

Globalization and Culture
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Lecture - 35
News as Infotainment

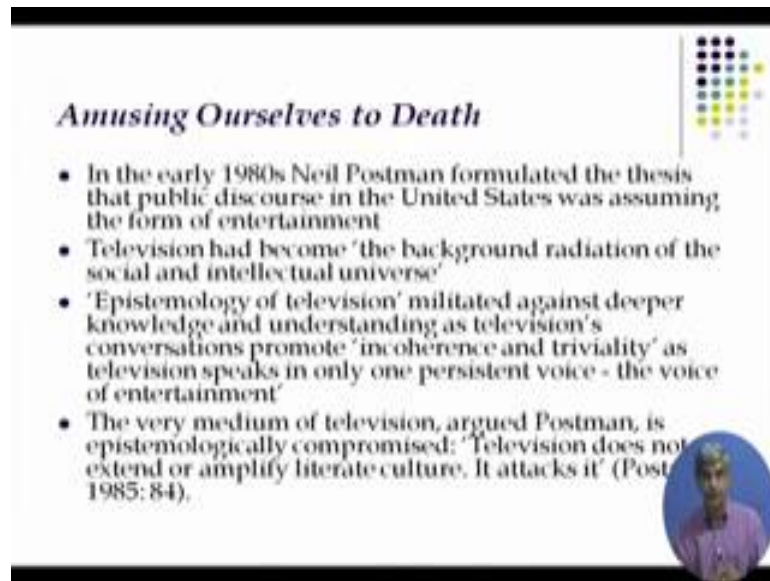
Good morning and welcome to the lecture on Global news. This is a continuation of a lecture we had yesterday, where we looked at the politics of global news.

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In today's lecture I am going to be focusing on the Economics of Global News, how increasingly news and entertainment are blurring and creating a new kind of news with the phenomenon is sometimes described as infotainment, I will look at why it has happened, where it has emerged from and how it has been globalized and finally, I will be reflecting on what are the implications, when news becomes a commodity implications for public sphere in implications for democratic discourse implications for the future journalism.

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Amusing Ourselves to Death

- In the early 1980s Neil Postman formulated the thesis that public discourse in the United States was assuming the form of entertainment
- Television had become 'the background radiation of the social and intellectual universe'
- 'Epistemology of television' militated against deeper knowledge and understanding as television's conversations promote 'incoherence and triviality' as television speaks in only one persistent voice - the voice of entertainment'
- The very medium of television, argued Postman, is epistemologically compromised: 'Television does not extend or amplify literate culture. It attacks it' (Post 1985: 84).



So, let me start with a title of a book called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Now this is a book that was published in the early 1990s and the book was written by Neil Postman, who was a very well-known media educationist based at New York University and he was very concerned about what was happening to public discourse in the United States primarily, because of the economic pressures under which media organizations and news organizations were operating.

So in the 1980s Postman came up with a thesis, the title of his book, that the public discourse in the United States is increasingly driven by entertainment. He was particularly concerned about television. Television even today in 2016 remains the most important global media. Despite the massive expansion of the internet, if you look at the global picture the most important media even today is television. Television became the background radiation of the social and intellectual universe that is what Postman said, he was also concerned about the epistemology of television, the knowledge system of television. He argued that it militated against deeper knowledge and understanding as television's conversations promote incoherence and triviality as television speaks in only one persistent voice, the voice of entertainment.

The very medium of television he argued is therefore, epistemologically compromised. Television does not extend impetrate culture it attacks it. The book was published in 1985 this is the age before satellite TV have become big even in the united states let alone internationally there was no internet right. Even then some people like Neil postman were concerned about what was happening to public discourse in the united states if we fast forward to more recent years say 1990s.

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Entertaining news?

