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English 101

23 July 2018

Controller

Journalism became an important force in government by regulating the actions of democracy. The Fourth Estate is a press instrument of birth and growth of democracy that gives facts to inform the citizens to then inform their own opinions. The main objective that original journalist focused on was to providing unbiased information that the government was involved in. This method proved very beneficial until the fateful combination of technological advancements with private cooperation’s began demoralizes the role of what true effective journalism can be in our today’s modern society. The role of the media is to inform the people of current local or national events as efficiently as possible. However, the high growth rate of private owned media companies is profit based. Therefore, the media will possibly favor topics that present higher revenue.

Before giant private companies began having influences on the media, journalist was determined to stay true to the people. The following excerpt from Chapter 8, titled “The Fourth Estate”, of Driving democracy states “The guarantee of freedom of expression and information is recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. In particular, Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “… this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers” (Norris 1). This pioneered the abilities of the press to find its upmost importance in a representative democracy. Without the journalist, the government would no longer be accountable to the people. According to the article “These 6 Corporations Control 90% Of the Media in America”, published by Business Insider, from the year 1983 to 2011, ninety percent of American media went from being owned by fifty different companies to now only six. It later states that the total net income for these major six companies 275.9 billion dollars and that 1 media executive is in control 850 thousand subscribers. In today’s society, more and more journalism is subject to focus its attention towards bringing the most profit for the company rather than gathering material for the public’s best interest.

Money is powerful factor that can influence corruption where their extreme amount of profit can be made. Unfortunately, the press may have fell under corruption of the six major companies. “James D. Wolfensen echoed these sentiments when he was the president of the World Bank: “A free press is not a luxury. A free press is at the absolute core of equitable development, because if you cannot enfranchise poor people, if they do not have a right expression, if there is no searchlight on corruption and inequitable practices, you cannot build the public consensus needed to bring about the change” (Norris 1-2). The people have the right be educated on the important events that happen on a continuous basis. High profit corporations have the authority in deciding what their consumers want to versus what they need to watch. The press has continued to sway away from important issues to now topic that involve more entertainment. For example, media such as TMZ or E.TV focus on celebrity agenda which is completely valueless information and does not benefit the public with material they need to stay effective in participating in the part of democracy. Journalism that doesn’t uphold to the standards for the right of the people endangers the efficiency of our democracy. Splitting up the monopoly on air waves that these six companies have by taxing heavily on entertainment rather than beneficial material can lead to the intention of charging the consumers a higher cost to watch their network. By creating a cap on the dosage of careless media, this can prove to be highly beneficial for the information that the public needs to here, to become relevant again.

Journalism and the media are no longer cautious with the reasonability to deliver the material on a non-bias platform. The bias is first impregnated into the consumers’ mind through the strategy of “click-bait”, which is used to attract attention of a potential viewer. According to the online science article “Wired”, writer Bryan Gardiner states, ““Breaking the News: First Impressions Matter on Online News,” two researchers looked at 69,907 headlines produced by four international media outlets in 2014. After analyzing the sentiment polarity of these headlines (whether the primary emotion conveyed was positive, negative, or neutral), they found “an extreme sentiment score obtained the largest mean popularity”” (Gardiner 2). The people are the foundation of this nation and should not be taken advantage of. However, modern journalism recognizes that the consumers are subject to manipulation and capitalize on this opportunity, instead of having the integrity to act for the betterment of the community. In the play text “Inherit the Wind”, by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, character Hornbeck is a journalist of the early 20th century states his position on the trial of a male teacher who broke the law by teaching Darwin’s Theory to his students in a predominately Christian town. “I am both Poles of the Equator, With no Temperate Zones in between.” (Hornbeck 33). It is then revealed after the trial that Hornbeck was in favor of the teacher the entire time. His neutrality displays a great example for how the media should operate. Journalist may feel pressured to push a certain agenda through media because their careers may depend on it. As the role of a true journalist should have the interest in providing for the public, and should be willing to sacrifice their income for the rights of the people.

The influence of the Forth Estate has transformed since its original birth in 1841. Advancements in technology have now led to era of the ‘Internet Age” which has jeopardized the old traditions of journalism. The Pew Researched released a statement, “The reliance on print among dedicated newspaper audiences is especially problematic as the portion of Americans turning to print newspapers continues to decline, given that in 2015, 75% of newspapers’ advertising revenue came from non-digital sources.” (Barthel 5). With traditional methods of news declining, it is apparent that people are concluding with the faulty assumption that they themselves have become the new form of the Forth Estate. The ability to search anything on the internet has shifted the common citizen to believe that he or she is now in control, which is valid only to a certain extent. The Pew Research Center suggest profit is causing traditional news companies to migrate, “This change was particularly pronounced at Gannett, where advertising revenue fell 12% (from $1.8 billion to $1.6 billion) and circulation revenue fell from $1.11 billion to $1.06 billion, a 5% decline” (Barthel.9). People believe that the public has replaced the role of the Forth Estate, but actually the Fourth Estate has just evolved to digital media. The majority of the population in America still depends on the minority to provide them with information and data. Doesn’t the power of the internet give the individual the choice to control what he or she desires, therefore defeating the Fourth Estate? While the internet has provided a larger variety for the consumer, the information provided by honest journalist has also become more easily publishable, which in turn allows for important material to be in abundance amongst the internet. Cambridge University Press in 2008 claim, “widening public access to newspapers, radio, and television was insufficient by itself to promote democracy and development, as these media could be used to maintain autocracies, to reinforce crony capitalism, and to consolidate the power of the media oligopolies, as much as to provide a democratic channel for the disadvantaged” (Norris 3). The Fourth Estate is in a constant struggle with providing for the public because it faces the constant threat of being overshadowed by these corporations and will remain with little impact if the private companies are allowed continuation of dominant control with no fear of consequences for their actions.

The objectives of journalism will continue to develop by how the population and technology evolve as well. The Fourth Estate will also find itself molding to the criteria that is most relevant for the people of the current time. With the rise of private corporations, it is the combined duty of the people and journalist to regulate the media ethics to create and maintain well established balance between the collective desire and the moral needs for citizens in today’s society and democracy.

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