**ANDREW H. ROHN**

**27 MAY 2018**

**COMM 202 (2185)**

**Theory: Framing and Agenda Setting**

**A) Does media directly influence individuals? Explain your answer.**

Media, more so today than ever before, directly influences the lives of individuals in our society. People today are exposed to a constant stream of media content. This influence finds its most powerful expression in the news industry. A vibrant free press is a pillar of a healthy, democratic society. Ideally, a populace with greater access to information should result in a more enlightened society. However, the profit motive has led to unforeseen consequences that are having a deeply insidious effect. The selective nature of private news outlets is creating huge ideological divides where there doesn’t need to be. As a result, society is becoming more and more polarized.

**B) Which of the mass communication theories do you feel most accurately portrays your media experiences? Why? Be sure to provide an example that supports your opinion.**

This effect of course falls under the category of selective exposure. The mass communication theory that I feel most accurately portrays media experiences today is the theory of *Framing and Agenda Setting*. According to this theory, the way that information is presented on a specific issue, affects the way the viewer perceives that issue (Benoit & Holbert 1993). Long gone are the days when we had unbiased reporting on potentially controversial issues. Nowadays, media outlets focus on selling a certain view of a story to a specific demographic of people who they feel are more likely to agree with that position. This prevents people from fully understanding the complexity of the issue in question. However, this shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone. After all, political biases have long been a staple of the news industry. What is concerning is that now it is moving into newer forms of digital and social media. This expanding of the ideological divides has the negative effect of funneling people into ideological black holes which inhibits critical thought and prevents compromise on important issues.

Media companies facilitate this trend by implementing "filters bubbles" to make their specialized content more attractive to their respective public niches. Eli Pariser is the first person to coin the term "filter bubble" which is defined as the narrowing of intellectual perspectives due to the tendency of media providers to personalize what content is available to consumers, often without them being consulted about it. What Pariser discovered, was that digital and social media companies like Google and Facebook, were altering search results that people received to more closely match their perceived political views and interests from previous searches ("The Filter Bubble, " 2011). This prevents people from developing a broader perspective and ultimately divides people ideologically.

**C) How involved should the government be in protecting us from media effects? Where do you draw the line between free speech and indecency? Is censorship ever warranted?**

As much as I detest the practice of narrowing the ideological scope of the content that is presented to the consumers, media providers do have a right to publish what they want. Most media companies are private organizations, which are entitled to the same right of free speech that average citizens enjoy. And while I am not fan of ignorance, especially when it’s willful, consumers have the right to consume media that appeals more to their liking.

However, what is unacceptable is how this filtering of content is being done without consulting the consumer beforehand. I imagine most people wouldn’t like knowing that their search results are deliberately being limited without their permission. That is where the federal government should take a stand. Legislators in this country should hold media providers to account and enact legislation that requires media providers to acquire explicit consent from their consumers before altering what content the viewer can see.

**Bibliography**

Benoit, W. L., & Holbert, L. R. (1993). Chapter 25: Political Communication. *The Handbook of Communication Science*. Retrieved May 27, 2018, from http://sk.sagepub.com.ezproxy.umuc.edu/reference/hdbk\_commsci/n25.xml

Pariser, Eli. The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think. Penguin, 2011.