

NEWS MEDIA

ABSTRACT: American journalism is in the midst of a transition unlike any it has experienced in the 225-year history of the republic. The news industry today is facing the proliferation of distribution of outlets, fragmentation and shifting demographics of the audiences, and an increased emphasis on profit making. Industry executives have not responded well to these challenges, cutting their reporting and editorial staffs, closing foreign bureaus, and shifting the content of their product away from hard news toward more entertainment-related news and sensationalism. On the positive side, media executives are exploring new ways to make their news operations more efficient through investment in technology and by acquiring new media outlets and consolidating news production.

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PLACES VISITED

Domestic:

ABC News, New York, NY; Washington, DC
America Online, Reston, VA
Armed Forces Journal International, Washington, DC
Associated Press, Washington, DC; New York, NY
Bloomberg News, New York, NY
Chief of Public Affairs, US Navy, Washington DC
Columbia University, Graduate School of Journalism, New York, NY
Foreign Press Center, Washington, DC
Fox News, New York, NY
Freedom Forum (Newseum), Arlington, VA
National Public Radio, Washington, DC
Nielsen Media Research, New York, NY
The New York Times, New York, NY
Reuters, Inc., New York, NY
US News and World Report, Washington DC
The Wall Street Journal (on-line edition), New York, NY
The Washington Times, Washington, DC
WTOP Radio, Washington, DC

International:

BBC World News Service, London, England
The Economist, London, England
Financial Times, London, England
The Guardian, London, England
Independent Television News (ITN), London, England
Inforadio (News Radio), Budapest, Hungary
Magyar Hirlap (National Newspaper), Budapest, Hungary
Magyar Nemzet (National Newspaper), Budapest Hungary
Markiza TV, Bratislava, Slovakia
Media Roundtable, Budapest, Hungary
Media Roundtable, Bratislava, Slovakia
Press Agency SITA, Bratislava, Slovakia
RTL Klub TV (commercial), Budapest, Hungary
Roxy Radio, Budapest, Hungary
Slovak Radio, Bratislava, Slovakia
Slovak TV, Bratislava, Slovakia
Slovakian Ministry of Defense, Public Affairs, Bratislava, Slovakia
Sky News, Islesworth, England
The Times, London, England
United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, London, England
US Embassy, Bratislava, Slovakia

Introduction

To understand this industry, one should first consider its product—news. What is news? Is it the most important information, is it the most entertaining information, or is it the information people want to hear? War is news, but so is peace. Death is news, but so is life. News is not entertainment, but news can be entertaining. Webster's dictionary defines news as a report of previously unknown information.¹ Accordingly, what is news to one person may not necessarily be news to another.

Good news reporting can enhance communities by covering issues concerning education, transportation, government services and public safety. It can challenge government leaders by examining an administration's policies and the effects of those policies on the people. It can expose incompetence and corruption in government and can end the careers of public officials. By examining business practices, it can save consumers money and protect their health. It can make the weak strong and hold governments accountable for their actions.²

Bad news reporting, on the other hand, can leave the people uninformed by failing to report important news, or by reporting news shallowly, inaccurately or unfairly. It can also misinform by overemphasizing an otherwise minor event.³ According to *Washington Post* executive editor Leonard Downie, "[t]oo much of what had been offered as news in recent years has been untrustworthy, irresponsible or incomplete...But the most alarming weaknesses of the news media have been systemic, and they have seriously underestimated or ignored America's need for good journalism, and evaded their responsibility to provide it."⁴

This country's founding fathers recognized the importance of a strong and free news media and codified that principle in the First Amendment to the Constitution. While freedom of the press is guaranteed, the Constitution does not require the press to be fair, accurate, or impartial. As Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger stated in 1974, "A responsible press is an undoubtedly desirable goal, but press responsibility is not mandated by the Constitution and like many other virtues it cannot be legislated."⁵ Nevertheless, many in the news media and legal professions interpret the Constitution's granting freedom of the press as representing an "implied bargain," such that the press remains free in exchange for its obligation to provide the public with appropriate information and framework to function in society.⁶

The question of where and how the public finds the truth is integral to the discussion of what the press has as a purpose and how good a job they do. This is particularly relevant in today's advancing technological age since news immediacy and primacy are paramount. Technology allows instant coverage of major world events. Since news is now transmitted instantly, the consequences of getting it wrong are more serious and the responsibility of getting it right is much greater.⁷ Advances in technology also fragment the audience for news by increasing the number of outlets available to consumers. In this highly competitive environment, news organizations increasingly turned to more entertainment-oriented stories in an effort to attract and hold their audiences' attention. The result is fewer hard news stories concerning foreign affairs and important domestic issues.

The terrorist attacks against the US on September 11th reversed, at least temporarily, this trend away from hard news. But as the American economy improves, the public regains their confidence, and the war in Afghanistan continues to go well, the industry is slowly returning to its old habits.

The 2002 News Media Industry Study examined these and other issues through study, speakers, panel discussions, and visits to news organizations in the United States and Europe.

This document presents the consolidated findings regarding the current state of this industry in the midst of transformation.

The Industry Defined

The news media industry comprises daily newspapers, print periodicals (weekly and monthly), radio, television (broadcast, cable and satellite), and the Internet.

Newspapers. Once the dominant source of providing news, newspapers have steadily declined in subscriptions and numbers of copies sold in the past several decades. Still, the newspaper industry continues to be the largest revenue-producing form of mass media in the United States. Today, corporations own 80 percent of America's newspapers.⁸ Gannet is the largest newspaper publisher in the US, with 95 newspapers, including *USA Today*, and a combined circulation of nearly 8 million.⁹ The Tribune Company is the number two publisher with 11 daily newspapers including the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁰ Knight Ridder is the third largest publisher. Among its holdings are the *Detroit Free Press*, The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and The *Miami Herald*.¹¹ The nation's two leading newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, are still family-controlled and therefore not subject to the same stockholder profit concerns as are the Gannets and Ridders.

Newspapers in the emerging democracies of Slovakia and Hungary tend to be more ideologically aligned and focus more on persuading rather than just informing the public. In the UK, there is a mixture of traditional national papers (the "broadsheets") and sensational tabloids. The UK papers have an ideological alignment.

Periodicals. The leading US news magazines, Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report, are published by diversified media companies with interests in other media outlets (movie, music, book publishing etc.). Time Warner Inc. is the leading publisher with more than \$3.0 billion in revenue, followed by the Hearst Corporation (\$1.6 billion) and Advanced Publications, Inc. (\$1.4 billion).¹² Internationally, one of the most influential periodicals is the Economist magazine, which attracts a world-wide audience.

Radio. The radio sector has experienced sharp increases in the level of mergers and corporate acquisitions following the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Since then, the sector has grown to 12,582 stations, producing advertising revenues of \$19.5 billion in 2000. The largest 10 radio broadcasters have 41% of the radio advertising revenue. Today, Clear Channel Communications is the industry leader with 830 radio stations in 187 US markets, including 47 in the top 50 markets. Average annual growth for the radio market through 2004 is projected to be 10.4 percent.¹³

Central European radio has seen great changes since the Communist governments were ousted a decade ago. The influence of Western European media conglomerates are beginning to influence the nature of radio broadcasts in Slovakia and Hungary.

