Exploring how dishonest Media Affects The Public
Writing 1133
Michael Kennedy

Abstract:

In recent years with due to an increase in media conglomerates and the growing popularity of social media, there has been a significant increase in dishonest media. This study is going to explore how large media conglomerates affect public perception by providing misinformation to the public. Today all companies in the field of media battle for the eyes of the American people which has led to news sources and media companies to battle for producing the most riveting content. The competitive nature of the media field has led to an overall boom in the information that the public can receive in real-time. However, this battle for content has also led to media framing, misinformation, and social influence. Large media conglomerates such as Fox News, The New York Times, and USA Today are all large media companies with a significant following. The influence these companies have on the public is proportional to the size of their audience. This puts the media in a significant position of power given the deregulation of media in our country. An increase of awareness of these claims have become apparent in amongst the American people. This study is going to explore the effects of false media on the public and their perceptions of the media in the modern era.

Related Research:

The rise of social media and the increasing accessibility of news has led to an increase in content that can't be trusted by the public. Media companies have been increasingly producing biased accounts of events to push privatized media companies' political or ideological agendas on a vulnerable audience. This is what is known as media framing. Much research in this field debates the effects of how media frame various events. Easton Bush from the University of Denver compared two accounts of the Centennial Olympic Park bombing. In his paper, Bush compares coverage of the bombing from USA Today and the Atlantic Journal-Constitution compared to the actual police statements and known information. Both USA Today and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution speculated about the bombing's motive, suspects, and other information regarding the ongoing investigation without any evidence or official police reports (Bush, 2021). Contradictory accounts of events have become more frequent which has led to the phenomena known as "alternative facts." Alternative facts being a fact one news source claims is true while another news source claims it is false (Hendricks, 2018, 55). Media framing not only contributes to unreliable information it also works to influence an audience's perspective. A study done by Margaret Cissel at the University of Elon researched six articles from six different media sources to compare their account of the same event. Cissel found that the articles from FOX NEWS, The New York Post, CNN, The New York Times, ABC News, CNBC, and The Wall Street Journal all provided biased accounts of the event (Cissel, 2012). All coverage produced from those six mainstream media establishments was worded to cater to a specific audience by either releasing a positive or negative account of the event.

While media framing deals more with the end of changing the tone of an article to frame it in a more positive or negative way, misinformation and disinformation are what provide false accounts. In the media landscape misinformation is when false information is spread unknowingly while disinformation is the spreading of false information with malicious intent (Søe, 2017). In 2002 Judith Miller, a reporter for the New York Times, reported Iraq being in possession of biological and nuclear grade weapons prior to our initial engagement with Iraq post 9/11. Miller's reports on Iraq's weapons proved to be false on account of unreliable sources on Miller's end. However, the discovery proved too late as the United States had already engaged

Iraq (Page One, 2011; History. com Editors, 2009). The increasing relevance of misinformation in our media directly correlates to media standards nationally. The race for immediate coverage has compromised the journalistic standard for reporting to increase the speed at which they can cover the next new event. The type of reporting creates a cycle of reporting that relies on reaction time rather than truth and knowledge. This is what is known as "lowest common denominator journalism" (Sutter, 2001). Now that the public is receiving more lowest common denominator journalism audiences are much more susceptible to being misled.

Due to these external factors, large media conglomerates have begun using their platforms to promote an agenda separate from upholding a journalistic standard. The main two factors that lead to the creation of fake news are financial and ideological (Tandoc, 2017). A study done by Marlie Celliers at the University of Pretoria compared 38 news articles to determine if the articles mainly relied on social factors or if they relied on actual knowledge or facts. Celliers found that 60.5% of the articles (23 out of 38) relied on social factors such as conformity and social influence while only 39.5% relied on knowledge and education (Celliers, 2020). With a large portion of the media pushing ideological or financial agendas, audiences are considering the beliefs of a higher industry to make decisions in the future based on those ideologies. These large media conglomerates limit the perception of the population. These media powers have grown and so have their political and economic interests (Elejalde, 2018). However, it is not without the help of a phenomenon known as confirmation bias. This is the phenomenon in which people seek out information from groups whose public positions in the media were most aligned with their attitudes. These groups also include social media platforms and online forums which a study by Todor Mihaylov showed is a target for people being paid to make fake profiles promoting government and political parties (Mihaylov, 2018). This motivated form of reasoning works in tandem with the public ideologies taken by media companies (Buschman, 2018).