- Acquiring of news networks by conglomerates whose primary interest is in entertainment business:
- Viacom-Paramount owns CBS News
- ABC News is part of the Disney empire
- CNN is a key component of Time-Warner
- Fox News is owned by News Corporation.
- This shift in ownership is reflected in the type of stories - about celebrities from the world of entertainment, for example - that often get prominence on news, thus strengthening corporate synergies



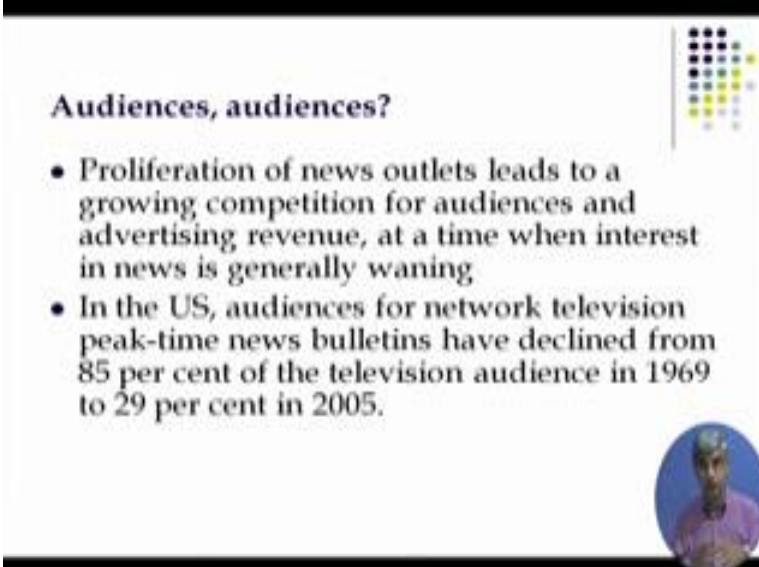
On words that has been an interesting shift and this is a structural shift, in the sense that increasingly news operations are owned by corporations whose primary interest is not in news who is primary interest is in entertainment. The phenomena start in the united states and as I will discuss then globalizes. So, for example, if you think of CBS news one of the most conservative well regarded network television news in the united states a major entertainment conglomerate with many properties notably MTV the most successful television channel in the world.

ABC news is part of Disney primary interest of Disney, is not in use its entertainment and in this case particular children's entertainment. CNN of course, the network which actually created the idea of 24/7 news is part of time Warner a major media conglomerate and of course, Fox News which is become very important in the united states and

arguably been change the broadcast journalism culture in the us is part of news corporation which is (Refer Time: 06:40) media conglomerate.


So, there is a structural shift main news channels are now part of big media conglomerate whose not primarily in news and this shift in ownership has a also affected the kind of stories which get picked up by news media stories about celebrities for example, stories from popular culture, which feed into the entertainment networks right there is a kind of synergy between entertainment properties of these conglomerates and their news operations. So, that is another if you like structural major structure change which is impacted on news operations.

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Audiences, audiences?

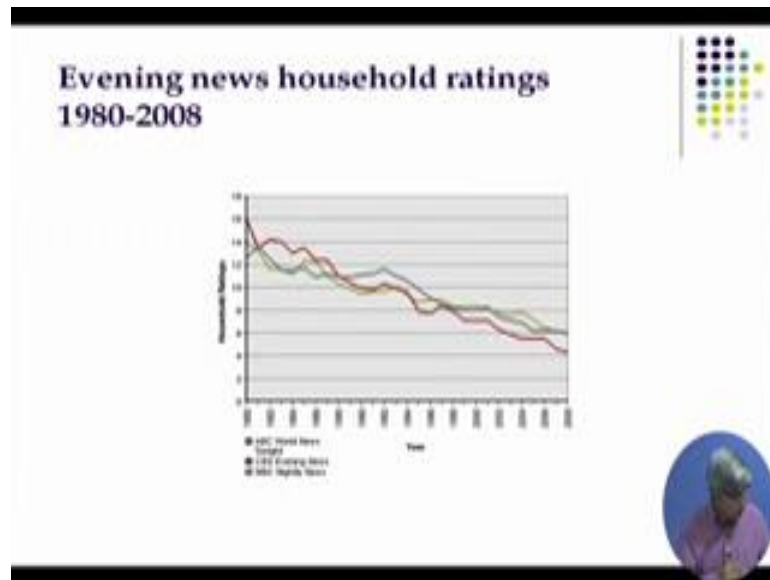
- Proliferation of news outlets leads to a growing competition for audiences and advertising revenue, at a time when interest in news is generally waning
- In the US, audiences for network television peak-time news bulletins have declined from 85 per cent of the television audience in 1969 to 29 per cent in 2005.