Broadcast television. The major US broadcast television news organizations are owned by large corporations. The Walt Disney Company owns ABC; NBC is owned by General Electric and Viacom owns CBS. The combination of CBS and Viacom produced a \$36 billion media giant, second only to Time Warner, Inc. The Fox parent company is Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. Once an industry dominated by three broadcast stations (NBC, CBS and ABC), today's environment sees no less than fifteen television groups.¹⁴

Cable & satellite television. Cable news brought us the 24-hour news cycle and has made it very difficult for the big three to compete for loyal viewers. Consumers are able to access the news any time by tuning in CNN, FOX, MSNBC, or any number of other outlets. Unlike broadcast, cable and satellite television organizations derive most of their revenue from monthly

subscriber fees. In the US, the number of cable subscribers is over 70 million and the number of cable systems exceeds 9,000.¹⁵ Because the costs to get into the cable industry are enormous, national providers are swallowing small local companies. Today, 25 companies dominate the industry and account for 90 percent of US subscribers.

Internet. The newest member of the media explosion is the Internet. It is the most responsive to the individual consumer and may influence the entire news media industry the most. Internet subscribers can access the news at any time, and can tailor its delivery to suit each individual subscriber's interests. America Online (AOL) allows subscribers to tailor their news page to include a wide variety of news, sports, financial, weather or other interests on the front display. AOL believes their subscribers will grow from 19 million last year to over 25 million this year. As the proliferation of computing grows, more and more subscribers will retrieve their news from the Internet.¹⁶ This may be bad news for the oldest traditional news sources—newspapers, news magazines and commercial television—unless they learn to adapt to this new environment.

Current Condition

The news industry today is characterized by technological innovation, the proliferation of news distribution outlets, fragmentation and shifting demographics of the audiences, increased emphasis on profit making, and mergers of different media companies and news production organizations.

Technology trends

The news industry is in the midst of a transformation, with technology serving as the engine of change. Video camcorders and satellite videophones are allowing more journalists to go to where the stories are, record broadcast-quality audio and video, and report live from those locations, regardless of the harshness or austerity of the environments.¹⁷ New digital production systems are making newsrooms more efficient and providing the flexibility to create news products that are suitable for a number of distribution formats.¹⁸ Advances in broadband and wireless technologies are changing the public's expectations of the way they receive their news.

The news media star of the on-going conflict in Afghanistan is the satellite videophone. This device allows live broadcasts to be beamed directly from a country that is war-torn, hard to access, and technologically primitive—without the burden of expensive equipment, multi-person crews, and truckloads of satellite dishes. Today, no international news organization can compete without satellite videophones.¹⁹

Small format digital camcorders and laptop editors are becoming standard-issue at broadcast and cable news departments. Produced originally for the consumer market, these digital format cameras offer broadcast-quality video, and are a more expendable hardware solution for operating in dangerous, hostile environments. The lower cost is helping television news operations get more cameras on the street. In television news, where video is king, having more cameras in the field is especially important (more cameras = more news coverage). Moreover, the ability to edit video on a laptop in the field allows the reporter to become part of the editing process, which saves time.

The Internet has finally established itself as a viable outlet for news. News and information sites had the largest gains among broadband users of any type of online site. Jupiter Communications found that among those online users who watch streaming video, news is more popular than entertainment or sports video. Internet news sites also experience the longest visits of any category.²⁰ One broadband Internet news organization, the "FeedRoom," aggregates the

latest news video from 35 television stations in its network (which includes NBC and Tribune's local television stations), and from a wide range of print and wire entities (like Reuters and Associated Press). In addition to being able to select and view a number of news videos, the site offers viewers related text and Internet links to access more information on the subject.²¹

As these new technologies proliferate, they will drastically alter the overall news media landscape, and as a result, businesses that produce and/or distribute the news must adapt to survive.

Consumer trends:

Communications technology is changing the way Americans live, and creating a highly competitive environment for those who provide news. The proliferation of new outlets for news in the form of cable television channels, direct satellite TV, and Internet sites makes news available anywhere, on demand. As a result, new patterns of news consumption have emerged and the audiences for all news outlets are fragmented.

After declining over the past two decades, newspaper readership has leveled off recently and is comprised of readers who are mostly older.²² The average daily newspaper circulation for the 6-month period ending September 30, 2000 was 55,772,847, down 206,485 for the same period in 1999.²³ The weekly news magazines have also lost readers in recent years (now down to 12% of those surveyed).²⁴ Regular viewers of network television news fell from 38% in 1998 to 30% in 2000, with only 17% of those being under the age of 30.²⁵

The significant drop in regular viewership of network television news coincides with the emergence of the Internet as a news source. Today, one in three go to the Internet for news at least once per week (compared to 20% in 1998).²⁶ Those using the Internet regularly for news tend to be disproportionately well-educated, younger men. According to the Pew Research Center, 61% of daily Internet news consumers are men, 75% are under 50, and nearly half (47%) have a college education.²⁷

Revenue and profitability trends:

Advertisers provide all or most of the revenues for most of the mass media businesses.²⁸ The slowdown in the US economy over the last year deepened the lingering slump in advertising revenues. Faced with shrinking budgets, advertisers struggled to find the best strategies for spreading their limited advertising dollars across multiple broad-reach media outlets. To maximize their reach to their target audience they followed the ratings—this usually meant moving away from the traditional evening news broadcasts.

News divisions, under increasing pressure from their corporate owners and shareholders to become more profitable, were told they had to compete on their own—they could no longer operate as they did in the past and expect the networks (or their parent companies) to cover their expenses.²⁹ In response, the news divisions sharply cut costs by closing foreign news bureaus and reducing their own internal staffs (ABC News cut about 9 percent of its staff last year³⁰), forcing the remaining journalists to do more with less.

In an effort to expand their audience market share, the news divisions also tried to raise the entertainment value of their broadcasts by doing more “soft” stories (e.g., celebrity oriented) and more newsmagazine programming. For some news organizations, the balance sheet bottom line became more important than the relevance or the worthiness of the news product. The most recent example of this approach occurred this past year when one ABC executive made a comment that Ted Koppel’s “Nightline” lacked relevance and could be cancelled in favor of David Letterman’s “Tonight Show,” if ABC could woo him away from CBS. This is the reality

of corporately owned broadcasting today.³¹ Koppel's show makes money for ABC, but a comedy show hosted by Letterman would make more money for ABC.³²

Ownership trends:

The dominant trend in the industry today is toward more mergers and consolidations. Acquiring a variety of different media outlets and consolidating news production can produce great economies of scale. Operating expenses can be reduced and content can be shared between the mediums. In recognition of these business advantages, owners will see the market value of their local media outlets increase if cross-ownership rules are eliminated. As NBC News President, Neal Shapiro said, "[w]hen you're being everywhere, the fact you can take information and spread it across three platforms makes more sense."³³