Method:

I modified a method used by Juan Barthelemy in his study investigating perceptions of law enforcement and the public. The study asked participants from law enforcement communities and communities of Baton Rouge to complete a survey and analyzed their responses (Barthelemy, 2018). Rather than complete a survey, I followed a conversational interview style. For this study, I conducted two interviews. One interview was with Dr. Rachel Liberman, a professor in the Media & Film department at the University of Denver. The second interview I conducted was with an anonymous student at the University of Denver. The purpose of the interviews was to determine how a college student and a professional in the media world interact with news daily. The semi-structured interview is meant to find out what habits a college student has developed in an untrustworthy news environment compared to a professor of media. A oneon-one interview allowed for the participants to let the conversation go where they let it to gain a broader understanding of how they view what information is given to them. The questions will begin by determining how each participant usually receives their news, who they get it from, how many sources they check, and which news sources they find themselves associating with the most. The other questions are more oriented toward how the participants perceive media habits amongst themselves, and their peers, and how they believe media affects the public on a large scale. The questions are worded to be non-suggestive and aimed at gaining a perspective on how the participants perceive media as it comes to them. This is to gain perspective on the audience's

	f the media. The transcripts of two trial interviews and analysis are included below list of questions asked.
Questions:	
•	In a day how many news sources do you believe you encounter?
•	Which news sources have you acquainted yourself with over the years?
•	Which of these sources do you feel most comfortable reading, watching, or hearing?
•	How many news sources do you go to before drawing a conclusion about a political stance, an account of events, or a possible area of conflict?
•	What new habits have you developed as a consumer of media? What habits have your peers developed?
•	What changes in new media are you excited about, and which do you believe could lead to possible turmoil in the field?
•	Do you believe the abundance of media has left Americans more informed? Why are Why not?
•	Do you think large media conglomerates directly influence the social and political theater of the United States?
•	What examples could you provide?

Transcripts:

Dr. Rachel Liberman

Kennedy: So, the first question is how do you typically receive your news throughout the

day?

Liberman: So, I will start with Twitter and that's the first, um, kind of platform that I'll check. And so, I follow a lot of people that are journalists and academics, and I get kind

of a Roundup. And then I will next go to, um, uh, the digital edition website right. Of, uh, the New York Times, Washington post wall street, journal, Denver post.

And I'll just check all of those digital additions.

Kennedy: Mm-hmm <affirmative> um, and then the next one would be, which, so you

answered the second one, which is great, which, which new sources have you acquainted with yourself over the years, but which of these sources do you feel

most comforting when reading, watching, or listening to?

Liberman: Hmm, I think honestly, um, comforting. I, I really, really appreciate that question.

Um, I think that because Twitter, um, opens up space for community and I can, um, kind of, I find reactions on Twitter, similar to mine. So if something is, you know, emerging, there's, uh, breaking news that is awful or dis you know, disparaging or, uh, uncomfortable or awful, et cetera, that takes on Twitter can offer some level of comfort because I can, I see that other people are experiencing something similar, um, in terms of hard news or like comforting in terms of, oh, I

know I can trust this. It's usually the New York Times. Thank

Kennedy: You. Although I, yeah, that was a perfect answer for that question. That was exactly what I was looking for. Um, so this question is how many news sources

do you go to before you start drawing a conclusion about a political stance and

think, I think that, um, for something happening in Washington, um, I can, I can

account of an event or a possible area of conflict?

