POLITICS, EMBEDDED JOURNALISM AND WAR NEWS

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ABSTRACT

Media plays an important role especially in the wartime as the news can affect the bottom line of the war. This paper focuses on the reasons of misinformation of society by war reportage as well as on the role of embedded journalists. News can change public opinion and can unintentionally inform the enemy. Embedded journalists play important role in making war news as they personally report from battlefield. That's why their news can deeply affect public opinion.

KEYWORDS : politics, embedded journalism, war news, media, objectivity.

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Media can have impact on people's perception (Sertyesilisik and Sertyesilisik, 2015:91). For this reason, journalists are expected to be objective staying on the right side fighting against corruption and seeking for the truth while they are informing societies (Odugbemi and Pippa, 2009). Furthermore, media has the watchdog role, as the news media is required *"to provide a check on powerful sectors of society, including leaders within the private and public domains"* (Odugbemi and Pippa, 2009:1).

The media's coverage of the politicians' speeches before and during the war time play an important role in shaping public opinion. For example, even if before the Iraq war the media was emphasizing the availability of mass destruction weapons in Iraq, US army could not find mass destruction materials after the war (Ehrenberg, 2010; LeBlanc, 2013; Borger, 2004).

Starting from the 17th century, classical liberal theorists supported the idea of the free press as according to them, openness in the press is the best way of protection from excesses of power (Coronel, 2009:1). However, there are a couple of reasons for misinformation in the Media coverage of war. One of the important factors for misinformation of public is to win the war by misinforming enemy. Even if at the beginning of the Vietnam War, journalists had opportunity to cover the war as they saw (Haigh et al., 2006), security review became one of the key components of the post Vietnam model according to which journalists' news are reviewed to understand whether or not their news comply with the rules (Lewis et al., 2006:9). During the war in Iraq in order to protect operational security the officials limited the flow of information to Media as the Ministry of Defence and Pentagon were *"concerned about the enemy monitoring news reports for information that would help identify the positions of forces, predict their tactics, or identify any weaknesses"* (Lewis et al., 2006:6).

Spinning can play important role in shaping public opinion. It is developed from military propaganda techniques. The aim of spinning is to create a desired impression upon public (Truthliesdeceptioncoverups, 2013). For example, during war time the number of casualty plays important role in shaping public opinion as showing less causality number can have less negative impact to the society (Boettcher et al., 2006).

During the coverage of war news, embedded journalism plays an important role. The Pentagon describes embedding journalists as *"where a reporter goes and lives with the unit for several days or a week and then writes a story about it"* (Bacon, 1996; Brandenburg 2007:952). These journalists are dependent on the troops due to their need for food, transformation and physical protection (Pfau et al., 2004). This system has been also used by the UK during the Falklands War in 1982 (Pfau et al., 2004). Embedded journalism enlightens society by reporting the war directly from battlefield showing the real face of war (Lewis et al., 2006). Their dependence on the army, however, can affect their reporting.

Restrictions to the journalists are made due to the operational security. *"The PA guidelines for embedding clearly state that 'Commanders and public affairs officers must work together to balance the*

need for media access with the need for operational security'" (Department of Defense, 2003, Sect. 2A; Brandenburg, 2007:955). DoD (Department of Defence) was also pleased with embedded journalists, as they enable people to see and be proud of their military's dedication, and professionalism (Purdum and Rutenberg 2003:B3; Haigh et al., 2006:142).

Due to the interpersonal relations embedded journalists can cover conflicts in favour of the army compared to non-embedded journalists. This may cause misinformation in their reporting. Interpersonal relations can occur between embedded journalists and army members as these journalists live, eat, sleep and travel together with the army members (Carr, 2003:B2; Haigh et al., 2006). Army train the journalists and provides them with the uniforms so that they look like each other, and the military commanders see these journalists as a part of their own forces (Ottosen, 1992; Miskin et al., 2003). This enables the journalists to feel themselves as the member of the unit. Ron Martz, a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution covering the Second Brigade of the Third Infantry Division, explained his emotions by saying *"I am a human being first and a journalist second"* (Carr, 2003; Haigh et al., 2006). Furthermore, embedded journalists can find themselves in the middle of the attack and can try to support the military members as they feel themselves as a member of the team. An example for such a case has been provided by Haigh et al. (2006: 142) as follows: *"some reporters provided lifesaving gear and also helped out when the units came under fire (Brightman, 2003; Carr, 2003)".* These events are claimed to affect the objectiveness of the news which are reported by embedded journalists. They can't stay neutral compared to non-embedded journalists in writing their news.

The minding system should be analyzed in order to understand the objectivity of the war news. Due to this system the news of the journalists is always checked by officials who can change parts of the news. The military officials control the information that journalists gains. Due to the minding system the minder has the right to *"interpret ground rules in whatever way they see fit; and to help journalists get their stories back, or to hinder or even block them"* (Lewis et al., 2006:9). This makes the news not the news of journalists but the news of officials resulting in potential misinformation to public (e.g. during the Iraq war army was feeding information to the journalists this makes them to see the war as the same point of view as the army) (Carr, 2003).

The minder system can be defined as the assignment of minders to the journalists who accompany military units who transport them to the places of war (Lewis et al., 2006). This makes journalists dependent on minders while making their news as their ability for making news is restricted by the places that are shown by the minders causing potential misinformation in the news (Lewis et al., 2006: 107).

During the war time coverage, the pool system has been introduced. According to this system tries to solve the problem of excess number of embedded journalists as the capacity of military to accommodate the journalists can be exceeded (Lewis et al., 2006). In the pool system, military sets limit for embedded journalists accommodated and they also set *"limit for different types of journalists (TV, photo, pen-*

cil)" (Lewis et al., 2006:9). This system has been applied in the Gulf war. Peter de la Billiere argues in his book "Storm Command: Personal Account of the Gulf War" that this system has been first introduced by Pentagon in October 1984. According to his definition *"The system was based on the military's selection of a small number of journalists from mainstream media providers who were chaperoned into battle and instructed to share their information with their sidelined colleagues"* (La Billiere, 1995). During the Gulf War, due to the pool system the reporters didn't have eyewitness accounts while important events were happening (Brightman, 2003; Haigh et al., 2006). That's why the pool system can be seen as an important control mechanism from the military officials over the journalists.

In conclusion, starting from the 17th century, classical liberal theorists supported the idea of the free press as according to them, openness in the press is the best way of protection from excesses of power (Coronel, 2009:1). However, if we generally look at the coverage in war time, it can be said that it is impossible to completely eliminate the misinformation of the society. On the other hand, it is possible to minimize it by eliminating or reducing the pool and mining systems. Despite of these precautions, however, there might still be reasons that can cause misinformation as the embedded journalists who stay with a unit of army can develop interpersonal relations which can influence their news preventing them doing their jobs as the watchdog of their society.

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