



TABLOIDIZATION (ETC.)

DUMBING DOWN OR
DEMOCRATIZATION?

COMMS 201

IDEAL

- **Watchdog, investigating Government claims and those of the powerful in society**
- **Providing accurate, independent, verifiable, and objective reporting**

REAL

- ▶ Concentration of ownership
- ▶ Non-media conglomerates
- ▶ **'Dumbing down' and commercialization**

EROSION OF FOURTH ESTATE 'IDEALS'

HARD NEWS VS. SOFT NEWS

HARD NEWS TOPICS	SOFT NEWS TOPICS
International news	Entertainment or celebrity news
Political news	Lifestyle news
Business and economic news	Arts and culture news
Health or education news	Sports news

Emma Morano, world's oldest person, dies aged 117

Woman, thought to have been the last person left in the world born in the 1800s, dies at her home in northern Italy



Emma Morano, pictured in May 2016. Photograph: Antonino Di Marco/EPA

The world's oldest person, Emma Morano, has died at her home in northern Italy.



Russell Blackstock is a senior reporter at the Weekend Herald and Herald on Sunday.

Sensing Murder star to leave show in pursuit of bigger fish

10:48 AM Sunday Apr 16, 2017

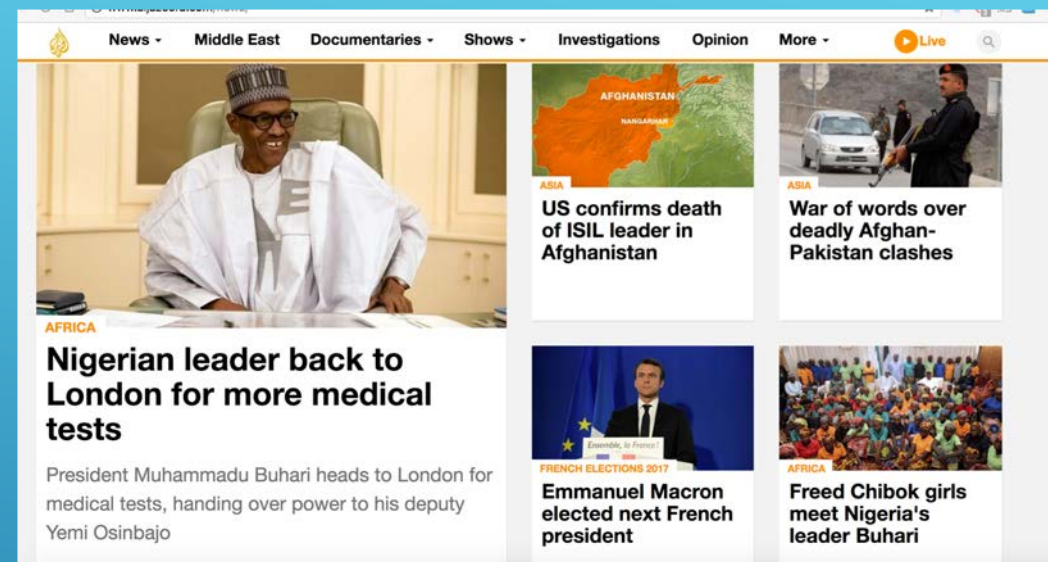
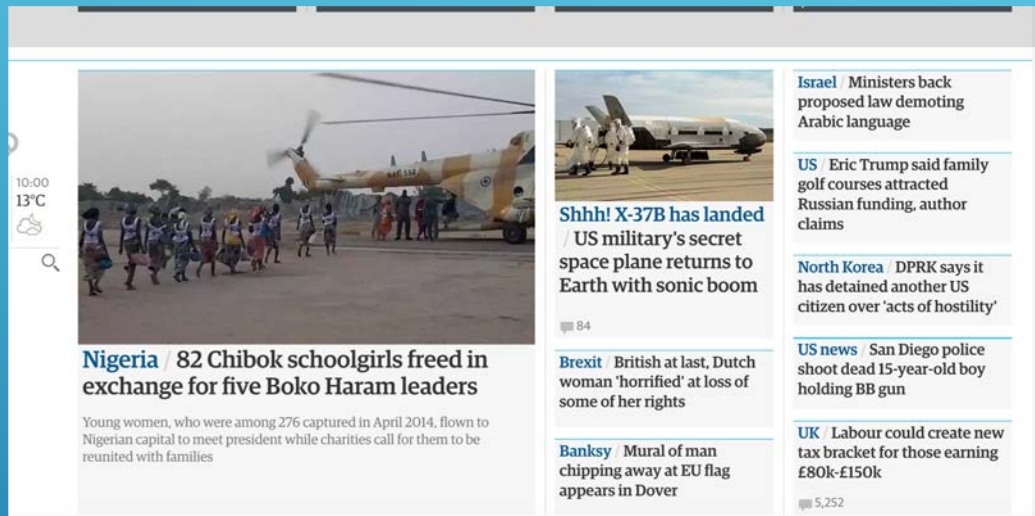
Television