Liberman: So it, it depends. And I think that this is a really interesting question as well, and I

usually I have confidence that I'll get the same record or account from the sources, even the wall street journal. Right. Um, even though some may argue that it's a bit more conservative, like again, wall street journal, uh, New York Times, et cetera. So when it comes to hard news, I don't check a lot when it's like a shooting, right. I'll look at the local news. I'll try to look at some other issues when it has to do with, um, you know, like with me too, right. When it has to do with social issues, when it has to do with something layered and historical and controversial, I'll usually try to look at three to four different sources, um, for that. And, um, I'll try

to be diverse with my sources and, and really pay attention to who's writing.

Kennedy:

Okay. Awesome. Thank you. Um, the next question would be, uh, what new habits have in media, have you developed as a consumer of new media and what habits do you think others such as your peers have developed when consuming new media? And that's gonna be more like, I guess, Twitter, uh, mm-hmm <affirmative> social media-based, uh, YouTube mm-hmm <affirmative> um, anything of that sort?

Liberman:

I think that the biggest habit for me, um, to be completely honest is social comparison. Um, I think that I have, um, you know, have, have, um, been, <affirmative> been, unfortunately, um, wrapped up in comparing myself to others and that's something that I hadn't done before social media. So, um, you know, when studies come out about that young people and comparing bodies comparing, oh, you know, um, you know, Yolo and, or not yolo, but, um, what is the, what is it when you're, um, fear of missing out like fomo, whatever, right. Oh, fomo, yeah. Yeah. Um, like fomo, you know what I'm trying to say,

Liberman:

Acronym, but, um, but that can happen to anyone. Right. So at any age, you could enter into this weird situation where you're thrust into an environment where you're like, well, what are other people doing? Um, so I think that that has happened, but in terms of news consumption, I think that I have, um, I don't know, I've I, my habits, I 'm, I'm checking Twitter first. I don't know. I just, I, it's not that I devalue the other publications, but I just feel like the interactivity and the quickness, um, I like with Twitter. So I guess my habits of changed and that I look to Twitter more before I would look to other sources. However, I always have to look at the other sources because I can't trust Twitter. Like I know better than to just trust Twitter all the time. But, um, I think that my relationship with news is different because I just think I'm gonna get it all the time now.

Kennedy:

Yeah.

Liberman:

And I expect that.

Kennedy:

Thank you. Mm-hmm <affirmative> um, what changes in new media are you excited about, and which do you believe, uh, will lead to possible turmoil in the media field in the future?

Liberman:

I think I, I mean, I continue to be excited about the possibilities, um, that of connection and community and learning and knowledge that, um, new media platforms and, and certain platforms, in particular, allow for at the same time that community building, um, can be problematic when it comes to, you know, um, something leading to January 6th, right. Or some type of harmful violent activity. Right. So on the one hand, the, I, I like the way that we can all come together online in certain ways, but then it also means that, um, you know, there could be

some organizing around harmful issues and harmful events. Um, but I just, I love learning from other people and it's nice to have that kind of access, um, online, especially when it comes to communities that I'm not in direct contact with all the time in Denver, Colorado. Right. So it's kind of a global phenomenon in that way. Um, I, um, I think another part of your question was, I mean, it was kind of twofold, but what was the other, like a,

Kennedy:

It was, what was, uh, what do you believe could lead to possible turmoil in the field?

Liberman:

Okay. Turmoil. I think I think that right now, you know, there's a lot of discussion of Elon Musk and Twitter. I'm, I'm watching that pretty carefully. I mean, I don't know what that looks like, um, in terms of having, um, you know, uh, I, I don't know what his intent, you know, like that, that's a kind of a TBD situation. Um, but I am kind of concerned about, um, you know, web three and metaverse, and the ways that, um, we, we could see increased, um, VR activity or online activity as opposed to physical activity. So that's kind of something that I'm a little nervous about. Mm-hmm

Liberman:

Even though there's, I mean, we have an Oculus at home, like kids are on it, like, it's, it's fun, but at the same time, if people are living their lives through, and again, that's, that's just like the speculation. I don't know what it's gonna look like.

