

Analyzing the Logic of an Article: An Example

Is it Possible for the News Media to Reform?¹

To provide their publics with non-biased writing, journalists around the world, would have to, first, enter empathically into world views to which they are not at present sympathetic. They would have to imagine writing for audiences that hold views antithetical to the ones they hold. They would have to develop insights into their own sociocentrism. They would have to do the things done by critical consumers of the news. The most significant problem is that, were they to do so, their readers would perceive their articles as “biased” and “slanted,” as “propaganda.” These reporters would be seen as irresponsible, as allowing their personal point of view to bias their journalistic writings. Imagine Israeli journalists writing articles that present the Palestinian point of view sympathetically. Imagine Pakistani journalists writing articles that present the Indian point of view sympathetically.

The most basic point is this: journalists do not determine the nature and demands of their job. They do not determine what their readers want or think or hate or fear. The nature and demands of their job are determined by the broader nature of societies themselves and the beliefs, values and world views of its members. It is human nature to see the world, in the first instance, in egocentric and sociocentric terms. Most people are not interested in having their minds broadened. They want their present beliefs and values extolled and confirmed. Like football fans, they want the home team to win, and when it wins to triumph gloriously. If they lose, they want to be told that the game wasn't important, or that the other side cheated, or that the officials were biased against them.

As long as the overwhelming mass of persons in the broader society are drawn to news articles that reinforce, and do not question, their fundamental views or passions, the economic imperatives will remain the same. The logic is parallel to that of reforming a nation's eating habits. As long as the mass of people want high fat processed foods, the market will sell high fat and processed foods to them. As long as the mass of people want simplistic news articles that reinforce egocentric and sociocentric thinking, that present the world in sweeping terms of good and evil (with the reader's views and passions treated as good and those of the reader's conceived enemies as evil), the news media will generate such articles for them. The profit and ratings of news sources that routinely reinforce the passions and prejudices of their readers will continue to soar.

¹ Paul, R. and Elder, L. (2002). *The Miniature Guide for Conscientious Citizens on How to Detect Media Bias and Propaganda*. Dillon Beach, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking.

The main purpose of this article is to show why the news media are not likely to alter their traditional practices of slanting the news in keeping with audience preconceptions.

The key question that the author is addressing is: “Why is it not possible for the news media to reform?”

The most important information in this article is:

1. Information about how and why the news media currently operates:
 - a. That the news media slant stories to fit the viewpoint of their audience. “Most people are not interested in having their views broadened....Like football fans they want the home team to win...The overwhelming mass of persons in the broader society are drawn to news articles that reinforce, and do not question, their fundamental views or passions.”
 - b. That the fundamental purpose of the mainstream news media is to make money. “As long as the mass of people want simplistic news articles...the news media will generate such articles for them. The profit and ratings of news sources that routinely reinforce the passions and prejudices of their readers will continue to soar.”
2. Information about how the news media would have to change to be more intellectually responsible:
 - a. That the news media would have to actively enter differing world views “Imagine Israeli journalists writing articles that present the Palestinian point of view sympathetically. Imagine Pakistani journalists writing articles that present the Indian point of view sympathetically.”
 - b. That the news media would have to “develop insights into their own sociocentrism.”
 - c.

The main inferences in this article are: “as long as the overwhelming masses of persons in the broader society are drawn to news articles that reinforce, and do not question, their fundamental views or passions,” the news will be presented in a biased way. Because the fundamental purpose of the media is to make money, and the only way people will buy papers is if their sociocentric views are reinforced and not questioned, the media will continue to distort events in accordance with audience views.

The key concepts that guide the author’s reasoning in this article are: biased and unbiased journalism, egocentrism and sociocentrism, propaganda. (Each of these concepts should be elaborated.)

The main assumptions underlying the author’s thinking are: The driving force behind the news media is vested interest – i.e. making money; that the news media therefore pander to their readers’ views so as to sell more papers; but that, at the same time, the news media must appear to function objectively and fairly.

If this line of reasoning is justified, the implications are: Citizens need to think critically about the news media and how they systematically distort stories in accordance

with reader bias. They need to notice how their own sociocentric views are intensified by what they read.

The main point of view presented in this article is: The world news media function as profit-making enterprises that structure the news to pander to reader and society prejudices.

Source: Foundation for Critical Thinking