (paraphrased): Sweden had given Latvia a firm lesson in capitalism, that Latvians were irresponsible and another comment that all three Baltic States should be expelled from the European Union. I wrote a comment that pointed that Sweden is not really in a position to be giving lessons in capitalism, that *Swedbank* is facing a very difficult period in its eastern markets (such as Latvia and Ukraine), and spending beyond one’s means is far from a solely Latvian phenomenon. This was posted, but within 24 hours was removed. This hints at the role in censorship that is played by the mass media themselves, in a country where freedom of speech is supposedly cherished.

However, even within the EU member states there have been a number of attempts by governments to muzzle free speech, at times this is simultaneously running with the rhetoric of nourishing the idea of freedom. A number of different mechanisms are being considered or tried to 'reign in' troublesome journalists. A selected list of some of these means include:

– Just prior to assuming the rotating EU presidency in 2011, the Hungarian government introduced a new media law that greatly increased state powers in monitoring and penalising the media. This received heavy criticism from fellow EU member states, which is rare. The law has been slightly revised, but is still heavily criticised [20].

– Romanian broadcast laws have been amended six times in the last year, with up to 40 per cent of broadcast time reserved for the national news agency. The parliament is also debating the imposition of annual psychiatric controls for journalists.

– In France a fall in readership and a recent wave of newspaper/TV takeovers has been said to threaten the independence of some of the country's most established media outlets. *Le Monde* also accused the French presidency of ordering counter-intelligence agents the source that leaked information to the newspaper.

– The law restricting media ownership concentration in Italy is due to expire, which would allow the embattled Prime Minister Berlusconi to increase his media empire.

– The Bulgarian government is considering introducing a new media law. There has also been widespread wiretapping of journalists, and an improper investigation of a recent bomb explosion at the headquarters of the magazine *Galeria* in Sofia [35].

The Fourth Estate and the Crisis of Legitimacy

Concern over the decline in the standards of journalism has reached the point in the European Union (EU) when the European Federation of Journalists (representing unions in 24 countries) has called for the EU to back journalism as a 'public good.' Arne König, the President of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) characterised the 'spiral of decline' as being due to economic factors. He sees the decline as being a significant threat. "A toxic mix of editorial cuts, precarious working conditions and unethical journalism has created a spiral of decline for media and democracy in Europe." The hardest hit sectors of journalism due to the economic hard times are editing, investigative and specialist news reporting. The union has gone as far as to call for protection and funding from the EU, putting part of the blame with policy makers. Secretary General of the EFJ stated that "EU policy makers have not done enough to protect standards, to protect ethical journalism" [30]. However, this raises a number of questions on the relationship between the state and the mass media when public funding of private business is proposed. Not the least of which is editorial independence of the mass media versus journalistic transparency and accountability to the European taxpayer.

Some two years prior to this event, on 3 October 2008 the Council of Europe past Resolution 1636 on indicators for media in a democracy. Resolution 1636 puts a focus on the role of freedom of information and expression in the media being

a crucial element for democracy. It is stated in 1636 that “public participation in the democratic decision-making process requires that the public is well-informed and has the possibility of freely discussing different opinions.” There is a list of some 27 basic principles in the document. The third principle states that “media ownership and economic influence over media must be made transparent” [10]. This implies that journalism is in serious crisis, especially regarding its capacity to act as an effective and functioning Fourth Estate, otherwise there would be no need for such a proposal to be lobbied. Interestingly, the links between the crisis of journalism and the crisis of democracy being interwoven is not a new one. Walter Lippmann [22, 5] wrote about the same problem over 90 years ago!

Increasingly they (the public) are baffled because the facts are not available; they are wondering whether government by consent can survive at a time when the manufacture of consent is an unregulated private enterprise. For in an exact sense the present crisis of Western democracy is a crisis in journalism.

Journalists still stick to their mantra as being a fourth estate, and therefore entitled to certain rights and privileges as the public guardian. However, their work that is broadcast and published seems to undermine this notion that they are an independent monitor of power. One need only look at the reader comments on corporate mass media material that has been published on the internet to understand the public’s distrust and suspicion of journalism. Various polls and reports back up this observation.

“More evidence of public disapproval concerning Europe’s media in general is contained in a poll published in early 2008 by Comres. It polled a range of people working in public affairs, and found that 73 % of respondents believed that journalists regularly sensationalise issues rather than reporting them for their inherent worth. As many as 22 % also said they trusted journalists «not at all»” [19].