Then there is a there is another very important factor and that is fragmentation of audiences, is an interesting paradox that at a time when used networks have proliferated, it has also lead to a fragmentation of audiences which also means fragmentation of advertising revenue. Also at a time when interest general interests in news is declining particularly among the young population, many young people do not when we talk about television news are not watching television news regularly, they are getting the news from other sources. Whether it is online sources or social media, but there are not

regularly watching television in the US the decline is substantial from its 29 percent by 2005 the figure is even lower today. So, there is constant decline.

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If you look at the this is a kind of longitudinal figure to show the how did ratings for evening news have decline in the united states and this is ABC world news tonight are CBSE evening news on NBC nightly news the 3 leading news networks and then their main program in the united states. There is a 4th problem, which is that with in media organizations the relationship between the management and editorial site has also changed. Editorials editorial staffs are much weaker today than the managers.

So, in other words manager are setting the newsagent rather than the other way around. So, this is something which is happened in the US for last 20 years, but the given that us is. So, powerful what happens there? In their media has an impact around the world and therefore the whole idea of public broadcasting has been undermined because of this trend in news operations.

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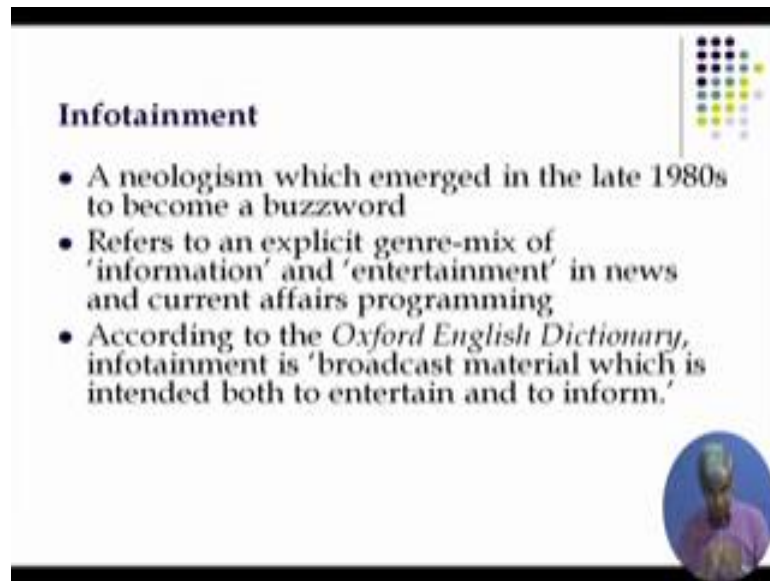
Future of public broadcasting

- The challenge of technology
- From broad- to 'narrow'-casting
- From national to global broadcasting
- From information to 'infotainment'




So, there are questions about how new technology can be deployed to protect public broadcasting because public broadcasting in many countries is being undermined by public challenges to the extent that some people argue that, the idea of broadcasting itself is redundant we may be better advised to talk about narrow casting. So, you are interested in particular country or particular theme or particular sport star or celebrity or whatever you just get that information its narrow casting rather than broadcasting. Traditionally broadcasting used to be a national phenomena television was a national phenomena, but with globalization that is not the case increasingly the market is global and therefore, the product is global and because there is so much pressure on news operators to keep retaining their marketplace and expanding it consolidating it there is a trend increasing trend towards presenting news in entertaining manner. So there is a move from information to infotainment.