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New Zealand's most famous psychic detective insists he has finally closed the

SOFT NEWS - HUMAN INTEREST & CELEBRITY



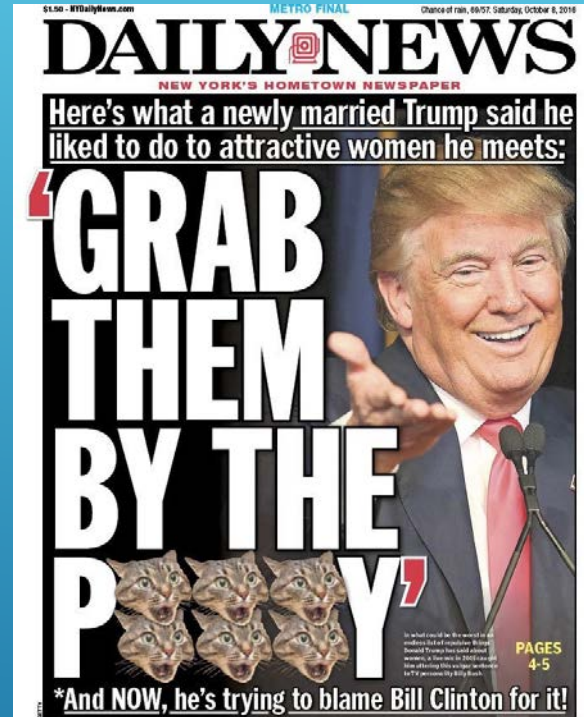
HARD NEWS-ASSOCIATED WITH 4TH ESTATE ROLE

SOFT AND HARD NEWS COMBINATION!



THE DUMBING DOWN OF NEWS: RANGE OF TERMS

- ▶ Tabloidization (Bird 2009)
- ▶ Celebrification (Turner 2015)
- ▶ Militainment (Stahl 2010)
- ▶ Politainment (Schultz 2012)
- ▶ Infotainment (Thussu 2007)
- ▶ Sensationalism (Kitsch 2009)
- ▶ Popularization (Gans 2009)



- ▶ 'Tabloid' refers to newspaper size, Tabloid vs. Broadsheet
- ▶ Stylistic and content changes that represent a decline in journalistic standards
- ▶ Formulaic, colourful. Appealing to base instincts and public demand for sensationalism
- ▶ Dedicated to celebrity, human interest, advice: mix of news, entertainment, sport, heavy illustration



1. TABLOID NEWS AND TABLOIDIZATION

STYLE

- ▶ Short punchy sentences
- ▶ Narrative rather than analysis
- ▶ Use of personal stories
- ▶ Dependency on visuals

CONTENT

- ▶ Increasing trivialization
- ▶ Celebrity news and gossip
- ▶ Human interest stories
- ▶ Covers political debate as 'horse races'

TABLOID NEWS AND TABLOIDIZATION



TABLOID-IZATION – SHIFT FROM 'REAL' TO TABLOID

CRITICS

- ▶ Undermines truth and objectivity and the role of the 4th estate
- ▶ Trivializes and sensationalises, rather than informs
- ▶ Obscures deeper analyses
- ▶ Crowds out 'proper news'
- ▶ Commercially driven, condescending, pandering
- ▶ Superficial

SUPPORTERS

- ▶ Yesterday's 'tabloid' can now be seen as fresh and new.
- ▶ Context can be variable over place and time
- ▶ Greater accessibility - can loosen elite controls
- ▶ Personal stories can make news more effective and accessible
- ▶ Mainstream news has also failed to inform and engage

TABLOIDIZATION - TENSIONS AND DEBATE

“ THE TENSION BETWEEN TABLOIDS AS REPRESENTING THE LEGITIMATE DESIRES AND VOICE OF THE PEOPLE OR A VULGARIZATION OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE HAS BEEN AT HEART OF DEBATE ”

ELIZABETH BIRD, *'TABLOIDIZATION'*

Several thin, parallel white lines of varying lengths and angles are positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, creating a modern, abstract graphic element.