This is a worrying figure for a profession that projects its image as a guardian of public interest, when public trust is this low in them as a profession. Other polls and surveys tend to support a low level of trust in journalists, which is decreasing over time. *YouGov* has been conducting surveys for Prospect Magazine since 2003, which have shown a remarkable slide in trust across the types of media (TV and newspapers). For instance, trust in ITV journalists fell from over 80 per cent in 2003 to 33 per cent in 2010. The trust in BBC journalists dropped from 81–60 per cent over the same period. The Times, Daily Telegraph and the Guardian lost 24 points over this period. The Sun, Daily Mirror and Daily Star fell from 14–10 per cent [16]. This drop has occurred under circumstances of ‘normal’ conditions, the effect of an extraordinary event can exercise a very powerful effect upon the issue of public trust that is linked to perception of an event. The News of the World hacking scandal in the UK saw a drop in the trust of national newspapers, broadsheet and tabloid, by 25 points.

“The public, however, do not appear to have made this distinction. Trust in tabloid journalists (asked by referring to ‘journalist in newspapers such as The Sun, The Mirror or the Daily Star’) has similarly fallen by around a quarter, although as this is from a much, much lower starting point the absolute change is relatively small” [32].

Although this particular story was carried by a broadsheet newspaper, exposing the misdeeds of tabloid newspaper, all newspapers suffered as a result of the scandal.

There seems to be, as is noted in the quoted text, a lack of distinction or differentiation between different styles of journalism, even within the relatively narrow strata of media as national newspapers. But does a lack of trust in journalists equate to a lack of trust in media and news?

A 2006 Trust in the Media poll revealed among the ten countries surveyed (UK, USA, Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia and South Korea) that people tended to trust media more than their governments, with the exceptions of the UK and USA. Of the 10230 adults interviewed, one in four (28 per cent) had abandoned a media source over the last year after losing trust in its content. Some 57 per cent also believed that the government interfered too much with the media. Trust in media in the UK had increased from 29 per cent in 2002 to 47 per cent in 2006 [5].

In the US there has been a gradual downward trend in public trust in the media. Some 57 per cent of respondents say that they have little or no trust in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately and fairly. The main concern/complaint was that media were considered as being too liberal (48 per cent). 63 per cent of respondents perceived a bias of some sort [27]. The annual Pew Centre poll in 2011 revealed a series of negative perceptions about journalists.

- 72 per cent believe that journalists try to cover up their mistakes when they get something wrong.

- 57 per cent believe that journalists are professional.

- 68 per cent think that they care about the quality of their work.

- 63 per cent believe reporters are “politically biased in their reporting.”

But seemingly paradoxically there is a reasonable level of trust in the news, even if journalists are not trusted.

- 69 per cent said that they trust information in local media outlets a lot or some.

- 59 per cent said that they have a lot or some trust in national media outlets [3].

The poll shows an interesting result insofar as people seem to trust information appearing in media outlets, but not the people that produced that news. A number of reasons and excuses have been set forth to try and explain some of the apparent failings of the mass media. For example, Nik Gowing [15] places the blame on ‘the tyranny’ of deadlines. That information flows are shifting much faster currently than ever before, added to this is the competition to be the first to break the story. This is to be fast, but not necessarily accurate.

However, other factors are also at play. Not least of which is how news should be produced, the nature and format of it. Previously, news was considered to serve to inform the public to enable them to make informed decisions. This entailed an analytical approach and format to explaining the pros and cons of the subject or object at hand. Under the current conditions this has shifted to a more entertaining format, infotainment, in order to keep the news consumer tuned in. But this has the effect of making the format descriptive and not suitable for creating the environment where informed decisions can be made [33, 1].

Conclusion

Traditional mass media have been undergoing a number of fundamental changes in the way that they operate as a business and in the production of news [29]. The concentration of mass media ownership and changes in the production of news (including the use of the infotainment format) does little in the way of protecting public interest. What may be uttered rhetorically by journalists as being in the public interest can in fact be remote from the actual situation. Underlying interests need to be taken into account, hence the lobbying and trying to get the EU to declare journalism as a public good, thereby bringing a greater sense of transparency and accountability is particularly revealing about the current absence of these aspects.