It is becoming increasingly inefficient and unaffordable for a large television network news organization to serve only one narrow set of consumers. Signs of convergence are there, but in a majority of newsrooms today, the journalism and the media production operations are still separate; so, too, are many of the news centers of broadcast television, cable channels, and Internet outlets owned by the same company. In most cases, there is still little or no direct technical linkage between the various types of media outlets.³⁴

One example of where this is being done to some degree is found in Tampa, Florida, where editors from *The Tampa Tribune*, WFLA-TV, and Tampa Bay Online sit side by side, allowing them to make quick decisions about how best to share resources and provide better coverage of breaking news.³⁵

Challenges

Ethics and Credibility. Lapses in personal and professional ethics of individual journalists and news organizations continue to affect the credibility of the news media. Journalism is replete with Standards and Codes of Ethics, some broad and some tailored to specific aspects of the media. In Europe, many news organizations have adopted to varying degrees the BBC code of standards³⁶. Within the US, codes and standards tend to vary widely between news organizations. In the industry as a whole, ethics and values are largely situational; within the right framework, almost any decision can be judged ethical at a given time. One senior editor at a major national newspaper admitted that he made ethical decisions based on competitive advantage. In other words, when faced with an ethical question, the decision taken would be the choice that offered the best advantage over their competitors on that given day.³⁷

The news media industry is in conflict with itself—as a news organization accountable to the American people protected by the First Amendment, as a profit-making business, as part of the entertainment industry, and as a proactive community-builder rather than a disinterested observer. The tensions and pressures within the industry are felt at every level of every news organization. Journalists and editors are making decisions that may benefit the industry or themselves, but are not necessarily ethical or related to serving the public consistent with the intent of the Constitution.

The resulting environment is producing more sensationalism in reporting and greater willingness to take liberties with the truth. The latest example is Geraldo Rivera's live reporting from Afghanistan. First, there was Rivera's bravado by his brandishing a gun and threatening "...if they're going to get us, it's going to be in a gunfight." Then Fox News aired his dramatic account of ducking sniper fire: "You hear that unmistakable zing as the bullet breaks the sound barrier," ... "Didn't quite part my hair, but it was close enough." Finally, there was his visit to

what he called "hallowed ground...that area where the friendly fire hit," on December 5, the day three American soldiers were killed. In a live report, he told a Fox anchor: "I said the Lord's Prayer and really choked up...I could almost choke up relating the story to you right now."³⁸

The truth was that Rivera was hundreds of miles from the friendly fire incident he was talking about. When called on the discrepancy by a newspaper journalist, Rivera said he was confused in "the fog of war" and was referring to a separate bombing run that same day that took the lives of some Afghan fighters. Pentagon officials, however, said the only friendly fire incident they knew about near Rivera's location took place three days after his "choked-up" report.³⁹

More than ever before, journalists face professional and personal challenges, pressures and temptations that test their ethical fortitude. Faced with demands for profits from the owners and the intense competition for the public's attention, journalists are under constant pressure that challenge good ethics and risk their credibility.

Entertainment vs journalism. In the *Florida Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Robert Moffat offered this stinging critique: "The practice of sensationalizing news may have become so commonplace that [such] bias information would be of almost constant use... the media is failing to provide the reliable information we should be entitled to expect from them."⁴⁰ Journalists face the fundamental question of whether the news media's purpose is to provide the people with what they need to know or what they want to know. Audience surveys, supported by declining ratings, show larger segments of the population prefer more lite-fare than hard news. In today's highly competitive market, and with shrinking audiences and an increasing emphasis on profits, the news media has increasingly become an "infotainment" medium—providing more entertainment and celebrity-related stories rather than hard news about politics and international affairs. As the Rivera example illustrates, news reporting has become more sensationalized in an effort to attract and maintain a larger audience. Serious journalists may complain about this trend, but the industry is simply providing the public with the entertainment it demands. The practice of interweaving soft news around hard news is so prevalent, the line separating entertainment from news is nearly totally obscured.

Some of the mega-corporate news organizations believe that using infotainment is the only way to restore profitability to the struggling news divisions. A senior executive in the news business disagrees and offers his solution. He suggests that the best way to ensure the news media do not break trust with their audience or "stakeholders" is to find a different way to tell the important story—so that it's different and interesting to the public. This philosophy serves everyone's interests.⁴¹ News media organizations can't simply tell people what they need to know unless it is compelling, it sells and it generates profits. Mark Durham, executive producer at WOFL-TV in Orlando, Florida, explains the dilemma. "When metered markets happened, that's when it all started changing. Then you started playing games on a nightly basis to try to grab viewers, and you would tweak your teases and content."⁴²

Effect of September 11th on the Industry

On September 11, 2001, Americans turned to the major news organizations for information and understanding of the tragic events of that day. The public's demand for news during this crisis demonstrated that Americans still want quality journalism. It also demonstrated that, despite the cuts in staff and closing of foreign bureaus, the news industry had not yet lost its ability to respond rapidly to breaking events and provide quality news coverage.

Television provided the public with immediate and continuing access to what was happening in New York and Washington DC. The networks dropped their normal programming and

commercials for around-the-clock coverage. That night, 80 million Americans were watching ABC, CBS, or NBC.⁴³

While television provided many with the first reporting on that day, the next morning's newspapers provided information necessary for context and understanding the events. Newspapers provided the first reports about intelligence linking Osama bin Laden to the attack, details about the people who were onboard the airliners, and background information about terrorism against Americans. The *Washington Post* sold 150,000 papers over its normal press run of 900,000 on September 12.⁴⁴ The Los Angeles Times sold 227,000 more than its normal circulation of one million.⁴⁵

Internet news sites also quickly responded to the dynamic environment. Most sites expanded their video offerings by adding film clips filed from the war zone and live and archived video feeds of press briefings.⁴⁶ According to Jupiter Media Metrix, a company that analyzes the Internet, traffic was up significantly for all Internet news sites immediately following the attacks. Most consumers, however, turned to trusted name brand news organizations. For example, CNN.com was the top-performing television news site on the Internet in September. It had 24.8 million unique visitors, an increase of 141 percent over August. MSNBC.com had 22.2 million unique users, a 66 percent gain over August, and ABCNews.com jumped 120 percent. CBS.com, the hub for CBSNews.com, doubled its traffic to 8.2 million visitors from August to September. Dick Meyer, editorial director at CBSNews.com, said he and his colleagues were at first against simulcasting CBS news programming on the site before September 11. The network made an exception after the attack, he said, because "many people, particularly office workers, don't have TV sets at work but do have computers with broadband hookups."⁴⁷

The events of that day and the weeks that followed proved the news media industry could respond with quality reporting when the nation needed it. Good journalism can hold communities together in times of crisis, providing information and shared experiences that help a nation cope with the unexpected.⁴⁸

Military - Press Relations in the Current War

According to many journalists, the relationship between the military and the press attempting to cover the on-going war against terrorism is the "worst its ever been."⁴⁹ Early on, the media was, in fact, allowed only limited access to the battlefield. Many of those early restrictions have been lifted in Afghanistan, but American media believe they still are experiencing some of the most restricted access in history. Consequently, they claim they are not able to provide balanced coverage of the war.