Kennedy:

This is kind of a two-parter, but it's my last two questions, which is, uh, do you think large media con conglomerates directly influence the social and political theater of the United States? And if so, what examples could you provide?

Liberman:

So my answer is yes. And, um, you know, I think, I think that, um, for example, what we're seeing with Walt Disney, uh, Walt Disney company right now, and, um, the kind of conflict and tension that's going on between them and Ron DeSantis in Florida. So speaking of political theater, right? So they're going back and forth about that. Don't say gay law and, you know, Disney, um, is not in support of that. And so the governor is then trying to rip tax exemptions from Disney. So again, this is a major conglomerate that is shaping and, and is integrated into politics, right? Mm-hmm <affirmative> so there's that kind of specific examples, but then there's also just like in general, the ways that media conglomerates, like Comcast, like Disney, um, are able to a, you know, at&t at are able to, um, you know, own these smaller subsidiaries and make decisions about what is visible and not visible to us, the consumers.

Liberman:

So, you know, when you, as we talked about in class, right, you have a concentrated media environment, you have these conglomerates that, you know, have the final say in what type of information we're receiving in the commercial

marketplace. So, I think they absolutely, um, impact our social world. So again, um, something that is controversial politically to a conglomerate, we may not see that on there, in their portfolio, like in their stations, television stations, radio stations, film studios, because they've deemed it may be too political, or if they've deemed it too controversial. So that then, um, impacts <affirmative> and, um, impacts what we understand is normal or not normal if that makes sense.

Kennedy: Yeah. Okay, perfect. Thank you.

End of Transcript

Kennedy: So, my first question is in a day, how many news sources do you believe you encounter?

Anonymous: Oh, that's a really good question. I like the answer is so high like the number is so high that I don't know if I can put a number in, I would honestly say, like, upwards of like 50, maybe even 100. Because like, I'm on, I'm on Twitter, I'm on Instagram. You know, I have news alerts. That's for a lot of things. I've read a lot of articles. Like any article that I think I would like, I click on it and read it. I'm always like, Googling stuff. And like, that just leads to an infinite amount of the question was like, news outlets, right? Like, even, like, just scrolling through Instagram, or like, just mindless activities like that, like, stuff that you don't even think about doing? You're encountering new sources? They're like, again, like upwards of like, 7500s of them.

Kennedy: Okay, I, yeah, yeah. And then, which news sources have you acquainted yourself with over the years? I know, you said like Twitter and Instagram, like, what are Your main go-tos?

Anonymous: I would say, Twitter and Instagram are really hard for me to, like, actually believe the shit that I see on there. Especially Twitter. I mean, I'm like reading a paper on this right now. Everything on there is just like complete brain rot. And like, I would honestly say the same thing for like news sources on Instagram, too. I should say that, like, the majority of the news sources that I see I take with a fucking grain of salt. Like, I just do not think that they're accurate whatsoever, because there's just so much fake news and media going around all these days. But like, on Twitter, if they're like, publish articles from like, a journalist that I

know, and have verified in the past, I stick with that's a kind of general answer, I would say for specifics. Don't know, I think CNN does some good stuff. Sometimes it's kind of a boring answer. But MSNBC is pretty good. Like the local, the local, like Channel Five, CHANNEL SEVEN, like Rocky Mountain News, stuff like that. They're usually really good for, like, local stuff, which is kind of hard to fuck up and get wrong.

Kennedy:

So, which of these sources do you feel most comfortable reading, watching, or hearing? Like, which one do you just like you like the most?

