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The Gatekeepers

How does the press know what it knows?" The answer to this question may surprise many readers: In Intersection, it draws its knowledge from three global news agencies. The news agencies, which operate almost anonymously, are the key to what's happening in the world - and how we perceive it. They define our values and they define our definitions. The question is: Do we even care? Because we have long been addicted to junk news.

What is journalism about - truth or sales, enlightenment or clicks, information or manipulation? This important question is more topical than ever in times of threatened business models and digital disruption.

The fourth power

Journalistic media are often referred to as the "fourth power" in the state. What is meant is that they take on a further important role alongside the three classic state powers, the courts (judiciary), parliament (legislature) and the executive power (executive). Unlike the other powers, they are not part of the state; they have the right to report independently on politics and, where necessary, to control and criticize it. The "fourth estate" lacks democratic legitimacy; journalists do not have to stand for election.

If the real advantage of democracy over other forms of government is the control of the government by the people, then the people also need the necessary information to exercise this control function. "Knowledge is power" - or at least an indispensable prerequisite for retaining control.

Watchdogs of democracy?

The crisis of democracy has reached a new level. It is no longer a distant fringe phenomenon, but has arrived at the center of society. The ideological

operational blindness in journalism led us into the media and democracy crisis in the first place. The good old days, when journalism was about truly independent and well-founded research, opinion-forming, objective reporting and reflective discussion of burning issues in society, are long gone.

« Information was once the main course in a good five-star restaurant. Later, it was just a side dish, and today it's just the faded glaze on cold-served plates of a run-down snack bar. Instead of factual, neutral and informative reporting, we get attitude-salting, ethics-burning cheap copies of information fragments on double-moral sauce. »

Today, it's all about grabbing masses of data in order to direct the market-relevant target group to consumption through optimized placement of mendacious advertising.

No trace of self-criticism

The media crisis is homemade. The media play the role of the fourth estate only when it suits them. Reliable ethical, journalistic and legal foundations have been inadequate to date. The press code is an ineffectual misconstruction, and the Press Council is an appallingly pitiful self-help group.

Journalism is the organized destruction of the mental receptivity of the population exposed to journalism. The little bit of investigative, the little bit of pseudo-informative dirty tricks uncovered is absolutely negligible in view of the baseness that journalism as a whole embodies. The truth is declared to be a lie and the lie is declared to be the truth, hounded, divided, denounced and defamed. Whether mass media or mass crises, one would be inconceivable without the other.

Gatekeeper

News agencies are rarely in the public eye. Yet they are one of the most influential and, at the same time, one of the least known media genres. They are key institutions with substantial importance for any media system. They are the invisible nerve center that connects all parts of this system.

« Most of the international news in all our media comes from just three global news agencies in New York, London and Paris. »

This also makes them the gatekeepers of the news system. What news they select and what view they take of events decisively determines how we are told. News agencies are thus so-called gatekeepers. Who owns these gatekeepers has a great influence on our view of the world and thus on our decisions.

Associated Press (AP)

The American Associated Press (AP) with over 4000 employees worldwide. The AP is owned by U.S. media companies and has its main newsroom in New York. AP news is used by around 12,000 media outlets and thus reaches more than half of the world's population every day.

Reuters

The British Reuters in London, which is private-sector and employs just over 3,000 people. Reuters was bought in 2008 by Canadian media entrepreneur Thomson - one of the 25 richest people in the world - and merged into Thomson-Reuters, based in New York.

Agence France-Presse (AFP)

The quasi-governmental French Agence France-Presse (AFP) is headquartered in Paris and also employs around 4,000 people. AFP sends out more than 3,000 news items and 2,500 photos a day to media all over the world.

3000 messages and 2500 photos per day! How many reports are produced by all press agencies together? And we are served five mainstream topics. Isn't that crass? Sorry - let's move on.

The bottom line is that this dependence on global agencies creates a striking sameness in international reporting: From Rome to Washington, our media often report on the same topics and even use the same phrases in many cases

- a phenomenon one would otherwise associate more with "controlled media" in authoritarian states.

« Governments, the military and intelligence services use the global agencies as multipliers for the worldwide dissemination of their messages. Independent research hardly takes place in Western editorial offices anymore. Anyone who reports past the big Anglo-Saxon media and press agencies is ignored or even dismissed.»

Agenda-Setting

The reporting in today's mass media not only depicts the events of the world, rather it constructs world views and this with great impact on international events. In a world that is covered in the smallest corners by television, radio, print and online media, politics must increasingly take public opinion into account.

Agenda-setting research began in a narrower sense in 1968 during the American presidential election campaign. In their pioneering study, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw asked 100 undecided voters which issues they considered particularly relevant in the election campaign, and at the same time investigated which issues the media reported on particularly frequently in the election campaign. This revealed an almost perfect correlation (McCombs/Shaw 1972). Further studies with more elaborate research designs also proved that the influence of the media agenda on the audience agenda is significantly greater than the reverse influence of the audience agenda on the media agenda.

Investigative journalists and international media associations also provide information strategically rather than promptly. Information is not infrequently deliberately withheld as a joker in order to make it public at the decisive moment. The goal is not information and enlightenment, but socio-political impact - thus the watchdog of democracy increasingly becomes the devil's advocate.

« The leading media are our eyes and ears in the big wide world - they decide what we get to see and hear from our world and they decide who is seen and who is heard. They decide who is loved and who is hated. They define our values and they define our definitions. In doing so, they tamper with the building blocks of our consciousness, - the DNA of our existence. Power without responsibility. »

The media are the necromancers of our time. Their magic wand is the focus and their words the spells. Mediums seem to have the ancient words of the Aramaic incantation Abrakadabra - כזברא אברא - avrah k'davra - written all over them. It means « I am being created as I speak ».

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Wikipedia, the Wiki-Watch office of the European University Viadrina has drawn a critical balance. The Internet platform is opaque and error-prone and needs to be reformed. In its criticism, Wiki-Watch referred to a lack of reliability of the information disseminated on the platform, the non-transparency of funding and a structure that prevents the legal prosecution of criminal and false content. In addition, the American Wikimedia Foundation generates a lot of money, the use of which is unclear.

Digital Alliance

All over the world, media companies are introducing a common log-in requirement for their news platforms. Our data against their ideology-soaked brawn. A little information and a lot of advertising - and demonize capitalism at the same time.

Because no one wants to watch their stuff anymore, sales have plummeted. Thus, the critical press became a mouthpiece and stirrup holder loyal to the government. Instead of spreading ashes on their heads, they whine in chorus and continue to pull the wool over the eyes of the deceived.

What can we do? Stop reading the filth, stop spreading it, stop commenting on it, stop responding to it. The dog we feed always wins and why should we keep a rabid beast alive any longer?



***Jack Kabey** is not as important as his readers. For over three decades, he was a security advisor and strategy consultant for public institutions and international trading companies. Today, he is a freelance writer and publicist, putting his finger in the wounds of our time, putting into words what should no longer be put into words, and reflecting with the necessary dash of humor on the deepest corners of the rabbit hole we call our lives. Jack Kabey is an avatar, his name a pseudonym. The author simply wants to keep his identity to himself so that he can devote all his energy to researching and writing. His work is mostly financed by donations. He lives in Manarola / Italy.*