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Infotainment

- A neologism which emerged in the late 1980s to become a buzzword
- Refers to an explicit genre-mix of 'information' and 'entertainment' in news and current affairs programming
- According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, infotainment is 'broadcast material which is intended both to entertain and to inform.'



Now, infotainment is a phrase which came up in the 1980s became a buzzword emerged in the united states, it refers to an explicit genre mix of information and entertainment in news and current affairs programming which is even entered oxford English dictionary which defined it as broadcast material, which is intended both to entertain and to inform. So, we are focusing on television news in this lecture. In the future lecture I will talk about internet and other things.

So, how do we understand this phenomena this shift from journalism to entertainment driven journalism increasingly hostage to big corporate interest, it will look at how actually news works in a market place because news is also a commodity which needs to be sold in an increasingly competitive and crowded market. So, here I am drawing on some work done in the united states, which looks at how this phenomenon takes place in a very US context, but actually the argument that study raises are relevant to many other situations.

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News in a marketplace?

- Decision-making process among 'news directors' about what information to offer as news depends on:
- Audience interests
- Costs of assembling stories
- Readers' / viewers' expectations about their treatment of the news
- Likely actions of their competitors

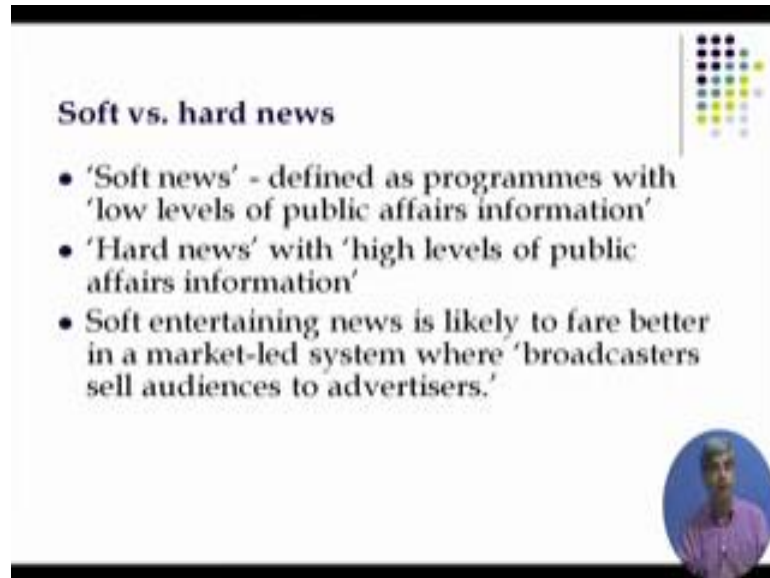


So, news in the marketplace, decision making process I mean news directors about what information to offer as news depends on various factors now here. News directors in the study are journalists or editors. So, on any given day there are millions of events that take place around the world, someone picks certain number of these stories, this raw information converts then into news and then put out to their networks. What are the factors in that? Audiences' interest is our viewership interested in this particular story. How much does it cost to assemble that story, remember it is market logic? So that is a very important consideration. Reader's viewers expectations about their treatment of the news, are they bothered very much what is happening in Southern Sudan, do they know where southern Sudan is.

So, what level of detail we need to provide in our reporting likely actions of their competitors, who else is covering it, how are they covering it, how they might cover it, good influence how we will cover it with the study of some interesting distinction between soft and hard news and soft news is defined here, as programs with low levels of public affairs information right. So, celebrity has a haircut a very little public interest, but it makes the news yeah and its repeated 24/7 around world. As against hard news with high levels of public affairs information to GST in India, but this would be good story

now GST is a complex story yeah how do you make it succeed how do you make it entertaining.

