PLAP 3140: Mass Media and American Politics

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Ms. Leah Malkovich: Wednesday 7:00-7:50pm

"On my honor as a student I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment."

The *New York Times* and Fox News, two of the most prominent media sources in modern American journalism, reported on Amazon's decision to cancel its plans for adding a headquarters in Queens, New York. Their decision came after backlash from some New York politicians and to a lesser extent the local community. While both sources acknowledge basic facts surrounding Amazon's decision, both strategically utilized certain quotes and facts (and leave some out) to appeal to their consumer bases.

The *New York Times* has long been a liberal-leaning news company, while Fox News has been known to be conservative-leaning. These tendencies are called political biases.[1] In his article, Shaw states that word choice is important in setting the tone and mood of an article. Due to the *New York Times'* and Fox News' political biases, they portray the Amazon story in different lights to appeal to their consumer bases. These political biases are reflected in their choice of different quotes and facts. Omitting or adding certain details about news stories illuminates their political biases, which drastically affects the connotation of their argument. When said arguments have left-leaning or right-leaning connotations, they appeal to their respective consumer bases, which can augment their viewership and subsequently bolster their profit. Goldberg equates the mafia to the news media in the sense that they both care only for their own party and attack the other party relentlessly. As you will see below, both Shaw's and Goldberg's arguments are validated by the *Times'* and Fox's varied coverage of the Amazon headquarters case.

The *Times'* article reflects how its word choices underline its liberal bias towards Amazon's decision and work against the opposing conservative bias as Shaw and Goldberg

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[1] Paul Freedman (lecture, University of Virginia, March 6, 2019).

suggest about opposing news sources. In its article titled "Amazon Pulls Out of Planned New York City Headquarters," the *New York Times* pays heightened attention to liberal Representative Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's efforts to dismantle Amazon's plans. Furthermore, the article's quote choice in reference to Ocasio-Cortez celebrates the representative. "Her race galvanized the party's left flank, which mobilized against the deal, helped swing New York's Legislature into Democratic hands, and struck fear in the hearts of some local politicians."[2] This quote contains powerful words such as "galvanized" and "struck fear," making Amazon's voluntary decision appear as if it lost a battle to the Democrats. Although the quote's suggestion that Democratic politicians such as Ocasio-Cortez played a large role in causing Amazon to back down is valid, the connotation of the word choice appears to celebrate their victory and insinuate that New York Democrats are rising in power. In comparison to Fox's article, the *Times* references Democrats' stances and how they affected Amazon's decision to a greater extent beyond Ocasio-Cortez. "Over time… Elected officials and activists in New York drew attention to the company's anti-union stance and its work with federal immigration officials — positions unpopular with Democratic leaders across the country."[3] Beyond explicitly mentioning Democrats' involvement, the *Times* referenced Amazon's tax incentives in a negative light: "Progressive activists and union leaders…contended that a tech giant did not deserve nearly $3 billion in government incentives."[4] The *Times'* word choice to refer to Amazon as a "tech giant" instead of simply as "Amazon" highlights its contention that big businesses are not worthy of tax breaks. This is a generally liberal idea. Common Democratic Party stances are not pro-big business, such as Amazon, and generally contend many of these large conglomerates have too

[2] J. David Goodman, "Amazon Pulls Out of Planned New York City Headquarters," *The New York Times*, February 14, 2019.
[3] Goodman, "Amazon Pulls."
[4] Goodman, "Amazon Pulls."

much power. The *Times* did, however, note that Amazon would have brought roughly 25,000 jobs to the city, and mentioned that there was vast support for the deal among the people. The *Times* left out the statistics about how many people wanted to keep Amazon's plan in action because this would have showed on a larger scale that the Democrats wanted Amazon to leave far more than the people did. Unlike Fox's article, which contained a variety of economic metrics, the *Times* failed to acknowledge specific economic details apart from the jobs. This omission is likely because the economic details are extremely pro-Amazon and pro-conservative and would serve as more detailed counterarguments to Democrats' backlash towards Amazon. Democrats also tend to believe that individuals in the richest 1 percent of the populace have too much power, which may explain why the *Times* decided to include in their article that Jeff Bezos, Amazon's wealthy chief, refused to speak with both Governor Cuomo and Mayor De Blasio. Although factual, the *Times'* choice to make said addition may portray Bezos as passive towards the issue and passive in his feelings toward the New York officials and in turn make Amazon seem more apathetic as a whole. Another detail that is quite liberal-leaning is that the *Times* mentioned that Amazon's headquarters would add to "the rising cost of living in gentrifying neighborhoods."[5] There is a photo in the article of what looks like Queens locals protesting Amazon, with its logo turned into a frowny face. The protestors themselves look disheartened, cold, and concerned. Here, the *Times* is using these details, aligned with the photo, to push forward its liberal agenda and provide its readers with what they want to hear. It is evident that the *Times* used word choice to support its argument and slander the opposing conservative arguments, just as Shaw and Goldberg claim news sources tend to do.

