

THE U.S. PRESS COVERAGE OF THE NEW INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER : AN ETHICAL APPROACH

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Journalism ethics, journalism morals, its credibility, and accountability have been discussed on many occasions by specialists and newsmen. All of them agree that journalism today is having some troubles with these issues. There are several variables and causes ranging from media organization to legal, political, and economic pressures.

Journalism scholars through their studies have argued that even the free press in western countries which almost everybody thinks that it has reached the peak of credibility, accuracy and accountability, is not excluded from the constraints and pressures of today's society on the press.

Based on what the press should do in society, and based on objective ethics and morals of the press, this paper tries to answer some of the following questions. How did the American press cover the conferences, meetings and debates on the new international Information order ? (N.I.I.O.). Did the U.S. press respect the criteria of exposing an objective coverage of events ? Did it inform fully and as it should have the American citizens about this important issue that preoccupies two thirds of the world's population ? Did the U.S. press present a meaningful account of the N.I.I.O. with its whole aspects and controversies ? Did it give "a good background, interpretation, analysis and context to help the citizen make sense of trends, events and discoveries".

The paper will shed some light on the New International Information order, a brief overview on how the U.S. press dealt with the event during the seventies. Finally, the moral and ethical aspects of the U.S. press Coverage of the N.I.I.O. will be analyzed. Did this press which we think is free and responsible carry out fully its role? were the criteria of objectivity, morals and ethics met and applied in the coverage.

The N.I.I.O. issue was a controversial one because of its international aspects, and because of the variety of divergences that exist between the center and the periphery, among the center itself, and among the Developing Countries. Another point about the issue is that the U.S. position toward the N.I.I.O. has been on many occasions unfavorable of the establishment of a new order of information which according to the Americans is contradictory to the diversity, and the freedom of the press. This is of course another pretext just like those presented at the new International Economic order and other issues to avoid the debate and maintain the status-quo.

Giving the imbalances that exist nowadays between the center and the periphery, third world countries are struggling hard in order to fight domination, exploitation and dependence. Unfortunately, things are not that simple, the task is very hard, and the situation is very alarming. Although they have their independence, Developing Countries still depend heavily on the developed nations. This dependence has in fact many aspects most importantly economy and culture.

The last preoccupation of third World Countries during the seventies was the establishment of the N.I.I.O. Developing nations through UNESCO and the Non-aligned movement argue that the present situation of the international dissemination of news must be reviewed, and the present flow of international information must be balanced.

In a paper presented to UNESCO in 1978, Mustapha Masmoudi highlights and analyzes the different aspects of the unbalanced flow of information, almost 80 percent of the World news flow emanates from the major international news agencies.

Through the dissemination of international news, Western Countries are imposing on developing nations their news values, life styles, and attitudes. These are some of the important aspects of the alarming situation while the list still goes on.

With the Nonaligned Countries and UNESCO are asking for is a radical change in the present international structures of Mass-Communication. However, Western Countries and mainly the U.S.A. do not see the problem from the same perspective; they suggest unstead assistance, and help to the developing Countries under one condition : the preservation of the freedom of the press and the diversity of the news. In other words some Western Countries did not like the idea of the N.I.I.O. at all. The reason is that the N.I.I.O. does not match their economic and political needs, and objectives.

Developed Countries argue that the Developing nations have been influenced by the U.S.R.R. and the UNESCO.

Developing Countries argue that the Developed Countries want the keep things the way they are at the international scale, and they don't want any change to occur. This change if it occurs as Samir Amin states, it will put an end to the Western exploitation of the poor Countries and the center will have many troubles with its economy which is actually in crisis.

It can be stated also that third world Countries do not have a unique ideology and the same strategy of development; many differences exist among them, some have a liberal policy, others have planned economy, still others have authoritarian regimes... etc. Of course, this diversity has many negative impact on the decisions of developing Countries about international issues and crisis, but still somehow the Common problems sometimes oblige them to be together, and to take the same decision for a better future. This is just to stress upon the fact that third World Countries here means mostly the nonaligned nations and those Countries who believe that the only alternative for economic and cultural independence comes only with fighting against imperialism under its multiple manifestations and through a

major change in the economic structure at the international scale, through the restructuration of international organizations.

Like the new international economic order, the new international information order still exists only in the form of declarations, and resolutions, some achievements have been made such as the nonaligned news agencies pool, the international program for the development of Communication, and other regional and bilateral agreement about news exchange and technical assistance.

As it was stated earlier, the Western Countries, and especially the U.S.A. did not agree with some third World Countries propositions concerning the N.I.I.O. The American officials are very attached to the diversity and freedom of the press, which according to them are the cornerstone of their Communication policy.