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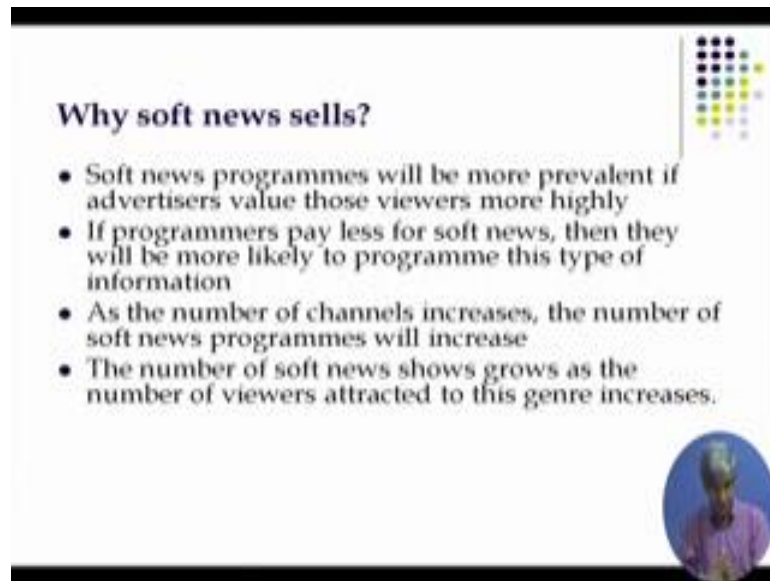
Soft vs. hard news

- 'Soft news' - defined as programmes with 'low levels of public affairs information'
- 'Hard news' with 'high levels of public affairs information'
- Soft entertaining news is likely to fare better in a market-led system where 'broadcasters sell audiences to advertisers.'

The slide features a decorative graphic of colored dots in the top right corner and a small circular portrait of a man in a purple shirt in the bottom right corner.


Soft entertaining news is likely to fare better in a market led system where broadcasters sell audience to advertisers. This is a crucial point; they are selling your time your attention to the advertisers. So, therefore, soft entertaining news is preferable to hard non entertaining news.

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Why soft news sells?

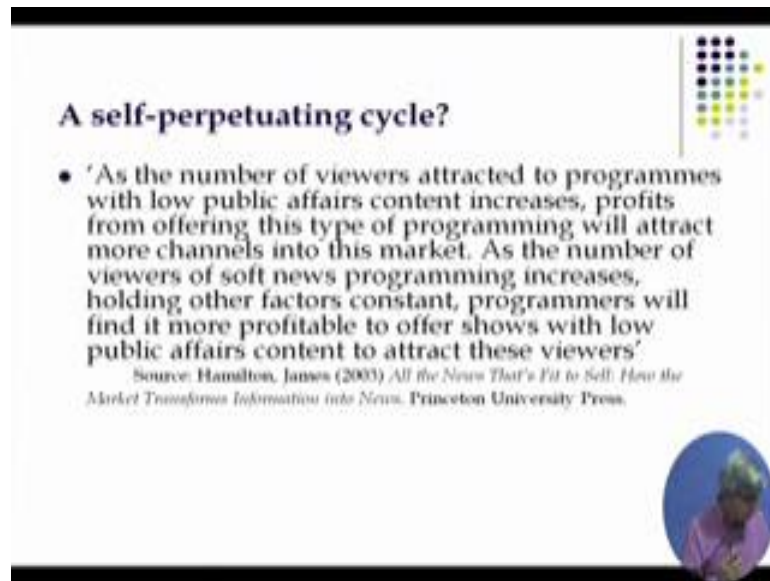
- Soft news programmes will be more prevalent if advertisers value those viewers more highly
- If programmers pay less for soft news, then they will be more likely to programme this type of information
- As the number of channels increases, the number of soft news programmes will increase
- The number of soft news shows grows as the number of viewers attracted to this genre increases.



Why it sells? Soft news programs will be more prevalent, if advertisers value those viewers more highly. So, young people relatively speaking are more susceptible to advertising when you get to my age, your ideas are formed you are not going to you know sleep outside in the street as some young people do in London to buy their latest iphone I will wait for a few months and buy. So, that the difference. So, youth is very important democratic for this.