Anonymous: Um, I feel like what I liked the most, and what I trust the most are two very different things. Like I like Twitter, and the constant flowing of news that you get on Twitter is the best. Like, it's just so entertaining. It's just constant. It's, it's all brain rot, or like 99% of it is brain rot. But like even brain rot is fun to read and think about. I would say, like the majority of the news that I get from, like CNN, or MSNBC. I probably would probably say, like watch the most MSNBC, even though they can also be a little biased sometimes.

Kennedy:

The next question is, how many news sources do you go to before drawing a conclusion about a political stance and account of events or a possible area of conflict?

Anonymous:

That's also a really good question. I so I feel like and I catch myself often doing two things. I often catch myself doing one, like seeing something on I know I'm going back to this Lapa, Twitter. And like not taking it with a grain of salt just believing it immediately. Or like scrolling through like something on Instagram and a fake account post something. I do often find myself way too often running with that like telling people and genuinely believing it and then soon realizing that it's wrong Okay, yeah. We'll repeat the question one more time.

Kennedy:

How many new sources do you go to before drawing a conclusion about a political state? Okay, that's

Anonymous: awesome. Um, and then if I'm doing like, if I'm doing like an academic article, or if I'm actually like writing a piece, then I, I, like force myself to find at least like four sources saying the same thing. And if I can't, then I just don't believe that I

can use it. I don't know. Usually, usually, when like, two or three sources are saying the same thing. You can kind of be like, Okay, this is what I take from it.

Kennedy:

What new habits in media have you developed as a consumer of media? And what habits do you think your peers have developed?

Anonymous: um, I think that people. Me included, again, we're really accustomed to believing things that we read online, which is just a terrible habit to pick up. I think that, like, a lot of people, like I said, do the thing that I said first, which is, you know, see something on like a fake account on Instagram, or like a joke on Twitter, and just completely run with it. It's actually now that I think about the half it's happening to parents on Facebook for years, where they just, like, get scammed, or like, click on a link that gives their computer a virus or something. Just because like, they didn't really question what they read, they don't really question what they stop. I think that's a really big habit. I think like, I don't really know how to put this into words, but I'm going to try. I think just like the constant, like, serotonin, and constant stimulation of the brain is a terrible habit that we've all picked up. Because like, you can just like, go in any app at any point at any time of the day, and have constant just like overwhelming stimulation to your brain. I know a bunch of people have compared it to a slot machine. I really liked that analogy. I think that like, we are programming ourselves as a society to need constant stimulation and not be okay without it, which is not okay. I also think that one thing that I'm seeing, as a lot more of in the past, like three years, is what I personally like to call the Wally effect, which is when I think in a few years like everyone's just gonna, like life like the people do in Wally, which is basically just like fat tubs of meat on like, a vacation vessel. Like, I genuinely believe that like, like with Instacart. And like, like digital shoppers and stuff. Now, I think that like, probably sooner rather than later. Like, people aren't going to leave their beds or their houses all day. And like, I don't know, like meetings will be on Zoom. You know, people order Instacart for groceries and stuff. Like sure you need those people to like, do those. Do you need specific people to do those functions? But like, I believe pretty soon they'll get replaced by? I don't know. Is robots too farfetched? I don't think it is. I just think that like eventually. We're training ourselves to become lazy as well.

Kennedy:

Do you believe the abundance of media has left Americans informed? Why or why not?

Anonymous: Ooh, that's a really good question. Let me think about how I want to answer that first question for a second. So my initial reaction was to say no, but I actually think the answer is yes. But I think that information that has come with being informed with the wrong information. And I think that's what has Like, that's what happened to the American people and just like people on social media as a whole. Like, I think they are getting, you know, constant information, constant news constant, new information. But like, again, most of it is completely out of left field and wrong. I think that's like, an effect of like having as much news and sources as we do right now. Like, that's just going to happen. I don't think there could be a situation where we have as much news as we do. And there's just like, not information, misinformation out there.

