

Journalism's Contribution To Democracy

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Abstract

When looking at journalism's role in a democracy, a health democracy not only allows it's citizens freedom of the press and freedom of speech (for the purpose of the paper, they are considered the same thing). Much like a vibrant democracy, journalism's role is like a pendulum, often missing the mark (sometimes wildly), yet always correcting to balance itself. While we citizens, the consumers of journalism, have over time, adapted different delivery systems to acquire our information, journalism has adapted as well to use these new platforms to make information available. What hasn't changed, is journalism's role in democracy, nor the virtual war that has always raged between organizations, political parties, corporations and individuals to produce information that they want you to see.

Keywords: fact, opinion, platform, delivery

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Interestingly enough, the relationship between democracy and the freedom of the press are very much intertwined. Its actually kind of hard to envision a healthy democracy without the citizens ability to say and hear information that is critical of it's government. Perhaps that is why the authors of America's constitution created the First Amendment of our constitution which guarantees freedom of the press (among other rights) so that we have the freedom to say/publish without recourse from our government.

“The Free Press Clause protects publication of information and opinions, and applies to a wide variety of media. In *Near v. Minnesota* (1931) and *New York Times v. United States* (1971), the Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment protected against prior restraint—pre-publication censorship—in almost all cases.” (*Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.)

Not surprisingly, such a freedom is and will always be a double edged sword in that “freedom of speech” does not mean “accuracy of speech” or for that matter, even “truth of speech”. Indeed, the freedom to speak, and publish, extends to both the factual, and the opinion, the accurate versus the inaccurate, the moral versus the immoral and so forth. Freedom of the press, while seeming a necessity for a true democracy, there are many pitfalls when it comes to the use and abuse that this freedom allows. It is a flawed gift, however, a gift non the less. Thomas Jefferson, a founding father, expressed his views about the need for freedom of the press even with these known flaws. In a letter to Edward Carrington, Jefferson said "The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government

without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them." (Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 1787. ME 6:57)

Jefferson couldn't be any clearer as to how important, dire in his opinion as to how absolute the need of a free press is to the health of a democracy.

Jefferson also acknowledges that having freedom of the press, is not without flaws. In a letter he states that even in his time, an existence of flaws with the press and the freedom to use it. "It is so difficult to draw a clear line of separation between the abuse and the wholesome use of the press, that as yet we have found it better to trust the public judgment, rather than the magistrate, with the discrimination between truth and falsehood. And hitherto the public judgment has performed that office with wonderful correctness." (Thomas Jefferson to M. Pictet, 1803. ME 10:356) Clearly, even in the beginning of our great democracy, having freedom of the press meant having to endure a less than perfect process by which information was passed. The art of journalism has in part tried to improve the practice of publishing information by at least asking that we distinguish between facts and opinions, and in doing so we can also note the difference between a hard story, one that follows the inverted pyramid style of writing that according to the website [anonymousewriter](#), a website on effective writing, elaborates on the difference in reporting a hard story vs. the featured story. Further stating that

“the inverted pyramid is a technique that consists of telling a story in the order of most important element to least important element. It is meant to inform. Because of this, these articles tend to answer five specific questions. Who. What. When. Where. Why. Some people also add How to these questions, but that is for a more detailed story. “The articles’ goal differs from the hard news article as well in that it is meant to entertain and inform more than break news. Basically, after breaking the news you

want to tell the whole story with a feature story.” (anonymousewriter, feature story vs. hard)

The inverted pyramid style of writing is used in paper and web based print. With that being the case, one shouldn't be surprised to see that style of writing dominating on the web.

Simply put, the attention span of the average web browsing person is far shorter than the traditional print media reader. The writer must grab the readers attention immediately if hoping to keep the reader from clicking on to the next site. The ITS web team states it clearly “Writing for the web is different to writing for print.” You need to give people what they want quickly. Write for your target audience, keep it short and simple and get rid of jargon. Put your most important content first, use the inverted pyramid structure and write in the active voice”. (IT Services (Write for the web)) One should expect differences in writing styles for different media. Some differences between print media versus spoken media would be the use of a more descriptive message, one where painting the picture for the listener so that they can see the words being spoken, where print is obvious to the reader, it is there, hopefully grammatically correct and punctuation so that the story flows.

Multi-platform Journalism Analysis

In the local Tulsa news on 6, Tulsa shoppers line up early to beat black Friday rush. The Woodland Hills Mall in Tulsa Oklahoma open their doors on Thursday night to let shoppers beat a majority of the rush for Friday however Thousands of shopper showed up and were on a mission. According to a national networking, the Daily News of New York Black Friday brawls break out across the country. On Thursday evening crawls broke out at Walmart retail stores and other shopping centers all over the country. In a Louisville mall on Thursday night shoppers wrestled to the ground in the food court.

Local Tulsa radio News 102.3 around 7:04 pm stated that 200 people waited outside JC Penny store on Thursday night.

A majority of these stories surround the same subject of Black Friday. Over all their stories were consistent I do feel however had it been any other day the news would be completely different depending on location and popularity but because it was a holiday tradition the all the news surrounded the same subject matter.

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