If programmers pay less for soft news, then they will be more likely to program this type of information cost is very important – remember, we are discussing marketization of news. So, the logic of market would apply everything including how much does it cost to make a program as the number of channels increases the number of soft news programs will increase right look at the Indian case four 100 news channels lot of entertainment of them. The number of soft news shows grows as the number of viewers attracted to this genre increases. So think of the genre of reality TV, yes which is relatively new phenomenon and it is not just an entertainment section is also a news section now we know what is happening on big brother or its version around the world gets into the news interesting phenomena.

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A self-perpetuating cycle?

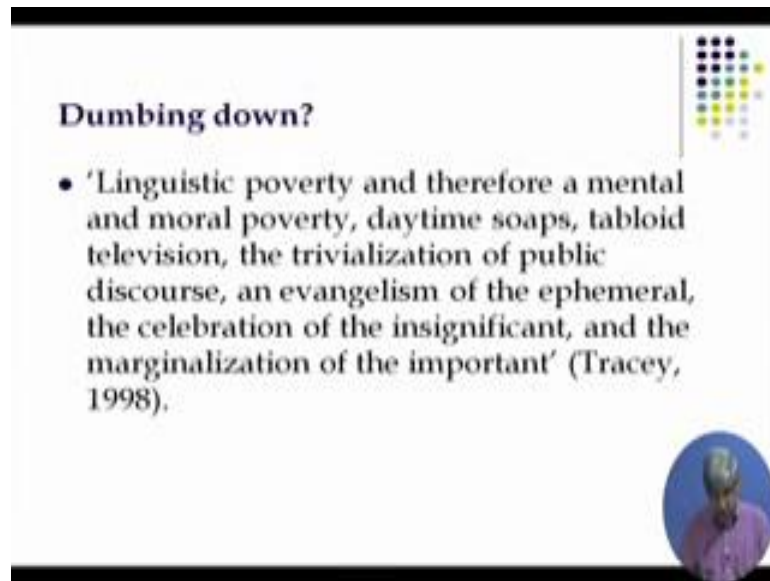
- 'As the number of viewers attracted to programmes with low public affairs content increases, profits from offering this type of programming will attract more channels into this market. As the number of viewers of soft news programming increases, holding other factors constant, programmers will find it more profitable to offer shows with low public affairs content to attract these viewers'

Source: Hamilton, James (2003) *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton University Press.

So what it means then, it creates its own self-perpetuating cycle. I am quoting here from this study, as the number of viewers attracted to programs with low public affairs content increases profits from offering this type of programming will attract more channels into this market. As a number of viewers of soft news programming increases holding other factors constant, programmers will find it more profitable to offer shows with low public affairs content to attract these viewers.


The study was published in the United States. The book which came out of the study was *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. It means it is very American study, but actually very interesting because it raises some questions which are relevant in many other situations because the basic logic of marketization applies to most media systems around the world today. Now this has led to a lot of debate in academic circles particularly about what it does to the public discourse, if too much soft news is on the agenda what happens to public you know or hot news, which is more relevant for most people here are some reactions.

