News – A Pro/Con Perspective

Pro:

- **News** – when well written or well-constructed – and when thoughtfully investigated with facts gathered from eyewitnesses and knowledgeable sources such as researchers and officials (all known as primary sources in field of journalism) - and when presented in a manner that considers a number of sides to an issue or event – provides us with a way to quickly and intelligently remain in touch with the events and changes in our world. It may be wise to gather your news from a number of different sources with different biases (see Con below).

- **Journalism** – the craft of news making – has a long and often important history dating well back to the 17th and 18th centuries.

- **News from historic periods** (known as primary sources in the field of history) allows us a chance to visit the past and experience the thoughts, ideas, interests, hopes, and worries of those who came before us. **Old news has value.**

- **Nexis Uni (formerly LexisNexis) and other databases contain billions of news articles which can be accessed online.** However, Nexis Uni and other news databases are very expensive. They contain many very short articles of low quality. In particular, Nexis Uni is very difficult to control and master. (See Con below).

- **Social media** allows individuals to report events as they happen in places that journalists may not be able to access. Social media may also allow individuals to report on events that are ignored by the larger media firms. Finally, social media may allow ideas to surface that might otherwise be suppressed by governments. (However, see Con below).
Con:

- **Most news is too short and too brief to be useful.** Many of the articles found in Nexis Uni are simply short sentences announcing upcoming events or recent transactions. Television news is often presented in short sound-bites. Most of the news we are exposed to lacks balance and in-depth analysis. It is often devoid of thoughtful discussion and it rarely presents multiple sides of an issue.

- **New technological and economic realities are endangering traditional journalism. Quality news costs money to produce and must be paid for.**

  Large quantities of free but poor quality news (drivel) are generated by businesses such as “content farms” (and aided by search engines such as Google). This low quality news floods the Internet and pulls attention and revenue away from companies that produce higher quality news.

  “Aggregators” take (steal?) news that is first reported by higher quality news firms. Aggregators do this in attempt to draw readers to their aggregator websites and thus increase their advertising revenue, which in turn reduces the income of the higher quality news firms and drives those news firms out of business.

- **Fewer journalists are being paid to do in-depth investigative reporting.** Due to aggregators, content farms, and other trends towards “free” news, many large news firms who used to pay news reporters to collect and report news - have gone out of business and many traditional newspapers and news magazines have disappeared.

- **News generated via Social Media may suffer from poor quality and inaccuracies.** Social media can allow anyone to report news. This news is unfiltered, and the “reporter” is unpaid. Since most individuals reporting via social media are not trained journalists with support from traditional news firms – the quality of their reporting can be of low quality, unbalanced, and perhaps inaccurate or even false.

- **Sock puppets.** It is not always possible to tell when a social media or Internet news reporter is who they claim they are. If the reporter is not who they claim they are it is likely the news they report is also fiction.
• **Propaganda.** Many news agencies are controlled by governments that are more interested in reporting (or creating) news that is favorable to that government.

• **Echo chambers.** Many news agencies are also owned by individuals or corporations that are interested in reporting news in a way that supports their political views. The goal of these news agencies is not to produce balanced reporting that considers issues from many viewpoints – but rather to report events in a way that promotes their particular point of view and to **repeatedly report certain viewpoints** in a way that creates a political filter bubble (an echo chamber).

• **News in print.** Magazines and newspapers were often (and still are) printed on acid-based paper that **will essentially self-destruct over time.** In the mid-twentieth century microfilm was introduced to preserve magazines and newspapers – but microfilm, though longer-lasting than paper is not indestructible. Microfilm is not easy to use and doesn’t allow for rapid full text searching.

• **Digitally preserved news is generally very expensive** and not located in just one place. Nexis Uni preserves billions of articles from the 1980s through the present day, but this is an incredibly expensive database that is generally only available to large universities and large corporations. Older newspapers (18th, 19th, and early 20th century news) have been preserved in a rather disorganized fashion by various companies who offer a wide variety of expensive databases. Some of the databases are of high quality (e.g. New York Times), but they are quite expensive. Other databases are of low quality – with both poor quality digital scans and only spotty coverage of past newspapers – yet these databases are also expensive.

• **Bias.** Perhaps all news and all news sources are inevitably biased (why?). Know the tendencies and biases of different news sources (e.g. political biases, geographic biases, racial biases, cultural biases, gender biases) and try to gather your news from a variety of sources from across the spectrum of bias. Avoid falling into a filter bubble or living in an echo chamber.