

“Question everything.” Is this fair advice when approaching the media today?

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In recent times, an ordinary person can be said to possess the world at his fingertips. With the rise of new technology such as smartphones, media outlets find no trouble disseminating information to their viewers rapidly and immediately. Yet, with these benefits technology provides come a growing problem – fake news. Therefore, I believe that it is fair advice to ‘question everything’ when approaching the media today, due to the increasing prevalence of clickbait articles, partisan news and inaccurate coverage of breaking stories.

To start, with the aid of the World Wide Web, many fall prey to clickbait articles that may contain false news, or “fake news”. The internet guarantees fast searches and a multitude of links to a wide variety of websites. It is so easy for a person to enter bogus websites, after being lured in by a catchy headline, with con artists earning money when viewers click on their article or visit their websites. This could be heavily seen in the 2016 US presidential election, when false articles flooded social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, linking to unbelievable news outlets reporting the latest ‘scandal’ by the presidential candidates. These are created by unscrupulous people capitalising on the demand for incriminating news to make a quick buck. For those that are constantly on the internet and on social media platforms, discretion has to be used to avoid falling into traps. As such, because of these clickbait articles, it is right to suspect everything online.

Furthermore, biased news outlets may twist their reports in favour of a political party. Viewers run the risk of receiving news that was edited and nuanced into portraying a particular view that suited a certain political party. An unsuspecting viewer will hence be made to believe a certain view after watching or reading information from the biased news outlet. This is especially relevant today in the world’s superpower, the United States of America. FOX News is said to align itself with the Republican party, while CNN is said to align itself with the Democratic party. The information from both these two media outlets are polar opposites, with FOX news painting the Republican Party in a good light while CNN reporters heavily criticise the party’s actions. FOX News especially distorts the truth when covering Donald Trump’s outrageous actions. Viewers that only subscribe to one news channel, which is the likely case for Donald Trump supporters, are thus polarised because they were led to believe that the actions of the President are always justifiable, even if they are not. Citizens should not trust everything that is disseminated from news outlets, even those that are supposedly reputable. They should exercise critical thinking when receiving information, and not blindly accept the news due to biased news outlets today.

However, detractors of my stand may argue that people can still trust news outlets that are reputable and trustworthy, along with the news that they report. News outlets such as the Straits Times, The Guardian, Huffington Post and Channel News Asia have a reputation of being unbiased in their reporting, preferring to take a neutral stand and reporting only the truth. News from these outlets are thus said to be trusted. After all, the average citizen has to receive his news from somewhere. For example, the Straits Times remained impartial when reporting about the 38 Oxley Road case involving the dispute between Singapore’s Prime Minister and his siblings about the outcome of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s house on Oxley Road. It would have been very easy for the Straits Times to side with the more ‘powerful’ Prime Minister Lee, and influence their readers to do so as well. However, reporters from the Straits Times accurately reported information from both sides without bias. A person who receives news from these reputable and trusted sources need not question and suspect everything, because these media outlets report the truth.

That being said, even trustworthy news outlet may make mistakes. Due to the speed of which breaking news are covered daily, there could be mistakes made because there is no time to verify the information thoroughly. Today, breaking news is covered immediately. Reporters flock to the scene of the news within minutes, informing their viewers on updates periodically. Often times, they would rely on sources to give a wider perspective or information of the ongoing events. However, these sources may not be fully accurate, but with pressing time to deliver a story, the reporter would be unable to verify the truth. For example, when a mass shooting occurred at a Quebec City mosque in January 2017, certain American news outlets reported that sources heard the gunman shout "Allahu akbar!", and thus instantly assumed the terrorist to be radicalised Muslim. After some time, the information soon proved to be inaccurate, and the shooter was found to be in fact a White Nationalist. Although it is safe to believe information from reputable news sources, there will still be mistakes as to err is human. Hence, one should still be critical and question the information provided.

In conclusion, I believe that given the needs of today's world, which are the immediate coverage of news and the ease of access to a wide range of information, questioning and being critical of news provided by all sources is sound advice. After all, it is also said that critical thinking is a 21st Century skill that most people should develop, and with the rise of "fake news", biased news, and inaccurate information, one should always exercise caution in one's judgement.

Comments:

A very sensible and well-balanced piece! A pleasure to read. Just be careful when writing to avoid little slips in expression. A thing to note, relate each paragraph to TODAY more overtly as it is the context of the question. Keep it up! ☺