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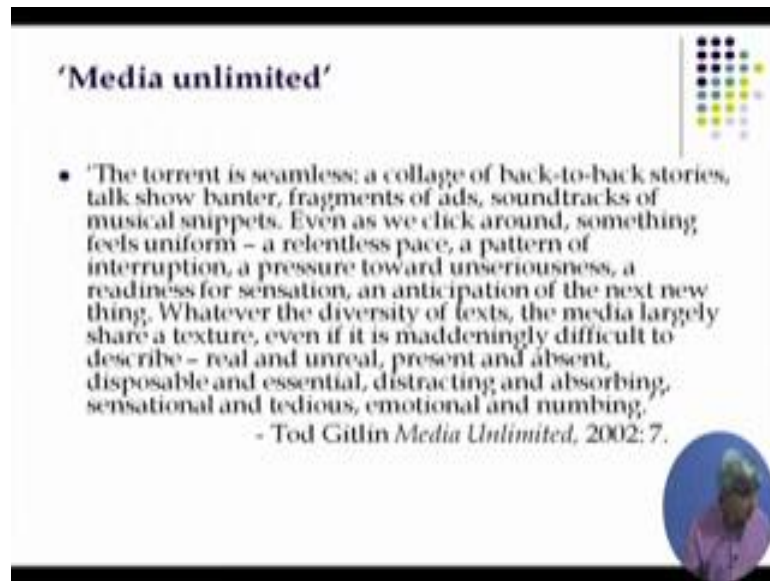
Dumbing down?

- 'Linguistic poverty and therefore a mental and moral poverty, daytime soaps, tabloid television, the trivialization of public discourse, an evangelism of the ephemeral, the celebration of the insignificant, and the marginalization of the important' (Tracey, 1998).




This is from Michael Tracy who has written a very important work on public service broadcasting. He is worried about how this kind of infotainment driven news is dumping down the populace. Linguistic poverty and therefore a mental and moral poverty, daytime soaps, tabloid television, and trivialization of public discourse, an evangelism of the ephemeral, the celebration of the insignificant and the marginalization of the important.

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'Media unlimited'

- "The torrent is seamless: a collage of back-to-back stories, talk show banter, fragments of ads, soundtracks of musical snippets. Even as we click around, something feels uniform – a relentless pace, a pattern of interruption, a pressure toward unseriousness, a readiness for sensation, an anticipation of the next new thing. Whatever the diversity of texts, the media largely share a texture, even if it is maddeningly difficult to describe – real and unreal, present and absent, disposable and essential, distracting and absorbing, sensational and tedious, emotional and numbing."
- Tod Gitlin *Media Unlimited*, 2002: 7.



It is another complaint by Tod Gitlin who is professor at Columbia book publishing 2002. The torrent is seamless a collage of back to back stories, talk show banter, fragments of ads soundtracks of musical spinets. Even as we click round something feels uniform, a relentless space a pattern of interruption, a pressure towards unseriousness, a ready readiness for sensation and anticipation of the next new thing. What about the diversity of text the media largely share a texture, even if it is madernally difficult to describe real and unreal, present and absent, disposable and essential, distracting and absorbing, sensational and tedious ,emotional and numbing Now so far I talked about the us case because it all started there and us being what it is as a impact, all over the world about ten years ago I actually wrote a book on this topic which was the first book length study about the idea of entertainment.