This gap between the idealised role and goals of journalism and the actual situation are growing, which may account for the exodus of subscribers to mass media products. There is an increasing gulf between what the public expect from journalism and what they receive. This has left many in the mass media industry questioning why this trend increases each year, in terms of traditional mass media products losing their market share, but without really questioning if it is something linked to the increasingly alienation from the public's concerns and interests.

The list of elements of journalism by Kovach and Rosenstiel seems to be a historical note now, especially judging by the manner and means in which news is currently produced by the corporate press. This transformation for the worst seems to be a reflection of changes in the news production process that has a faster pace and is now 24/7. Given the increased competition among news media, the temptation is to be first to break the story for some perceived temporary market advantage. There is also evidence that news is also selected or omitted based upon the interests of the corporate owners, who may have close ties to the political establishment. These situations serve to undermine the basis of accurate and informative news that is designed to make a better informed citizen who is more capable of making good decisions. Instead the situation suggests that mass media are serving the role of influencers of public opinion, not to serve the interests of the public, but a narrow few in the elite political and business circles.

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КОНЧИНА «ЧЕТВЕРТОЙ ВЛАСТИ»: СМИ И СОЗДАНИЕ НОВОСТЕЙ

Одно из главенствующих суждений, бытующих на Западе в отношении журналистики, сводится к тому, что она противостоит злоупотреблениям со стороны исполнительной и законодательной власти, а также несовершенств правовой системы. Принято считать, что СМИ являются так называемой «четвертой властью», которая обеспечивает выражение общественного интереса, предоставляя объективную информацию. И хотя само словосочетание «четвертая власть» используется повсеместно как образ, бытует мнение, что журналисты все-таки способны обеспечить законность и гражданские права своих граждан.

Журналистика между тем основывается на целом ряде обязательных и устойчивых правил. Одно из них сводится к тому, чтобы фиксировать социально значимые ситуации и проблемы в жизни общества. Однако в последние десятилетия происходило последовательное снижение этой профессиональной планки.

Кризисное состояние профессии обнаруживало себя и много раньше (о чем писал У. Липпман в своей книге «Общественное мнение» еще в 1920-е гг.), вместе с тем современные СМИ, похоже, уже окончательно перестают быть «стражами» общественных интересов.

В настоящее время существуют организации и отдельные люди, которые злоупотребляют возможностями СМИ, видя в них источники удовлетворения не общественно значимых, а в первую очередь личных интересов. Они воспринимают СМИ и как инструменты реализации определенной политики. Эту тенденцию подмечают сегодня многие исследователи массмедиа. Примером тому становятся США: официальные лица этой страны сегодня нередко «эксплуатируют» СМИ с целью проведения определенной политики, в действительности отстраненной от общественных интересов.

Можно отметить целый ряд факторов, способствовавших утрате независимости журналистики в западных странах. Один из них определяется концентрацией СМИ в руках все меньшего числа собственников. Это снижает уровень плюрализма, поскольку СМИ вынуждены отображать только те взгляды, которые не расходятся со взглядами их владельцев. Отмеченная ситуация приводит к тому, что массовая информация становится ангажированной и выражает узкополитические интересы. Потребности общества, таким образом, становятся подчиненными потребностям политической и экономической элиты.

Отсюда и сами СМИ перестают быть источниками взвешенных и объективных сообщений, что существенно меняет саму природу информационного процесса. При этом медиакорпорации сегодня озабочены извлечением прибыли, что приводит к снижению журналистских стандартов в процессе распространения массовой информации. К этому можно добавить и частое стремление современных СМИ пользоваться пресс-релизами как основными источниками для формирования своей информационной политики. Одновременно новости все чаще носят развлекательный, нежели информативный характер. В складывающихся условиях массовая информация все меньше претендует на то, чтобы быть основой для принятия обществом взвешенных решений.

В итоге СМИ перестают быть источником создания и распространения «общественного блага». Нельзя сказать, будто они совсем перестают влиять на людей, но вписанные в корпоративные интересы СМИ утрачивают свое моральное кредо — предоставлять социально ориентированную информацию и бороться за торжество истины. Правда, еще остается небольшое число интернет-СМИ, которым свойствен более взвешенный подход к раскрытию фактов и явлений жизни (такие, как Media Lens, News Unspun, PR Watch и т. д.). И это позволяет утверждать, что информационный мир, несмотря ни на что, пока остается разнообразным.

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