

UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC CRITIQUE

INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM

ASSIGNMENT: BOOK REVIEW

TOPIC: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BOOK

Select one of the books on the reading list.

Give an overview of the content of the book.

Critically review any case(s) the writer(s) puts about the method, practice, and outcomes of international news reporting.

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International journalism involves many facets of news reporting and includes areas like press freedom, news sources, objectivity, culture, and audience trends. Vincent Campbell (2004) in his book, *Information Age Journalism*, wrote on this subject, and it is the purpose of this paper to critically review some of the cases mentioned by him about the method, practice, and outcome of international news reporting. An overview of the book will first be covered before details of three different cases relating to press control in foreign news reporting are discussed.

The first chapter introduces the historical background of how journalism began and how it became what it is today. Current crises involved in international journalism mentioned by Campbell (2004) include technological development, emergence of commercial newspaper and broadcast industry, digital convergence, declining audience and diversity, tabloidisation, and threats faced by journalists in non-democratic and developing nations (pp.3-27). The second chapter looks into four theories of the press and explains why the belief of press freedom without state intervention is a myth, as there will always be some form of control, regardless of political or economic reasons. The third chapter illustrates this point by showing how free market journalism and the role of journalists as watchdog in maintaining democracy in the Fourth Estate also face problems, such as audience preference for entertainment to serious news, reliance of news organisations on advertising revenue, influences of owner on editorial, and professional competition (pp.54-78).

The fourth chapter discusses the reliance of reporters on their sources for news (pp.80-83), and explains the importance of relationship between journalists and their sources. This relationship, however, can result in journalists' sympathetic tendencies to the cause and endanger the balance of neutral viewpoint in news (p.86). News selection and gatekeeping are discussed in the fifth chapter to explain why audience's interest precedes the importance of news (pp.117-123).

The sixth chapter discusses the ethical issues of gathering and producing news, and the limitations of professional codes (pp.127-152). Issues discussed include human rights and privacy, taste and decency, confidentiality of information, bribery to write preferentially, news fabrication, unqualified account of events, erroneous foreign feed, adding of unknown facts, distorted presentation of information, and defamatory libel. Threats to objectivity of journalism are covered in the seventh chapter (pp.153-154). These threats include the emergence of free market and commercialisation (p.156), exclusion and inclusion of ideologies (pp.166-167), reliance on official sources for news, and the dangers surrounding journalists' opinions and actual 'facts' (pp.173-175).

The eighth and ninth chapter looks into alternative news sources such as participatory and literary journalism, conglomerate influences, entertainment, sport, and lifestyle news. The tenth and final chapter concludes the book by looking into the globalisation of journalism in the information age, wherein, Campbell says, "newspapers never really

developed into international titles” because of the difficulty in producing and distributing news in synchronised content across countries, language barrier, and literacy rates in certain countries (p.230). The rise and fall of foreign correspondents (pp.230-231) and new technology used in news gathering are briefly mentioned before the book concludes with considerations of the extent gatekeeping can be exercised in the new information age (pp.254-255).

Throughout the book, Campbell has brought up many cases relating to news reporting for his illustration. This paper will however only focus on three cases for reviewing the methods, practices, and outcomes. The first case involves the Taliban’s control over the news media in Afghanistan (p.33). According to Afghan-born journalist, Farivar (1999), Afghan newspapers are primarily distributed only to government offices, where news coverage is “limited to official announcements, accounts of Taliban military victories, and anti-opposition propaganda” (p.33). Jobs are heavily controlled and constrained by institutions of the state, and television is banned under the Taliban’s rule (p.33). The outcome of this method and practice of authoritarian control over news undermine the citizens from freedom of expression and independence, fulfilling the exact aims of the authoritarian model in supporting and advancing the policies of the government in power to achieve the agendas and objectives of the governing group (pp.32). In this case, the Taliban group successfully accomplished its goal in limiting the free flow of information.

The second case involves the success of journalists in exercising their rights to information concerning the Gulf War in its aftermath, illustrating the freedom of the press using the libertarian model (pp.34-35). During the war, state interference over news dissemination restricted press freedom on grounds of national security (pp.34-35). After the war, however, journalists in the US were able to exercise their rights under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to find out what actually happened (pp.35-36). This method and practice of press freedom illustrates the role of journalists in the Fourth Estate in serving as a check on government, advocating the need of the press to be free from government influence (p.34). The outcome of this is a presumed balanced account of international news reporting. This view of presumed balanced news reporting is however seen by Tattam (2000) as an act of authoritarianism by the US government in controlling press freedom. This is because the news coverage was exclusively assigned only to CNN as the disseminating point of news in providing to the world an all American perspective of the Gulf War (Tattam 2000: 3). That is to say even when the libertarian model is enforced in a country, degrees of press freedom can still vary at times, similar to what is mentioned by Merrill (2004) in the circular model of freedom and authoritarianism (Merrill 2004: 3), thus demonstrating the subjectivity of international journalism to press control by different players.

The third case illustrating press control as a result of conglomeration and free market looks into an arrangement made between Rupert Murdoch and British former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980s (pp.68-

69). Although it may be seen that editorial independence is possible with conglomeration and press freedom legislation in this particular case, it is still in the interest of the media owner to work hand in hand with the governing parties to meet the agendas and objectives of both sides. This has resulted in the removal of the editor for *The Times*, after which there have been fewer editorial problems for Murdoch to handle. The method and practice used by the media owner and the governing party of state in this case, successfully influenced the new editorial to self regulate its news content in order to meet political and economic objectives.

As can be seen from this review, foreign news reporting involves many areas of consideration. These areas include the level of press freedom in the respective countries, the control of the media, the influences from news sources, and the selection of news. From the three cases mentioned above, we can see that there is no real complete freedom of press. The degree of press freedom is dependent on the governing policies and control of each state. Conglomerate media ownership while promising freedom of speech is often another way in which audience may be controlled through agendas pertaining to politics or economy and are opened to commercialisation that aims to maximise revenue and political governance by which the media is subscribed to participating in the propaganda of the ruling party.

(1,197 words)

References

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Merrill J. (2004) "Global Press Philosophies" in deBeer A. and Merrill J. (eds), *Global Journalism*. Boston: Pearson: 3-18.

Tattam A. (2000) "International News Agencies", unpublished article, 11 pages. (Reproduced by Monash University with permission, Reference No.3473).