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Global infotainment

From public service to private profit

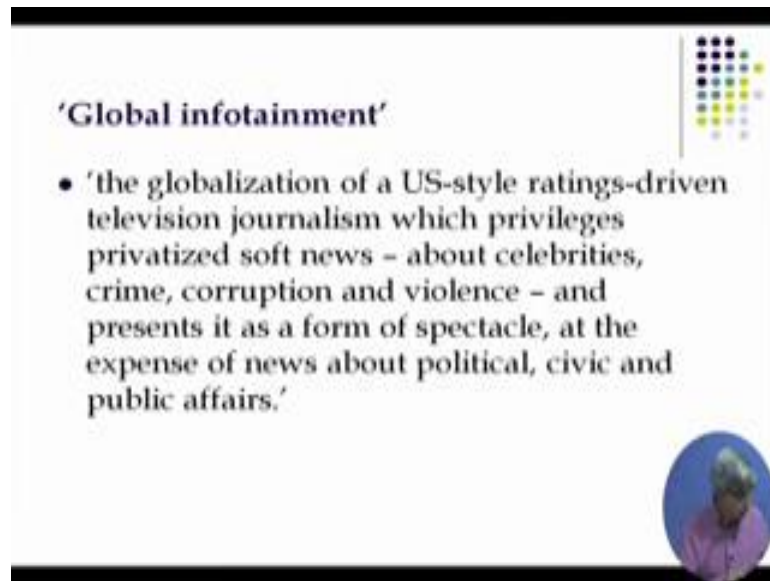
From Marx and Mao to market

'Bollywoodization' of news media

News as Entertainment
Daya Kishan Thussu


And the book is simply called news as entertainment the subtitle is the rise of global infotainment and what I did in this book is I looked at this phenomena from a more international prospect off course starts in the US, then it spreads around the world. Even in western Europe where the public service tradition is very strong market forces are increasingly impacting on news agendas and even in Eastern Europe former soviet union and even in China increasingly market driven decisions are affecting news coverage and in India of course, we have had the most extraordinary shift in news, television news particularly from one state monopoly until 1991 to 400 news channels and I wanted Bollywoodization of news, off course India has more than Bollywood that all kinds of the cinemas, but essentially the art point is that entertainment quotient is actually increasing at the cost of public information.

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'Global infotainment'

- 'the globalization of a US-style ratings-driven television journalism which privileges privatized soft news - about celebrities, crime, corruption and violence - and presents it as a form of spectacle, at the expense of news about political, civic and public affairs.'



And I defined this idea global infotainment as globalization of US styles ratings driven television journalism, with privileges, privatized soft news about celebrities crying corruption and violence and presents it as a form of spectacle at the expensive news or political civic in public affairs. Now you might argue in case India actually there is too much politics on television news, but is this politics really addressing political issues or it is just kind of positioning and shouting matches to basically increase the ratings of news networks, because just imagine if you have 400 news channels, they are all trying to get the attention of a very diverse and increasingly cynical audience and therefore in there is a tendency to project, politics in a manner which actually does not explain what is happening in the real world.

This is not something which is happening in India alone as I said its happening around the world and who benefits from it and who loses out I want to just back go to that in a minute, but before that the few other points I want to make in relation to the globalization of things, in the sense that although the market logic is dominant, but there is also has been a reaction to it. So, how many countries are now have their public broadcaster which is not operating in the market system for example, the RT in Russia CCTV in china and which is going out of china their own countries and trying to project their own news that is different discussion for different lecture let me then finalize this

lecture with the few reflections on what are the implications when news becomes a commodity.

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Implications of news as commodity

- Tendency to trivialise/sensationalise
- Drive to maximise audience
- Tailor programme for multiple news markets (networks, cable, video, on-line, mobile, syndication)
- More leverage for advertisers
- Critical, controversial and educational programmes lose out
- Infotainment as diversion



First is to reiterate this point about trivializing of public discourse a tendency to trivialize not to sensationalize information drive to maximize audiences to keep it at level which is understood by most people. So, by definition it cannot be very detailed by definition it cannot be you know very sophisticated because you want to reach the max audience and given the way media systems operate today news organizations are part of biggest conglomerates which are part of even bigger conglomerates, they have to produce something which works for different platforms for mobile telephones, to laptops and other digital devices.

In a system which is essentially dependent on market advertisers become very important because they are providing the money on which the media at Ephesus based and who are the big advertisers big advertisers are either the governments or big corporations. So, therefore, news operations have to be very careful not to offend either of these two. What is also means is that critical controversial educational programs, get left out there is controversy about the things which actually do not matter with where you imagine, but more essential critical discourse is not on television news, if you want to find that out

you read a book, you even read a newspaper. It has got more detail and educational television in a country like India where we are home to 300 million people are illiterate in 2016, we have missed this amazing opportunity to use television to educate people and my final point and this is actually the crux of the argument, that book I mentioned news entertainment which is that infotainment works at a very skillful and I would argue largely successful diversion to legitimize a particular kind of neo liberal economy.

So, it is has an ideological connotation, that we fill the public space with things that are marginal to public interest and what is in public interest, gets marginalized and therefore, how the system works is very important to understand and on that not I will stop.

Thank you very much. You have been very attentive.