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[5] Goodman, "Amazon Pulls."

In contrast to the Times' article, Fox's word choice portrays a clearly conservative bias as expressed in its word choice and anti-liberal language, further supporting Shaw's and Goldberg's notions. In Fox's article "Amazon pulls out of plan to build New York City headquarters after backlash," Fox does not attempt to note Ocasio-Cortez's interference with Amazon's deal in the positively connoted light that the *Times* does. Perhaps the difference in titles between the news sources suggests this; they are identical except for Fox having "after backlash" at the end. The "backlash" suggests that lawmakers such as Ocasio-Cortez are to blame for this. Fox's subsequent claims that the economy would have benefitted, coupled with its slight blame towards Democratic lawmakers, hints that the New York economy will be worse off because the Democrats were anti-Amazon. Fox acknowledges that Ocasio-Cortez played a major role in rallying people and politicians against Amazon, but does not use the heroic rhetoric such as "galvanized the left flank" as the *Times* does. Instead, Fox refers to her as a "freshman lawmaker," suggesting that she is inexperienced, which in a roundabout way could make the reader see her as less credible and therefore mistaken in her choice to work to eradicate Amazon from Queens.[6] Adding onto the anti-Ocasio-Cortez (and conservative) bias, Fox decided to mention "Ocasio-Cortez has also slammed the company for having bias in its facial recognition technology."[7] This information has little to do with the Amazon headquarters deal. Rather, this information promotes negative views towards Ocasio-Cortez as a "whiner" and opponent of Amazon in general, perhaps even hinting that her own anti-Amazon interests outranked the pro-Queens interests of her constituency. Fox included a picture of Ocasio-Cortez in their article that depicts her smiling without showing teeth. Fox could have selected a more flattering photo, but

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[6] Chris Ciaccia, "Amazon pulls out of plan to build New York City headquarters after backlash," *Fox News*, February 14, 2019.
[7] Ciaccia, "Amazon pulls."

likely chose this one in order to make her seem less happy and more intimidating. As reflected in the Nixon vs. Kennedy televised debate in 1960, appearances matter because they can influence how viewers feel about the person.[8] Adding to their differences, instead of spending time reflecting on Amazon's potentially negative impacts in Queens such as gentrification, which was mentioned in the *Times'* article, Fox devotes more attention to Queens' economic losses as a result of Amazon's decision to exit. Fox notes "Economic analyst Mark Hamrick called [Amazon's decision] a 'stunning development,' adding: 'For those who didn't want Amazon to bring the promised 25,000 new jobs and added economic vitality to the area: Be careful what you wish for.'"[9] Fox's addition of this quote underlines its anti-liberal bias by suggesting that Democrats who were against Amazon were also against adding jobs and economic growth. Whereas the *Times*' only cited that Amazon would bring 25,000 jobs to the area, Fox cited that jobs "[would pay] an average of $150,000 per year…" and that Amazon claimed there would have been "incremental tax revenue of more than $10 billion over the next 20 years as a result of Amazon's investment and job creation."[10] Fox's attention to these economic details asserts conservative, capitalist bias. Unlike the *New York Times,* which noted Bezos declined to speak with Cuomo and De Blasio, Fox did not mention Bezos. This omission is likely because Bezos encompasses the ideal American capitalist, a concept embraced by conservatives and therefore conservative news sources such as Fox. The *Times* reported that polls showed that New York city residents favored Amazon's plan but did not provide the numbers. Fox stated "According to a December Quinnipiac University poll, 57 percent of New York City residents support

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[8] Leah Malkovich, "Discussion" (lecture, University of Virginia, March 20, 2019).
[9] Ciaccia, "Amazon pulls."
[10]Ciaccia, "Amazon pulls."

Amazon's arrival in the region, compared to just 26 percent who oppose the deal…"[11] in order to show that the people truly wanted the plan to go through and indicate that it was mostly the Democrats who opposed it. Fox stuck to its conservative, capitalist bias as depicted in its word choices while simultaneously attacking the Democrats, as Shaw and Goldberg would argue about opposing sources.

Through examining the variations between how the *New York Times* and Fox News reported this Amazon story, it is evident that political biases play a key role for news outlets. The *Times*' liberal bias and Fox's conservative bias were each used to support their own claims and dismantle the other's. Word choice, as Shaw suggested, plays a crucial role in establishing the tone, mood, and therefore bias in each article. As Goldberg claims, within each article lies an attack on their bias's opposing party. They use both word choice and an "us vs. them" mentality in order to maintain viewership that drives profit. Viewers'/readers' tendencies to read articles that reflect their own political views, implicitly or explicitly, is called selection bias.[12] Many people today are furious about the role of modern media in that they recognize that sources such as those above are intentionally biased. Among the many differences that exist between the articles, however, lies one major similarity; both sources, the liberal *New York Times* and conservative Fox News, are biased to maintain viewership and maximize profit.

[11] Ciaccia, "Amazon pulls."
[12] Paul Freedman (lecture, University of Virginia, March 27, 2019).

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