Journalists cite as examples of the lack of government cooperation their inability to get civilian casualty reports from US Central Command, problems getting access to troops in Kandahar, and military censorship imposed on a reporter covering Operation Anaconda.⁵⁰ They disagree that the majority of the restrictions are necessary, believing that much of the information that the Administration says is sensitive, is in fact, over classified, and should not be withheld. Michael Getler, in his article, *The Press is Not the Enemy*, states that the "administration should understand that the press will find a way to cover Americans at war, no matter what obstacles are put in the way. There is no bigger story."⁵¹

On the other hand, the Administration and Pentagon leadership has warned the media and its own staff on several occasions, that compromising sensitive information is unacceptable. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has been especially vocal by publically cautioning

potential leakers of classified information that “the lives of men and women in uniform could be jeopardized.”⁵²

While many journalists are upset by their inability to get information from the Pentagon, Secretary Rumsfeld has turned into a media star. Rumsfeld’s performance at Pentagon press briefings has earned him the nickname “Rumstud.” Many traditional journalists decry these briefings, saying Rumsfeld has turned them into entertainment rather than information opportunities. Still, the Administration seems to be getting its message out. In a survey by the Pew Research Center, 53 percent of Americans say the government should be able to censor news that it deems a threat to national security, and 82 percent believe the administration is disclosing as much information as it can about the war, while only 16 percent say the government is hiding bad news.⁵³

Outlook

The US news media industry was in a challenging period for several years before September 2001. There was hope that the surge in news consumption following the terrorist attacks would be sustained for the long-run. Unfortunately, that turned out to not be the case.

Newspapers report that after an initial surge, the overall circulation gains for the industry turned out to be modest to nonexistent.⁵⁴ According to the latest industry reports, the historic circulation bump immediately after the attacks quickly returned to pre-September levels, despite a news cycle that included the Afghan war, the Enron collapse, the Winter Olympics, the Roman Catholic priest scandal, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁵⁵ Looking to the future, newspapers will continue to struggle until ad revenues come back. Newspapers will continue to provide services over the Internet, but do not expect to make money in that medium.

The future of magazine publishing is similar to newspapers. Expanding abroad, the periodical sector has slowly been seeking to increase their revenue base with the introduction of foreign editions of their publications. Moreover, similar to the newspaper sector, with nearly 40% of US households owning modem supported computers, magazine publishers are using technology to produce publications on-line. Early predictions of the success of on-line publications is mixed with no supporting revenue data.

The future perspective of the television industry continues to show heated competition with satellite, cable and fiber optics mediums. With the expected drop in ratings for the network evening news programs, many in the industry speculate that when Brokaw, Rather and Jennings retire, the networks will discontinue these programs. The three major network evening news programs did, however, enjoy a spike in viewership following September 11. While this indicates they are not dead yet, they clearly are fighting an uphill battle to survive.

The numbers for full-year 2001 certainly speak to cable audiences' appetite for wartime coverage on the general-news nets. Whereas CNN's total-day household numbers surged by 45% in 2001, MSNBC's by 49% and Fox News's by 117%, CNBC's slipped by 3%, according to Nielsen Media Research; in prime time, the general news networks saw household delivery increase by an average of 59% in 2001, whereas CNBC's gain was 5%.⁵⁶

Fox News channel zipped past CNN in January to reign for the first time as the most-watched cable news channel for total day and prime time, despite being available in 9 million fewer homes than CNN. According to data from Nielsen Media Research, the 5 1/2-year-old Fox News' 24-hour average of 656,000 viewers was up 109% over January 2001, giving it a 10% margin over CNN, which averaged 596,000 viewers in January, up 51% from a year ago. MSNBC averaged 296,000 viewers, up 23% from a year ago.⁵⁷

The newest entry into the broadcast market is satellite radio. Two new-start companies, XM and Sirius, are competing with similar, but incompatible satellite broadcast formats. Targeting the captive audience of radio-listening car occupants, both companies offer over 100 channels of programming, to include news services. The sound is close to CD-quality and the signals don't fade as the traveler gets 30 to 40 miles away from a station's transmitter. It remains to be seen, however, if either of the two new companies can gain enough subscribers to turn a profit. If they are successful, broadcast news will have to decide how to account for this newest media outlet.⁵⁸

Another emerging technology destined to change the media landscape is digital broadcast. For over ten years, the radio industry has backed a company called "Ibiquity" to develop CD-quality digital signals to broadcast alongside today's standard analog transmissions. Since the digital signal occupies only 65% of the allotted bandwidth, stations can use the leftover spectrum to transmit text information (detailed news stories, for example). Like satellite radio, receiving this digital signal requires a new digital radio receiver (but it won't require a subscription). One industry analysis estimates nearly all of the 13,000 AM/FM radio stations will be digital by 2007.⁵⁹

Digital broadcast also has advantages for television. High-definition television (HDTV) will not only provide CD-quality sound and a DVD-quality picture, it also has the ability to provide ancillary services, such as datacasting, in addition to their digital signals. News organizations are planning now on how to best capitalize on the advantages of digital broadcast.⁶⁰

Government: Goals and Roles

Government effects on the news industry. Governments all around the world regulate the broadcast news organizations in their countries. The nascent democracies of Central/Eastern Europe continue their journey toward a free and independent press. State-supported broadcasters are still heavily subsidized and their content influenced by government-appointed station managers. Independent broadcasters are holding their own against their state-funded competitors, but are continuing their struggle to win reform of their country's media laws.⁶¹

The United Kingdom is now on the verge of having the freest broadcast markets in the world when their new Communications Bill becomes law, effectively lifting most ownership restrictions and opening their markets to foreign investors and allowing corporate media mergers.⁶²

Even in this country with its Constitutional guarantee, the broadcast media is regulated. The government's right to regulate the broadcast industry, including restrictions on ownership, has been upheld by the US Supreme Court because of the use of the public airwaves.⁶³ However, the February 2002 federal appeals court decision relaxing the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) limits on television and cable-system ownership may be exactly the kind of relief many broadcast news organizations seek in an effort to become more efficient, expand their audience base and, ultimately, increase profits.⁶⁴

Lifting ownership restrictions does have some potential negative consequences. Unlimited media consolidation could stifle competition, potentially degrading the quality of news reporting. More importantly, increasing consolidation could diminish the diversity of voices providing the news. A single dominant news organization could risk the free exchange of ideas and debate that is essential in a democracy.⁶⁵ In a recent address to the Media Institute, FCC Commissioner Kevin Martin said, "...while the First Amendment protects one's right to speak, it does not guarantee that you will be listened to, and competition among voices is ultimately the best method of ensuring that the most unique and important information is ultimately heard."⁶⁶

News industry effects on the Government.

