

Why is Media being Unethical?
A Case Study on Al Jazeera News Network

Course Name/Code: Introduction to Research in Communication COM300

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ID: 2016012195

Date / Year: November 25, 2018

Abstract:

Media plays a very significant role in present society. News is the audio, visual and written construction of events and incidents. News attempts to inform people about the things that took place and uses media channels to perform this. Media channels are the mediums that are in mass communication to reach a large number of people. This involves; TV, radio, newspapers and magazines (MBN, 2018). The function of news is to inform. Therefore, news channels attempt to inform viewers with happenings around the world and persuade its audience to believe its points of views (MBN, 2018).

Introduction:

News is the audio, visual and written construction of events and incidents. News attempts to inform people about the things that took place and uses media channels to perform this. Media channels are the mediums that are in mass communication to reach a large number of people. This involves; TV, radio, newspapers and magazines (MBN, 2018). The function of news is to inform. Therefore, news channels attempt to inform viewers with happenings around the world and persuade its audience to believe its points of views (MBN, 2018).

In another world, news media is expected to be ethical. It should be fair, balanced and unbiased. In reality, news media is a fine example of violation of ethics through defamation, lying, slander, and fabrication of news as well as provoking and biasness (Forbes, 2017).

Literature Review:

Based in Qatar, Al-Jazeera is one of the most popular news channels in the world. It is considered to be the first Arabic news channels, broadcasting news and in-depth reports on hourly basis. The channel is “highly active”, considering its role in reporting the 9/11 attacks and the Afghanistan War, the 2003 Iraq War and its role in the 2011 Arab Spring (JSC, 2018).

While the channel claims that it is a platform for all opinions, critics criticized its behavior which is very sympathetic towards the foreign opinions of the State of Qatar. Critics complain about the channel’s silence and absence from the social issues that face the Qatari society (Arab media, 2018).

When the February 17th 2011 Revolution took place in Libya, Al- Jazeera stood as a platform for the rebels. It turned its back to the Libyan Government and named the Libyan Security Forces as “the regime’s mercenaries”. Qatar supported and armed the rebels against Colonel Qaddafi, and used Al- Jazeera to defame the Colonel. Libya was subjected to various lies and the Colonel was pictured as a “blood-seeking” dictator (Al Aswad, 2017).

Various lies have been told. The channel broadcasted tragic pictures of slaughtered civilians, rape victims and demolished cities and claimed that they were taken from Libya. Reports ensured that they were taken from Gaza in 2009 following the Israeli Aggression. Likewise, on February 22nd, Al Jazeera conducted a call with a witness who spoke about the Colonel’s aggression on Tripoli and Benghazi using Israeli jets. Knowing the Islamic World’s paranoia of Israel, Al Jazeera knew that such news will gain sympathy. However, observers ensured that no attacks took place on that eve (Al Aswad, 2017).

Similarly, Al Jazeera took Qatar’s point of view during the 2011 Revolution in Yemen. It broadcasted a video of prisoners being whipped and beaten by “Yemeni forces”. The very same video was broadcasted a few years before the start of the revolution in Yemen and was taken in Iraq

Analysis:

The American Department of State Internal Communication criticized Al-Jazeera for its coverage of news that is done to suit Doha’s political interests. This is reflected on the channel’s approach and coverage of the 2015 Saudi-led coalition in Yemen before and after the 2017 embargo on Qatar by Saudi Arabia (Arab Media, 2018)

In 2015, the Iran-backed Houthi Rebels overthrew the government in Sana’a- Yemen’s capital- and seized power. Saudi Arabia and Iran are two regional powers that share ultimate hatred towards each other. Saudi Arabia lead a coalition to fight off the “Iranian hegemony” in the Yemen. Several countries joined the coalition and Qatar was not an exception (Arab Media, 2018).

Nevertheless in 2017, a dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia erupted. Qatar was kicked out of the coalition and an embargo was enforced on it.