In a paper presented at the U.S.-Japan Symposium in 1979, Ambassador John E. Reinhardt pointed out that "The freedom of information is the precondition for dealing with all the other problems that should command our attention" he added, "We cannot assume some concepts in the N.I.I.O. which imply linking with ideas and proposals completely unacceptable to any society that constitutionally assures freedom of expression against restriction by the government". For the Americans some issues in the N.I.I.O. resolutions and recommendations should be eliminated because they stem from deeply held philosophical views. The U.S. officials stated that some of the restrictions proposed for the N.I.I.O. would jeopardize a fundamental libertarian right, and because of the diversity of the economic and political systems in the World, and the consequently different concepts of the journalist's role, it is unthinkable to set up a code suitable to all nations. If such a code will exist, it would be just a government tool for controlling the media. Leonard Sussman former associated press executive said that "third world Countries are readily exploited by the marxist approaches of the Soviet Union in order to advance Marxism's political and economic goals".

As it was mentioned earlier, the Americans did not like the radical resolutions concerning the change in the actual international news gathering and news disseminating systems. They somehow agree about some bilateral agreements and some help, and technical assistance for the developing nations. To the Americans Free flow of information, and freedom of the press should be guaranteed by the international Community, however, the N.I.I.O. is an obstacle for those two principles. Another argument manifested by the Americans is that the UNESCO and third World Countries are manipulated by the Soviets, for more Communist expansionism in the world.

Just a few days after Talloires, the U.S. Vice President George Bush announced the U.S. Counter-offensive against the N.I.I.O. "UNESCO should desist from its efforts to impose orientations on the press" and he added that the idea of "international censorship" was strongly opposed by Ronald Reagan. From this statement it is clear that the U.S. government officials in the U.S. have seen in the N.I.I.O. some resolutions and demands that do not match their strategies and tactics at the international scale in the field of Communication and information. That why in 1981 The U.S. Congress mandated a cut-off of U.S. Contributions to UNESCO under the pretext that this latter is acting against the freedom of the press.

It can be concluded that the U.S. Position toward the N.I.I.O. was very unfavorable. It remains to be known, the manner in which the press carried out its responsibility, and duty in covering the event. Did it inform fully the U.S. citizen about the event? Did it present all facets of the issue? or did it just follow blindly what Mr. Reagan, and others argued about this international issue. We will consider the answer to this question in the following part of this paper from the works and studies done by Heacok, Raskin, Shah and, it is clear that the press that criticized the threat of the press freedom by the N.I.I.O. has been itself under constraints and pressure, and didn't carry out its mission according to the principles of a responsible and accountable press, what the U.S. press did, was: to focus on the negative aspects of the N.I.I.O. which of course shapes a suitable public

opinion inside the U.S.A. In his content analysis study of five U.S. elite newspapers Shah found for example that in 1970 while the meeting days about the N.I.I.O. exceded 26; and while hundreds of documents were published about the issue, none of the five elite newspaper wrote a single word about the event. In 1972 the total number of the meeting days about the N.I.I.O. were 52, fourteen documents were published, and out of the five U.S. elite newspapers, only the *Washington Post* reported the event. This is the American way of the freedom of the press, and free flow of information.

In his study of the U.S. press Coverage of the Belgrade UNESCO conference, Raskin pointed out that "The news analysis and feature stories concentrated almost exclusively on Western viewpoints". Sussman who himself opposed, and rejected the idea of the N.I.I.O. stated that the coverage was unbalanced; Raskin argues that "what created distortion in the news stories on Belgrade was not editorialization on the writing but selective process". From Raskin point of view the process of excluding contrary and opposite material was strengthened by gate keepers at the foreign desk; they did their best to discard stories, and arguments that did not highlight the conflict.

As we know the debates concerning the N.I.I.O. started in the mid and late sixties, and increased in the seventies. Raskin stated that the American people have not started to hear about the N.I.I.O. until 1976 at the Nairobi conference; he said that "most of what had preceeded was largely unknown to all but few academics". Another statement which may shed some light on the Controversy of the U.S.press is the one which was formulated by the U.S.National News Council. The U.S.media did not treat the issues of the Belgrade Conference professionally and objectively. The statement added "until this attitude is changed U.S. citizens will continue to receive coverage that is imperfect, biased, and inadequate by the very standards which the U.S.press claims it is fighting to preserve".

Another eloquent fact about this controversial issue is that the *New York Times* in 1981 published the entire Talloires declaration yexcept tu two lines on the impact of advertising, "We

adhere to the principle that editorial discussions should be free of advertising influence". Why the *New York Times* omitted the two last lines of the declarations? The Western press generally don't admit that it is under the mercy of big advertisers, and monopolies.

In his book, *UNESCO and the Media*, Heacock concluded that a large campaign was orchestrated by the Western media against UNESCO, and the N.I.I.O. with the support of the big news agencies, and professional organizations.

Western Countries decided explicitly to maintain the status-quo, and to reject the demands of the developing nations concerning the establishment of the NIIO. They did exactly the same thing in the beginning of the seventies with the demands of the New International Economic Order.

The U.S. elite newspapers were very critical and negative toward the N.I.I.O. They accused the developing nations of being influenced by the Soviet union and its marxist ideology. To the U.S. elite press the N.I.I.O. is a threat to the freedom of the press, and the free flow of information.