The news media also has the ability to influence the politics and policymaking of governments. In times of war or tragedy, television's instantly transmitted images can excite public opinion, demanding quick reaction from government officials. A clear danger here is that public opinion and public policy can be shaped and re-shaped before any of the facts are made clear, much less debated. This phenomenon of instant and relentless news coverage driving government decision making is often referred to as the "CNN effect."⁶⁷

Although the CNN effect is usually discussed in the context of military operations and foreign policy, the current trends of rushing the news to the public before thorough analysis is affecting other areas as well. For example, in the field of business/financial news, it is abundantly clear to any investor that *time is money*. The recent growth of on-line internet news and the 24/7 television news cycle (AOL News, CNBC, Fox News Network, MSNBC, etc.) has presented mainstream business news organizations with both opportunities and challenges. The speed of it all leads to mistakes that would have been avoided in the older, traditional news cycle. In this era of high-speed news, unfiltered financial information could lead to poor business decisions and improper government economic actions. To the traditionalist, "the 24-hour news cycle has become a nightmare of drivel and error."⁶⁸

Conclusion

American journalism is in the midst of a transition unlike any it has experienced in the 225-year history of the republic. Like other societal institutions, news organizations must contend with a variety of forces that are upsetting the status quo and shaping new business and cultural environments. These forces include advances in technology, demographic shifts and the changing interests of consumers, changing government regulations, greater competition through new outlets, globalization and market consolidation, to name a few.

The industry has not responded well to these challenges. News divisions cut their reporting and editorial staffs, closed foreign bureaus, and shifted the content of their product away from hard news toward more infotainment news with a heavy dose of sensationalism.

Reacting to these changes, journalists and critics have become increasingly vocal with their concern that journalism is drifting away from fulfilling its core purpose in a democratic society: to provide people with the information necessary to make informed decisions for enlightened self-governance.⁶⁹ Because of massive technology improvements, the amount of information flowing through the system is greater now than ever before and it continues to increase. How the news outlets respond or transform themselves to handle the massive amount of information could determine if those currently in the business of disseminating the news to the public will be doing it in the future.

On the positive side, media executives are exploring new ways to make operations more efficient through investment in technology and by acquiring new media outlets and consolidating news production. It's not enough to just do the same things more efficiently. Old business models must be replaced with new ones that are nimble enough to exploit the new information technologies to serve multiple niche audiences over a wide variety of platforms. The journalist of the future must learn to partner with their counterparts in radio, television (both broadcast and cable), and the Internet to better serve their shared customers, regardless of the distribution medium. As CNN Newsgathering President, Eason Jordan, explained in a memo to employees: "CNN news gatherers must be multiskilled and meet the requirements of our TV, radio, and interactive services. No longer will a news gatherer work only for TV or radio or interactive.

Correspondents whose expertise is TV reporting must know how to write for interactive and provide tracks for radio and deliver for them as needed.”⁷⁰

Essays on Major Issues

Historical Context of the US Military-Media Relationship

There has been tension between the military and the news media since before the founding of the United States. The military requires secrecy; the media demands transparency. The media generally agrees they should not reveal information that could conceivably put lives in jeopardy, but they also believe the public has the right to know, and they have a responsibility to report military mistakes and blunders.

Pre Civil War

There were at least three-dozen newspapers, mostly weeklies, in the colonies at the start of the war in 1775, but they lacked the means to provide adequate coverage of the conflict. Newspapers during this time were focused on opinion and editorial, rather than hard news, and survived only if they reflected the sentiments of the majority population of their region. None had the resources to put reporters in the field so they relied on letters from eyewitnesses, official proclamations and accounts published in other papers as their major sources of material. News often reached readers weeks after events occurred. With these delays, newspapers often resorted to printing rumors and speculation. Most newspapers of the period were supportive of the patriot’s cause; however at least 15 maintained allegiance to the king.⁷¹ Then as now, senior leadership felt much of what the press reported undermined their effort to successfully prosecute the war.

By the War of 1812, there were more newspapers, and their frequency of publication had increased, but their methods of gathering and distributing news had not significantly improved. With a continued opinion and editorial focus, newspapers remained at the mercy of local sentiment for their peaceful existence. James Bradford, editor of the *Orleans Gazette* and perhaps the first American war correspondent, enlisted and wrote letters home to his newspaper describing the events he observed.⁷² The news was not published until weeks after events; therefore, there was no call for censorship or security reviews.

By the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, newspapers had proliferated, and most cities were served by two competing daily papers. This war witnessed the creation of a system of field correspondents by George Kendall founder of the *New Orleans Picayune*.⁷³ Unlike earlier conflicts where the newspapers relied on official communiqués and letters from eyewitnesses, Kendall not only went to the front himself but also sent other reporters to capture the events as they unfolded. Despite these improvements, newspaper accounts still lagged the actual events by days and weeks.

The Civil War

During the Civil War, newspapers of the North sent 500 journalists to cover the war, 150 of whom were special field correspondents. With little relevant experience, reporters on both sides resorted to dubious practices and more emphasis was put on getting a scoop than on accurate reporting.

Both sides practiced censorship. All telegraph lines leading to Washington D.C. were seized by the government in April 1861. General Scott used this control to censor reports of the North’s defeat at the first Battle of Bull Run; as a result, much of the North did not discover the truth for weeks.⁷⁴ In August of the same year, the War Department issued an order warning journalists

they were subject to court-martial if they disclosed sensitive information.⁷⁵ In February 1862, all telegraph lines in Union territory were placed under military supervision subjecting all telegraph traffic to censorship. When negative reports of the war's progress were published, Secretary of War Stanton would banish correspondents from the front, arrest editors, and suspend papers for violating the rules.⁷⁶ When a newspaper printed the North's order of battle for the first Battle of Bull Run, General Sherman believed the press was responsible for the North's defeat.⁷⁷ The Civil War highlights the tension between the media and military that persists today, but in spite of all of its faults, press coverage of the Civil War was unparalleled.

The Spanish-American War

The Spanish-American War "marked a moral low point in the coverage of conflicts by the American press."⁷⁸ The war was preceded by wildly exaggerated reports of Spanish atrocities in Cuba. These reports were products of a circulation war between Joseph Pulitzer's *World* and William Randolph Hearst's *Journal*. The press had whipped the American populace and Congress into such a fury that when the Maine exploded, war was inevitable. At the outbreak, over 200 reporters descended on Cuba. Government censors were placed at the telegraph offices, both at the point of origin and at the receiving stations in New York, but reporters were still unrestricted on the battlefield.⁷⁹ Because most press reports were positive, censorship was lax.

The World Wars

After the United States entered World War I, several acts were passed that severely restricted what the media could print. Journalists on the front lines were required to be accredited by swearing an oath of loyalty, payment of a \$1,000 fee for maintenance and equipment and the posting of a \$10,000 bond to insure good behavior. Reporters were allowed to accompany any unit they chose, but all their dispatches were required to be submitted for censorship. Any attempt to circumvent censorship rules lead to revocation of their credentials, expulsion from the front and forfeiture of their \$10,000 bond—only five correspondents faced such action.⁸⁰

World War II represented a high point in military-media relations. Dan Rather attributes this relationship to a "clear sense of mutual trust and shared objectives."⁸¹ As in World War I, correspondents had to be accredited and censorship was imposed both at home and at the front. Most correspondents willingly accepted censorship because they believed it to be in the national interest and they identified with the cause they had joined. As Rather points out, this does not mean they rolled over and acquiesced to the military perspective.⁸² They did challenge and overturn decisions to cut or embargo their copy. Correspondents wore uniforms, traveled with military units and at times even participated in the action. There were also special correspondents who volunteered to enlist, went through regular Marine training and filed their stories after actually participating in or observing military operations.⁸³ Whether because of the censorship or a need to relate the war experience to the American public, the focus of many reporters became the experiences of the individual soldier.