It was during this time that Al-Jazeera's coverage changed dramatically. Just prior to the embargo, the coalition was pictured as Yemen's last hope to build the impoverished country and stable its unstable economy. The International denounces against the humanitarian crisis caused by this coalition were ignored. But as of June 2017, Al- Jazeera started to cover the famines, malnutrition, cholera and other health diseases that were caused by this coalition. It even conducted interviews with Houthi rebels who were previously called "thugs" and "mercenaries" (INSS, 2017).

After years of silence, Al- Jazeera focused more on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which are among the countries that enforced the siege on Qatar. Al- Jazeera discussed the bad treatment of labor in UAE and the oppression of women and minorities in Saudi Arabia. Critics criticize such coverages as they only came following the dispute (Arab Media, 2018).

The channel also came-up with "unheard" off news like Houthi attacks on Abu Dhabi International Airport despite the geographical impossibility (Fawzi, 2017).

Al Jazeera is seen sympathetic and friendly towards Qatar's allies like Turkey. It persuades viewers that the Turkish intervention in the domestic scenes in Iraq, Syria and Egypt are "support for freedom". The channel brings no reports on the supposed Turkish support for chaos-causing opposition groups in the mentioned countries. It also showed its full support for the Turkish president during the 2016 coup attempt.

Al Jazeera's criticism is based on the fact that the channel comes up with assumptions that harm country's reputations and the national security or lead to rage. In 1999, Al Jazeera translated a power cut in Algeria as a government attempt to stop Algerians from watching a documentary that was to be broadcasted by Al Jazeera about Algerian dissidents.

Egypt imprisoned 3 Jazeera journalists due to their provoking against national security. In 2015, India stopped Al Jazeera from airing its shows as the channel kept showing maps of India without Jammu and Kashmir and the Andaman Islands.

Research Methodology:

SQU student Ali Al-Radhawi answers this question: “Media works on the request of hidden agendas. Each news channel subjects a particular opinion and considers it superior over another. While media teachers wants us to believe that the purpose of media is to inform, everyone knows that media chooses to inform you what it wants. It is not just Al- Jazeera but every single news sources.

Wael Al Lawati believes that while media is biased, it is not media that is to blame. “If people blame Al- Jazeera for subjecting Qatar’s points of views, then why watch it from the beginning?” Everyone knows that media only works to promote certain ideas and points of views. Al- Jazeera is doing its job. Even if certain lies are broadcasted, it is the viewer’s choice to believe or disbelieve.

“While lying is unacceptable, government media is questionable” says Dana Thabit, a student in Sharjah University. There is no such thing as unbiased media. If people blame Al- Jazeera then let’s take a look at how the Egyptian media covered the 2011 events. Didn’t they call the protesters as “thugs”? I think media, whether state-owned or democratic, heavily depends on lies and propaganda to prove a point of view. Media is biased because it is self-centered. Those who work in media don’t consider what they are doing as unbiased behavior but rather as their job because they simply believe they know better than anyone else”.

It is simply because media is persuasive. Slogans like opinion and the other opinion and “to know more” or “reality as it is”, are slogans after all. They do not say much. Think about it. Why would media view both opinions if its main purpose is to prioritize one over the rest? “It doesn’t make sense” says Zahra Al- Raisi, a media student in Sharjah University.

“Let’s put it this way. Media- biasness= no media. While they do teach us about the characteristics of media here in Bayan College and one of which is being unbiased. In reality, that is impossible! No media would function without biasness and there is a reason why media chooses to be biased. Among the many functions of media is informing and persuading. Media will only inform you what it wants to you to know and thus persuading you to believe what it believes. Don’t just put the blame on Al-Jazeera. Look at France 24, CGTN, BBC, CNN, Al Arabiya and DW. They all do the same.” says Osamah Al- Shukaili.

Conclusion:

News attempts to inform, convey messages, persuade and raise awareness on certain issues. This often results in media choosing superiority and biasness to report its news. It is not surprising that Al Jazeera is taking such behaviors to report its news. Even though, Al Jazeera is not sole in this matter; it remains superior due to its popularity. The channel's unethical practices enforced many countries to take actions to shut down Al-Jazeera's offices and imprison its journalists. Despite being unbiased, Al Jazeera insists that it works independently from any authorities but questions on Jazeera's silence on issues in and on Qatar remain unanswered.

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