Kennedy:

Do you think large media conglomerates directly influence the social and political theater of the United States? And what Examples could you provide? Yes,

Anonymous: I do. a bajillion percent. I guess the most recent one I can think of would be well, I guess the most recent one I can think of tik tok and the Johnny Depp Amber Heard case. It is all over tik tok. And like, this is a domestic abuse court case that as the entire community of tik tok is just like treating so weirdly like they're making memes out of it. Like both sides, I believe are kind of at fault. I don't I don't really I haven't been watching it much. But I I've been told that there was probably the worst stuff on ever heard side, but like, I heard also stuff happened on Johnny Depp side, which is again, Justin effect is of tik tok right there. Like I have not been following the case that much. So I just see what like tik tok has been displaying to me and what YouTube has been explaining to me. And another example that rarely comes to mind. Is Donald Trump and Twitter? Because, like, I just think that went on. Can you repeat the question one more time? Yeah,

Kennedy:

it was, do you think large media conglomerates directly influenced the social and political theater of the United States?

Anonymous: Yeah. Okay. So like, I think that Twitter and Donald Trump go hand in hand with that, because like, he was a president of the United States and you have some freakin spicy tweets, just consistently. And like, I feel like America and the country had a front row view of like, politics, that doesn't make much sense. But like, they got to see what their president was thinking almost all times, which is something that like, you could have never seen without Twitter and something that like, people what 50 years back could have never imagined ever. I think that like the big conglomerates have their little guys you know, twiddle Twitter,

Donald Trump, Instagram, Kanye West. Tiktok has whoever the fuck they have a new person every week. But obviously, there are more for each too, but I just think like, there are these specific huge social media conglomerates that project and put out so much news for specific reasons like for the benefit of their platforms.

End of Transcript

Discussion:

When attempting to grasp the topic of the media in general Easton Bush's essay about the The Centennial Olympic Park bombing helped me begin to understand aspects of how media can narrow the perspective of the public through media framing. This essay began my journey with my first term which was media framing (Bush, 2021). Marlie Cissel's study on how the media used framing to show bias towards the protestors during Occupy Wall Street in 2011 provided a great understanding on how specifically large media powers use their platforms for social influence (Cissel, 2012). In understanding an effective process, I found it helpful to read Juan Barthelemy's survey procedure when dealing with perceptions and surveying (Barthelemy, 2018). The interview process went well for both participants who both responded well to the questions they were asked. I was interested to see how the anonymous student was aware of their bad habit of trusting something he saw just because he's seen it enough times. When interviewing both participants they gave very in-depth thoughts that revealed a lot about their own personal opinions towards the media and even touched on the political climate. I would say overall, this interview process was a success as the participants were able to give well-thoughtout-out answers which gave an understanding of their perceptions towards media and how they interact with it daily. Both the participants answered very honestly and were comfortable taking a pause to collect their thoughts. In the future, I would like to extend the number of questions I ask participants to address social media and mainstream news in a more separate manner. I would like to explore more how social media and mainstream media are perceived separately in the eyes of the public. The point of asking questions in a manner that would divide was to see if there was a correlation between if there was more of a positive perception towards mainstream media or social media.

Including more specific research pertaining to the difference between how social media

influences the public versus mainstream media. This would include understanding online media culture and how it interacts with larger media powers. I would also like to find more sources that investigate campaigns paying people to create fake media accounts to help influence audience perception, a phenomenon that Todor Mihaylov discussed in his research about online community forums (Mihaylov, 2018). The original research question was much broader when I was defining media, a definition which included both social media platforms and mainstream media sources. When I asked the question about how many news sources, they encountered a day both participants mentioned checking social media for more entertainment and updates rather than the main source with a heavier influence of social media from the second participant. However, both participants responded to the question in a manner that separated social media and mainstream media in their respective answers. By categorizing social media and mainstream sources when conducting the interviews, I will be able to create a deeper understanding of more specific media perceptions.

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