The Korean War

Within weeks of the invasion by the North Koreans over 200 reporters were accredited and in theater. Conditions were tough and risks high as journalists moved with the front.⁸⁴ Initially there was no formal censorship, only voluntary self-censorship. As a result, the press reported a brutally honest picture of poorly led, equipped, beaten, frightened, and desperate troops. There was also frequent disclosure of strategy and troop movements and thus the press was accused of undermining the war effort. Confused over the voluntary guidance dubbed the "you-write-what-you-like-and-we'll-shoot-you-if-we-don't like-it" policy the press officially asked the military to

impose full censorship.⁸⁵ When eventually imposed, all radio broadcasts, press reports and pictures had to be submitted for review before transmission. However, complaints continued on both sides; officers resented the criticisms, and correspondents complained of uneven censorship. By 1952, the system was improved, and all services used the same guidelines.⁸⁶

Vietnam to Desert Storm

Improvements in television technology enabled the Vietnam War to be broadcast to American living rooms nightly. From the beginning, there was no censorship, and the press was free to cover whatever they choose. Eventually a voluntary code of restraint was negotiated between the US mission and the media. The code worked well, but the military remained concerned sensitive information could be disclosed. General Westmoreland proposed a formal censorship program; however Defense and State Department officials concluded censorship would not be workable for several reasons.⁸⁷ First, since war was not formally declared, they did not believe military commanders had the legal authority to impose censorship. Second, they did not control the means of communication and transportation that would be necessary tools to effectively enforce such measures. Finally, they knew they had no means to control the foreign media. As a result, the press was free to report as they saw fit.

In response to the increasingly critical stories on US involvement in Vietnam, the Johnson administration mounted a massive public relations campaign to maintain continued public support. Senior administration officials and military officers were discredited when actual events, such as the Tet offensive, showed the media campaign to be more spin than truth, and thus the divide between the media and military increased. As the media discovered they were not getting the truth from official sources, they sought out alternatives that provided more critical analyses.⁸⁸ Many military officers believed the resulting coverage was irresponsible and inaccurate, exacerbating the growing military-media divide with many military officers blaming the press for declining public support.⁸⁹

Reeling from their Vietnam experience, the US military was extremely cautious about permitting reporters near hostilities. The media was excluded entirely when the US invaded Granada in 1983 and was not permitted entry until two days into the action and then only in small groups under military escort. The military cited security reasons, and a fear of the press potentially compromising the operation's success for the media's exclusion, but the press complained they had been excluded to hide military deficiencies.

As a result of the media debacle in Granada, the Department of Defense created a national media pool. The concept was to have cadre of journalists ready to deploy on short notice to cover the opening moments of a conflict. These journalists would abide by security restrictions and share their reports with other media agencies. In December 1989, the pool was activated to provide coverage of US military action in Panama. While the military operation was a success, the media pool deployment was not. The sixteen-person pool arrived hours after the invasion. Due to security concerns of the operational commander, they were kept far from any of the fighting, and once granted access they lacked transportation to get to the scene and reliable communications to file their stories.⁹⁰ To compound the problem, operational commanders were not prepared to handle the mass of reporters who showed up on their doorstep when access was widened to all members of the media. Expecting approximately thirty journalists, they were overwhelmed when three hundred-plus showed up.⁹¹

Desert Shield/Storm

American troops began arriving in the region on 7 August 1990, but the Pentagon, awaiting clearance from Saudi Arabia, didn't notify the 17 members of the media pool until 10 August.

Although the pool lasted for three weeks, vice the short period originally intended, it was a success. As the coalition's counter attack came closer, hundreds of reporters wanted access to Saudi Arabia; military leaders had to find some method of accommodating them and maintaining operational security. Thus the pool system was again instituted to provide the media access. Imbedded in this system was the requirement for a security review by the military before a report could be filed. The only way a journalist could cover the war and remain sanctioned by both the US and Saudi Arabia, was to be a member of the pool. If a reporter worked outside the pool system, they risked the loss of their credentials and deportation. While many violated the pool system none ever met with these sanctions.⁹² Pool reporters were tightly controlled, and operational commanders held the decision authority as to whether they or their units were open to the media. Many journalists complained that denial of access was worse than censorship because it meant there were stories that would never be told, whereas with censorship the story could eventually be told.⁹³ Secretary of Defense Cheney felt the media was a problem to be managed but believed it essential to provide the public, not necessarily the press, lots of information as accurately as possible.⁹⁴ Hence, regular live briefings from the Pentagon and Riyadh were instituted—a model that continues today.

Post-Desert Storm

General Nash, commander of the American sector during the initial NATO deployment to Bosnia, speaks of including media considerations as an integral part of his planning process, looking for ways to advance the military-media relationship.⁹⁵ He instituted embedded media in the operational units, much like what was done in World War II, allowing virtually free access to soldiers and commanders. On the other hand, during operations in Kosovo, the Pentagon was reported to have been more restrictive on the media than in other recent conflicts. The Pentagon feared modern technology (cell phones and the Internet) would make any military information it provided the press instantly accessible by the Serbs, but the media has speculated the restrictions were to shield potentially embarrassing details.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Both the military and the media in their own right serve the public interest. While the media have no constitutional right of access to military operations, the military should recognize they have much to gain from working with the press.⁹⁷ Any conflict will present dilemmas that must be resolved to balance the need for secrecy against the need for the public knowledge. Maintaining an understanding and perspective of each other's roles in this democracy should provide insight and temper the friction between the two communities.

By Lt Col Gregg Clark

The News Media Coverage of the War on Terrorism

Introduction: The news media's coverage of the events of September 11, 2001 was outstanding. All parts of the media, including major newspapers, American television news, and Internet companies provided exceptional coverage and kept Americans and others throughout the world well informed.

In the five months since the terrorist attacks, the media has gotten mixed reviews as they struggle to provide balanced coverage. They are working to gain access to details of the war while at the same time trying not to appear unpatriotic and unsupportive of the Administration's war on terrorism. The journalists continue to be patriotic but want greater access to details about the war, as many believe they are unreasonably denied access to non-sensitive details. Officials

in the Bush administration and the Pentagon believe the restricted access is necessary to protect those Americans and allies engaged in this unconventional war.

The Media perspective: Many in the American media have grown unhappy with what they believe are unreasonable restrictions as they try to cover the current war. Journalists' complaints range from an inability to get civilian casualty reports from US Central Command, to problems getting access to troops in Kandahar, to military censorship imposed on reporters covering Operation Anaconda.⁹⁸

Although President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and his staff have vowed to grant unilateral coverage and access whenever possible, many in the media disagree that the majority of the restrictions are necessary. Alex Simendinger of the *National Journal* states, "Bush is fighting the first war of the 21st century, but he is also shadowboxing with some old enemies at home. How much information is too much?"⁹⁹ Simendinger goes on to say that "In a long war, which Bush has promised, the administration's concentration on secrecy, on the one hand, and public's expectations of fuller disclosure, on the other, are both likely to intensify. It is, it seems obvious to say, an uneasy tension."