“ SLEAZOID INFOTAINMENT CULTURE; A CULTURE OF JOURNALISTIC TITILLATION, WHERE WE TEACH OUR READERS AND OUR VIEWERS THAT THE TRIVIAL IS SIGNIFICANT, THAT THE LURID AND THE LOOPY ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN REAL NEWS. WE DO NOT SERVE OUR READERS AND VIEWERS, WE PANDER TO THEM. AND WE CONDESCEND TO THEM, GIVING THEM WHAT WE THINK THEY WANT AND WHAT WE CALCULATE WILL SELL AND BOOST RATINGS AND READERSHIP ”

CARL BERNSTEIN, WASHINGTON POST

One of the two investigative journalists that broke the Watergate story that led to the downfall of Richard Nixon.

“ EXPANDING AND DEMOCRATISING THE PUBLIC SPHERE – THAT IS REACHING PEOPLE THAT MAY NOT OTHERWISE READ THE NEWS (BRANTS 1998)

DRAMATIC FRAMING DOES ATTRACT VIEWERS WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE IGNORE NEWSCASTS, IT INCREASES THEIR EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT WITH SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL ISSUES, AND IT STIMULATES THEM TO CARE AND THINK ABOUT THESE ISSUES (GRABER 1994)

HAS AN EMOTIONAL APPEAL AND REPRESENTS THE HUMAN IMPULSE (BOURDIEU 1994; GITLIN 2002)

CRITICS ARE ELITIST AND PESSIMISTIC, AND IDEALIZE MAINSTREAM NEWS AND MEDIA (HARTLEY 1999)

”

DEFENDING POPULARIZATION (TABLOIDIZATION)

THIS YEAR, THE BIGGEST STORY IS THEIR OWN.

PAGE ONE

INSIDE THE NEW YORK TIMES



MAGNOLIA PICTURES PARTICIPANT MEDIA AND HISTORY FILMS PRESENT ANDREW ROSSI'S "PAGE ONE: INSIDE THE NEW YORK TIMES"
WITH CHAD DECK CHRISTOPHER GRAMICA SARAH BOWEN KATHY HARRIS LINDA HENRY WITH JOSH BRADY DAVID HANCO ALAN OXMAN ADAM SCHLESINGER WITH DANIEL STEIN DANIEL PINE
EDITED BY KATE NOVACEK ANDREW ROSSI PRODUCED BY ANDREW ROSSI

SUMMER 2011

<http://www.rokspoll.com/pageone>

Read PublicAffairs' book: Page One

- ▶ Page One: Inside the New York Times, (2011) dir. Andrew Rossi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLct9jNrFuo>



- ▶ Graeme Turner (2015) The Reinvention of Media. The impact on celebrity news in transforming media.
- ▶ “Celebrity News would have been an oxymoron – once”

2. CELEBRIFICATION OF MEDIA

- ▶ Celebrification has spread from the 'red top' tabloids to the quality press
- ▶ Rise associated with commercialization; entertainment now as providing information and the concentration media ownership
- ▶ Celebrity has always been popular, but what has changed is the preparedness of the media to transform itself
- ▶ World of celebrity and the everyday seems more porous than ever (Big Brother, The Bachelor, PewDiePie)
- ▶ Social media has adopted the hybridized (public and private) process of self-fashioning individuals
- ▶ Everyone can imagine or style themselves as a 'celebrity'
- ▶ Construction of politicians as celebrities, conducting policy through Twitter.

CELEBRIFICATION - STATE OF PLAY

Regular News	Celebrity News
Seeking out sources	Managed by celebrity machine
Produced for informational purposes	Produced for commercial purposes
Research, shape 'finding story'	Provides story 'ready to run'
Newsgatherer, fact checker	Filtering agent, witness, 'captured'

CELEBRIFICATION -CHANGING NEWS PROCESSES



CELEBRIFICATION - THE RISE OF THE IMAGE

<http://www.tmg.com/>



CELEBRIFICATION - PAPARAZZI





CELEBRIFICATION – GOSSIP AS NEWS

- ▶ The widespread celebrification of media is structural as well as discursive
- ▶ Adopted a number of practises of news while establishing some of its own
- ▶ 'Celebrity news' is displacing the populations' interest in other forms of news
- ▶ This in turn reduces the scrutiny and accountability of those in power
- ▶ Trump as reality star: political coverage becomes a reality show

CELEBRIFICATION - CONCLUSIONS

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2017/04/trump-show-170410080214061.html>

- ▶ Military coverage and entertainment – ‘militainment’
- ▶ The promised democraticization of international news promised by the Internet never occurred
- ▶ News outlets feed off each other – range of stories are shrinking including those on terrorism and war

3. MILITAINMENT - BACKGROUND

- ▶ The First Gulf War in Iraq (1991) George Bush Snr framed as 'just, heroic and clean'
- ▶ 'Precision smart bombs' and 'collateral damage' rather than civilian death – aestheticization of war, making it 'beautiful'
- ▶ Embedded journalists: fewer viewpoints
- ▶ Influential postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard (*The Gulf War did not take place*, 1991) argues the first Gulf War was 'virtual', a scripted media event or spectacle: missile eye's view video cameras.