The N.I.I.O. is a Complex, multifaceted issue, it concerns the total humanity, and its consequences are also of extreme importance to the World's population. In short, the N.I.I.O. is a restructuration of the international newsgathering, and news dissemination system. Unfortunately, the five elite newspapers (*New York Times*, *wall street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *The Chicago Tribune*), of the United States of America "oversimplified the N.I.I.O. issue by only presenting aspects of N.I.I.O. that had potential Consequences for the operation, and function of the Western Press".

Contrary to the conventions, ethics, and morals of the Western press, the five U.S. elite newspapers neglected and avoided completely the theses and concerns of the developing nations concerning the N.I.I.O. Third World concerns, their points of view, their perspectives, and their criticisms went almost unreported. An example of the following aspects and preoccupations can be cited :

— National Communication polices.

— Regional News agencies such as the Non-Aligned news agencies pool, the pan-African news agency, and other aspects of regional, and continental cooperation, and exchange.

— The relation ship between the N.I.I.O., and the N.I.E.O.

— Chronological process, development and evolution of the N.I.I.O. and the N.I.E.O.

— Technical aspects of the N.I.I.O. issue sush as geostationery orbit, radio frequencies, satellites... etc.

In addition, the volume was also biased; the volume of the stories about the N.I.I.O. was almost insignificant.

As stated carlier, many meetings, conferences, and symposiums went almost unreported. Sometimes a meeting, a conference of many days did not get a single inch in the elite press of the U.S.A. The Fourth Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries held in Algiers in 1973 with its resolutions, and declarations about the implementation of the N.I.I.O. is a good illustration of the biases of the coverage of international issues by the U.S. elite Newspapers.

It can be concluded according to the content analysis of the U.S. elite press coverage of the N.I.I.O. that "Both the quality and the quantity of the coverage during the last decade" the seventics "were negative, and presented a narrow, oversimplified and biased image of the N.I.I.O." What are the considerations and importance given to the moral, and ethics of journalism throughout the coverage of this international issue? the next part of this paper will try to shed some lights on those aspects.

Analyzing this subject from a societal role of the press, and its impact on people, and its influence on policymakers, and decisonmakers, it can be stated that the U.S. elite press didn't assume its responsibility the way, it should be. In the case of the New International Information order, the U.S. citizen. Didn't get

a good background about the event, and the press reported the facts with just one side.

Here the idea of the equal right of opposites, fairness, and objectivity was put aside by the U.S. press. The set of balance between freedom, and responsibility did not get any space, and any room in this international event. The Four steps of achieving objectivity mentioned by Gay Tuchman were put aside by the U.S. gatekeepers, and editorialists. According to the content analysis of the U.S. elite press, the presentation of conflicting views, the presentation of supporting evidence, and the use of citation marks were unused.

What can be concluded from the coverage of the N.I.I.O. is that the U.S. journalists didn't assume their tasks professionally, responsibly and honestly. As Gerson stated, the American people were lied to about the N.I.I.O. as in the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the Bay of Pigs. Where are the ethics and morals in the coverage of this international issue? Where are the standards of objectivity and fairness? The N.I.I.O. Case explains clearly, the mechanisms of newsroom pressures, monopolies, advertisers, and technologies. As a result, the American reader didn't get any background, and information about the N.I.I.O. What he did read was just the arguments of the U.S. officials, the state department, pressure groups, and other multinational corporations and large monopolies.

Ethically, objectively, and morally speaking, it can be concluded that the U.S. elite press failed in carrying out its task of covering the N.I.I.O., in a professional manner. Perhaps it succeeded in giving an image about the N.I.I.O. As Anthony Smith pointed out, the Western World has to look back at its superstructure, and to take into account that the world is changing and a large sector of it will no longer account its values along with its transfer of science, technology, and know how.

The principle of freedom of the press has yet to be reached, and achieved in today's society. According to the basic fundamentals of news writing, and reporting one has to put the facts in

the whole context in which that several factors, that are in fact determinant should be taken into consideration, such as the economic powers, the superstructure, the news values, the political forces, and the social constraints. As we should know, all of those variables have their impact in one way or another on the final product of the news organizations.

In today's society, we are witnessing a mixture between information, and indoctrination, right and wrong, true and false, in the almost dominant forces for the sake of operating, and functioning without any reaction or opposition from the large masses. The international dimensions of the human being are being destroyed these days by the impact of the advanced ideological industrial culture.

What can be done toward this alarming crisis ? A number of philosophers, moralists, sociologists, and scientists have looked at the problem from different angles, and various perspectives. Journalists, newspeople, and the mass Communication Community, both newsmakers, scholars and researchers have to realize that a journalist is not just the disseminator of the industrial culture, values, and attitudes.

According to the early philosophers, and moralists of the press, a journalist has to be responsible, accountable, has to inform, and criticize. He does not have to align himself to any side but the side of objectivity and truth. However, things in reality are otherwise, and who pays the piper calls the Tune. Unfortunately not everybody can pay the piper, and not every tune can please everybody.

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