Clearly, this conflict is different from those fought in the past; it lacks a defined front, and a preponderance of the initial actions were conducted in secret by Special Forces. Defense officials would not let the media accompany troops in the initial overseas deployments, yet reporters were permitted on three aircraft carriers in the region, and, subsequently, pool reporters were based at a single base in Afghanistan. Pentagon guidelines required public affairs escorts at all times, and while there was no formal censorship, reporters operated with the understanding they would not specify the location of the base, report the number of troops being deployed or describe planned future military operations.¹⁰⁰ Initial pool reporters complained they were not allowed to accompany troops on expeditions from the base, nor report much of what they saw (but they were treated to such events as church services and promotion ceremonies), they had no access to senior commanders and were barred from reporting details even after the Pentagon had announced the event.¹⁰¹ The Pentagon noted its shortcomings, apologized for some of its restrictions and took action to remove some obstacles by establishing public information offices in Bagram and Mazar-Sharif. A few reporters in search of the story went off on their own, hiring local gunmen to protect them in the dangerous areas--eight journalists paid the ultimate price. The press in Afghanistan is serving its function by documenting, investigating, and when evidence is to contrary, challenging official accounts.

The news organizations are much like other businesses that need to show profits in order to be successful. Part of that success is dependant on the media providing balanced coverage to keep the public informed. As the news media struggles to provide balanced coverage, many of these news organizations have turned to "terror experts" to round out their news reports and fill in the gaps due to limited access. "Since September 11, the words 'terrorism experts' have been used to describe about three dozen academics, diplomats, former military officers and intelligence officers who have appeared on television news programs or been quoted in print."¹⁰²

The U.S. public's perspective: The American public has largely approved of the media coverage of the war on terrorism. In a survey taken after September 11, over 75% of Americans felt that the press had done a good job. In a survey by the Pew Research Center, more than half of those asked say the government should be able to censor news that it deems a threat to national security. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents say they want news that includes the views of America's enemies, and just over half say reporters should dig hard for information rather than trusting government officials.¹⁰³ Further, 82 percent believe the administration is

disclosing as much information as it can about the war, while only 16 percent say the government is hiding bad news. Mike McCurry, former spokesman for the Clinton administration, said the Bush White House “will read this poll as confirming that the constraints they’re putting on public information are warranted in the eyes of the public. But they will misread this poll if they don’t see that the public also wants an impartial, hard-digging press corps.”¹⁰⁴

International perspective: The support of international allies for the war on terrorism and the media’s coverage of it has been mixed. While some foreigners approve of the balance of the media coverage, others agree with those in the American media who feel they should have more access to operational aspects of the war. Commentaries in European and other Western media criticized the U.S. for failing to use the power of the media in the war on terrorism, and warned that “self-censorship” by some in the press played right into Osama bin Laden’s hands. These critics gave the US poor marks for managing the “propaganda battle” and agreed with Berlin’s right-of-center *Die Welt* that “military victories mean nothing if the media war is lost.” Some suggested that by restricting the media, “the U.S. and its Allies were in effect enabling the Taliban and UBL to “define the conflict as an attack against Islam.”¹⁰⁵ Columnist Justice Malala wrote in his weekly column for the *Sunday Times* (England): “The reason the United States and Britain are infinitely better places than almost all of the Muslim world is that the freedoms to assemble, to speak and to move as one wishes are enriched in constitutions and practiced and protected vigorously...But the war on terrorism has raised a new specter as freedoms are curtailed and security agencies are given astonishing powers to follow and arrest suspects on the flimsiest evidence.... In its war against terrorism, the West is eroding the very qualities that made it great and becoming more like the enemies it deplores.”¹⁰⁶

Conclusion: The media has been given limited access to the battlefield and other operational details of the current war on terrorism. Many journalists believe this has been some of the most restricted access in history, and causes the American media to feel they are not providing balanced coverage of the war. The Bush Administration has vowed to give as much access as possible without compromising national security or endangering lives. Only history will tell the impact of this conflict on the future of the military-media relationship.

By Lt Col Deb Martinez

The “CNN EFFECT”

Introduction

Since the decline of the Soviet Union and the waning of the Cold War in the late 1980s, the military of the United States has increasingly been called upon to prepare and conduct many non-traditional military missions. The primary focus of these missions has been either peace-keeping or humanitarian support. Not only do these missions present unique challenges to military planners and operators (because they differ radically from traditional warfare), they also have the potential to generate tremendous national and international media attention.

Generally, these types of operations do not capture the nation’s attention and resources the same as traditional war does. In fact, the traditional wartime relationship between media reporters and government officials “may be virtually turned on its head.”¹⁰⁷ Rather than controlling reporters’ actions and outputs, military commanders and civilian leadership may actually depend on the media to build public support and to explain a potentially complex, confusing picture. Unlike war, peace-keeping and humanitarian operations may have less clear-

cut outcomes, with less definitive end-states...which may be quite difficult to explain to the public.

As the Cold War began to wind down in the late 1980s, most citizens in the United States would learn about the details by watching a new kind of news source from televisions in their living rooms. Founded in 1980 as a small maverick operation, the Cable News Network (CNN) grew rapidly throughout the decade. By the mid-1990s, CNN had an annual budget of over \$400 million, 3500 employees, and 150 correspondents in 30 bureaus around the world.¹⁰⁸

Discussion

To summarize the historical perspective of the CNN Effect, a combination of two factors in the 1990s resulted in this new phenomenon. These two factors were: (1) the overwhelming national popularity of the 24-hour CNN news service, and (2) the strange new-world focus of the United States military (peace-keeping and humanitarian operations) following the decline of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. This phenomenon gradually became known by various names, such as: the “CNN Effect”, or the “CNN Factor”, or the “CNN Curve.”¹⁰⁹

The greatest enablers for the CNN Effect have been technological advancement and innovation. The incredible communication technologies of the information age and cyberspace have enabled us to receive real-time, unfiltered news from virtually anywhere in the world. In times of war or tragedy, television’s instantly-transmitted images can excite public opinion, demanding quick reaction from government officials. Public opinion and public policy can be shaped and re-shaped before any of the facts are made clear, much less debated. This phenomenon, the CNN Effect, may be best defined by Professor Steven Livingston of George Washington University as “a loss of policy control on the part of policy makers because of the power of the media, a power they can do nothing about.”¹¹⁰

In recent years, observers of international affairs have raised the concern that the media has expanded its ability to affect the conduct of United States diplomacy or foreign policy. Advances in communications capabilities and satellite coverage have created a capability to broadcast live from anywhere on earth with very little set-up effort or set-up time required. As a result, the vacuum left by the end of the Cold War has sometimes been filled by a foreign policy of crisis management driven by the media. Futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler offer strong argument on the future media role in wartime: “Some of the most important combat of tomorrow will take place in the media battlefield...Commercial reconnaissance satellites will make it almost impossible to hide from the media, and with all sides watching the video screen, constant broadcasts from the battle zone will threaten to alter the actual dynamics and strategies in war.”¹¹¹

Perhaps the best known example of the CNN Effect is the Persian Gulf War...in fact, it was during that conflict that the term “CNN Effect” was first mentioned. Unlike any other war in history, the Gulf War began on live television. On the evening of January 16, 1991, many viewers watched in complete amazement as CNN reporters Bernard Shaw, John Holliman, and Peter Arnett described the opening stages of the allied bombing and cruise missile attacks on Baghdad from the al-Rashid Hotel.¹¹² That moment was an early example of the power of globalization, enabled by world-wide instantaneous communication capability. Millions of people around the world were watching the same historic event as it happened. Among the viewers were the President of the United States and his staff, who were seeing a war they had just ordered unfold, on schedule and on television. That night set the tone for the news media’s subsequent coverage of the Gulf War and CNN’s domination of it.