MILITAINMENT - ORIGINS



- ▶ The second Gulf War (2003) which many believe spawned the rise of ISIS – which was generated endless suffering, terrorism, war and displacement.
- ▶ George Bush Jnr, Tony Blair and John Howard framed the terms of the war based on Saddam Hussein's links to Sept 11, 2001 and to the supposed weapons of mass destruction.
- ▶ The media mostly accepted the framing – the falsehood that formed the backbone of the story of the war.
- ▶ Tabloidization, increasingly uncritical journalism and embedded journalism, allowed this narrative to spread.

MILITAINMENT - ORIGINS

<https://auckland-kanopystreaming-com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/video/page-one-inside-new-york-times>

- ▶ Not just issue of spectacle and reportage, rather than investigation of 'facts', the media was melding resonant images and stories allowing the US administration to sell their war.
- ▶ The case of Pat Tilman: a soldier's death as a 'heroic deed'; fusing of football and war. Killed by 'friendly fire'.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlqRa49aTyw> (The Pat Tilman Story, 2011)
- ▶ The Jessica Lynch story: the innocent teenage girl abducted by menacing 'natives' by brave US troops. Lied about her experience.



MILITAINMENT - SELLING WAR



'Mother of all bombs'

MILITAINMENT - TELEVISUAL SPECTACLE

<http://www.avclub.com/article/fox-and-friends-somberly-soundtracks-afghanistan-b-253769>

Not the 9 o'clock news

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beCYGm1vMJ0>



Now for something completely different

- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGK8lC-bGnU>



NEWS SATIRE – THE PAST

- ▶ ‘Satirical news’ interrogates and critiques power
- ▶ Enacts a model of ‘deliberative democracy’
- ▶ Performs the 4th Estate better than the mainstream news



SATIRICAL NEWS' SHOWS

Geoffrey Baym, "Real News/Fake News: Beyond the News/Entertainment Divide"

- ▶ Attracts diverse audiences turned off by traditional sources of news
- ▶ More 'real' than real news
- ▶ Reinvent public interest journalism, reinvigorate the fourth estate and popular engagement with politics.
- ▶ Parody and satire cross over news and entertainment.
- ▶ Habermas argues modernity divided culture into spheres, the *political-normative* distinct from *aesthetic-expressive*.
- ▶ Baym: satirical news provides discursive integration, deeply hybrid. Politics is indivisible from popular culture.
- ▶ The real news is postmodern infotainment indistinguishable from reality TV.
- ▶ Satirical news becomes the serious source of 'news' information.

SATIRICAL NEWS' SHOWS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIJmW3sFPEI>

SATIRICAL NEWS

- ▶ Freed from news cycle although often shadows news
- ▶ Editorially independent, focuses on politics
- ▶ Re-aired and shared, allowing analysis and reflectiveness
- ▶ Lacks real access to politicians, thus not 'captured'.

MAINSTREAM NEWS

- ▶ Must adhere to news values, newsworthiness, news conventions
- ▶ Political coverage now obscured by tabloid news
- ▶ Glued to 24-hours news cycle and breaking news
- ▶ Often uses by politicians, 'spin doctors' and 'media advisors'.

SATIRICAL VS. MAINSTREAM NEWS

SATIRICAL NEWS

- ▶ Wider range of voices and viewpoints
- ▶ Mends politics and play
- ▶ Critically engaging, dialogic
- ▶ The 'said and the unsaid', irony involves filling in the blanks
- ▶ Brings politics into leisure time

MAINSTREAM NEWS

- ▶ Adheres to 'objectivity' and convention
- ▶ Repetitive and conformist
- ▶ Unidirectional and hierarchical
- ▶ Monologic, readymade 'truth'
- ▶ Divorces politics from everyday life

SATIRICAL VS. MAINSTREAM NEWS

- ▶ Real news in crisis, declining audiences, decreasing profits, loss of credibility
- ▶ Real news re-packaged as tabloid infotainment, abdicating and swamping watchdog function
- ▶ In making fun, satire engages with serious political issues
- ▶ Thus we see the power of entertainment in pursuit of older Fourth Estate and journalistic ideals

SATIRE: CONCLUSIONS