Despite numerous articles, books and research projects devoted to a complete explanation and understanding of the CNN Effect, success at clarifying it has been minimal. Part of the reason may be due to the imprecise use of the term “CNN Effect,” and a misunderstanding of what the term really means. For many journalists, policy-makers and scholars, there is very little doubt that the media affects the foreign policy process. For example, former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger argues that in the post-Cold War era, the United States has learned to make foreign policy in response to “impulse and image.”¹¹³ Image means television, and policies seem increasingly subject to the images coming across television screens, especially in democratic countries. A commonly-cited example is the Clinton administration’s response to the mortar attack of a Sarajevo market in February 1994 that killed sixty-eight people.¹¹⁴

Even with the popularity and intuitive appeal of this argument, a growing number of journalists and scholars have begun to question whether or not media actually do have the ability to affect the foreign policy process as described. The key variable to the media’s impact on foreign policy may not be the presence or absence of cameras with uplink and downlink capability, but rather the presence or absence of political leadership. James Hoge, Jr., editor of *Foreign Affairs*, for example, argues that while a CNN Effect of some sort may have once existed immediately following the Cold War, it no longer does, or at least not to the same extent: “It seems to me that in 1993 we reached the high-water mark on standing in awe over the potential CNN effect on things...television news has a tactical effect from time to time, but not a strategic one; that the impact is greater when humanitarian issues are involved than when actual security issues are.”¹¹⁵ Hoge’s point suggests that media effects on policy are dependent upon the specific type of policy and the specific details of the world situation.

One of the potential effects of global, real-time media is the shortening of response time for decision-making. With enough political pressure, decisions can be made too quickly, sometimes with harsh consequences. Former State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns states that policymakers “decry the absence of quiet time to deliberate choices, reach private agreements, and mold the public’s understanding. Unfortunately, instantaneous reporting of events often demands instant analysis by governments.”¹¹⁶ Former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III, highlights his understanding of the CNN Effect: “The one thing it does is to drive policymakers to have a policy position. I would have to articulate it very quickly. You are in a real-time mode. You don’t have time to reflect.”¹¹⁷ Baker’s advisor, and former press secretary, Margaret Tutwiler, echoes his assessment: “Time for reaction is compressed. Analysis and intelligence gathering is out in the new world of global media.”¹¹⁸

Richard Haas, former member of the National Security Council and one of President Bush’s closest advisors in the Gulf War also notes this effect, saying that CNN has managed to change the concept of a daily news cycle. While often argued as a detriment to good policy, Haas has stated that the availability of global, real-time television can just as well be considered as asset. He says: “People are looking at the media’s impact as a downer,...a problem for policymakers to cope with. That is true. But it was also an opportunity. One of the things about the CNN effect for people like me at the time (of the Persian Gulf War) was it gave you some real opportunities. One was penetration. CNN gave you tremendous access to markets that normally you couldn’t get to.”¹¹⁹ Haas felt that the media which brought in information instantaneously also gave him the chance to respond and get his message out instantaneously.

During a recent interview, former Department of Defense spokesman Kevin Bacon (Clinton Administration) does not question the existence of the CNN Effect, but did respond that: “Policy makers are becoming more adept at dealing with the CNN factor.”¹²⁰ Bacon asserts that the

closer one looks into those famous incidents of CNN Effect (such as Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda), the more the Effect shrinks. While televised images of humanitarian suffering or starving children seem to have a great impact on world opinion, a growing body of academic research is casting doubt on the notion that the CNN Effect determines foreign policy...it may not change things, but just make things happen faster.

Conclusion

There is no direct compelling evidence that the news media *forces* United States officials to change their policies. Still, the CNN Effect can instantly expose inadequate or faulty national policy and actions to the bright light of day (international scrutiny). Under the right conditions, the news media can have a powerful effect (positive or negative) on national/international processes and public opinion. Those conditions are usually set by foreign-policy makers themselves or by the growing number of policy actors on the international stage. Government officials can control external influences toward policy by having appropriate plans in place for various contingencies, and by building and maintaining popular and Congressional support for these plans. If officials have no such plans in place, global events can quickly force them into a reactionary mode...and then they may have lost control. **The CNN Effect is a powerful negative force only if there is a governmental policy void** in a particular area of international affairs. As stated earlier, proper advanced planning/support (on the part of the government) and an understanding of the CNN Effect can help mitigate the potential negative results. In addition, the CNN Effect is a potential positive asset to policy-makers and operational commanders since it can provide a vehicle to get one's own message out instantly...for positive international coverage.

By Dr. Paul Alfieri

NOTES:

¹ "New information about anything; information previously unknown." *Webster's New World Dictionary*, second college edition, 1986, Prentice Hall Press (New York, NY), s.v. "news."

² Leonard Downie, Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser, *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ Hugh Stevens (et. al.); "Responsibility in the Media," *Florida Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 9 J. Law. & Pub. Policy 177, Spring 1998. Note: Chief Justice Warren Burger, United States Supreme Court; 418 US 241, 256 (1974); *Miami Herald Publishing Company v. Tornillo*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John Hughes, "How do we find what's true?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 May 2000, Vol. 92, Issue 123, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Downie (fn 2), p. 68.

⁹ Hoover's Online, Company Capsule, Gannet (<http://www.hoovers.com/co/capsule/3/0,2163,10623,00.html>) no date.

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⁶³ Alex Jones, "The Costs of Consolidation," *New York Times*, 28 February 2002, Sec. A, p. 27. Note: Government action to regulate the broadcast media began with the Radio Act of 1927, and the Communications Act of 1934, which required broadcasters to operate in "the public interest, convenience and necessity" in return for their broadcasting licenses. To execute this regulation, Congress created a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and gave it the authority to define what was the "public's interest." The Supreme Court later upheld the government's right to regulate broadcasters because of their use of the public airwaves. Subsequent government regulation included content restrictions and restrictions on ownership.

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Note: In addition to concerns about multiplicity of voices, increased consolidation also raises worries over the creation of a monopoly. Most newspapers and television stations are already owned by major chains but not in combination in the same community. Using the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) the Consumers Union (CU) calculated the average newspaper market HHI to be in the 3000 – 6000 range while average television station market HHIs were greater than 1800. In anti-trust matters, Department of Justice guidelines consider an HHI above 1800 to indicate a highly concentrated market where they would scrutinize merger activity.

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