

Why Facts No Longer Matter in the Media Discourse

How Media Outlets Became The New “Carnival Barkers”

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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How should we understand this latest and most troubling insight into the reality of our media ecology?

In the aftermath of the resolution of the Great Birther bash-up, even as President Obama tried to lay the issue at rest by producing the document that showed, proved, verified, documented, and validated his birth in one of the great states of our disunion, it was said that its release would only fuel more debate, and convince no one.

In other words, in the end, this long debated fact didn't matter.

Facts no longer seem to matter on other issues, too, as articulated in the now infamous memo issued by retiring Senator Jon Kyle whose office, when confronted with evidence that he misspoke on the matter of how much money Planned Parenthood spent on abortions—he claimed 90%, the truth was but 3%, issued an advisory that said, “The statement was not meant to be factual.”

The Jon Stewart's Daily Show and Stephen Colbert had a lot of fun with that but one thing that's not funny is that even when media coverage discredits or exposes some canard, public opinion is not necessarily impacted.

It doesn't change the minds of those whose minds are made up.

Once some people buy into a narrative or worldview they seem to be locked into a way of thinking. For some, efforts to discredit a conspiracy theory offer more evidence that the conspiracy is valid, because why else would THEY want to refute it.

If you don't trust the President, don't believe he is an American or do believe he is a socialist, nothing he or his supporters say will change your mind. After all, what would you expect them to say?

So even refutation can turn into reinforcement and trigger more stridency.

Dismissing critics as “silly,” as Obama has done, only annoys them and makes them more determined to cling to their ideas, attitudes and anger.

The values (and prejudices) people grew up with often shape their worldviews. Their parochialism limits what they are exposed to. Their schooling and narrow range of experience seem to have had little impact in broadening their views.

Political scientist Thomas Patterson describes this as “The process by which individuals

acquire their political opinions is called political socialization. This process begins in childhood, when, through family and school, Americans acquire many of their basic political values and beliefs. Socialization continues into adulthood, when peers, political institutions and leaders, and the news media are major influences.”

Writes Edward Song on Huffington Post, “For example, people who believe in health care reform value helping the poor and needy. For progressives, it is moral to help the poor. ‘

For conservatives, helping the poor is helping people who are irresponsible, and goes against their principle of individual responsibility. The conservative’s solution to poverty is called “Tough Love.” Whether you believe in helping the poor is a matter of values and not a matter of logic. Believing otherwise is the big progressive mistake over the last 40 years.”

Conservative columnists like John Hawkins seem to subscribe to this view too. Writing on Townhall.com, he argues,

“The sad truth of the matter is that most Americans don’t pay much attention to politics and those that do often just parrot doctrine instead of investigating issues with an open mind. This allows lies, myths, and dubious assertions to live on long after they should have shriveled and died in the light of day.”

Surprisingly, he also quotes JFK: “No matter how big the lie; repeat it often enough and the masses will regard it as the truth.”

Media outlets play a role in fashioning a culture of repetition, producing armies of “ditto heads” who are exposed to message-point pseudo journalism that they in turn regurgitate to advance partisan agendas. This approach is built into the design of the new polarizing and politicized media system.

This leads in the words of Vietnam War chronicler Tim O’Brian to how “you lose your sense of the definite, hence your sense of truth itself.” He was writing about military wars abroad but his insight applies to political wars at home as well. We are all becoming casualties of a media war in which democracy is collateral damage.

No surprisingly, the dominance of conservative media produces more people who align themselves as conservatives and will only understand the world that way. The shortage of progressive media outlets limits the mass the circulation of progressive perspectives. No wonder the media marketplace is so devoid of competing ideas.

Beyond that, media outlets legitimize virtually all controversies as valid, however contrived they may be, just to have something to talk about. This legitimates subjects with the noise of continuing blather and contentious discussion featuring superficial analysis by unqualified pundits.

One consequence, according to GOP political consultant Mark McKinnon is that voters cast ballots on attributes not issues. “They want to see the appearance of strength in leaders, and are less persuaded by what they say.”

That means, news programs ultimately trade in fostering impressions, not conveying information. Viewers trust their feelings over facts.

Remember, one of the most profitable formats on cable TV is not news but wrestling driven by cartoonish characters and invented confrontations. Is it any wonder that ratings hungry news programs take a similar approach to political combat. They are in the business of producing numbers for advertisers more than explanations for viewers.

John Cory commented on the media role in legitimating the birther issue and turning it into a form of entertainment, calling it " a sorry and sad day for America."

"What does it say about our 'media' that they have spent so much time and so much effort promoting crazy over reality? That our 'media' relishes circus clowns jumping out of their clown-cars and spraying clown-seltzer everywhere and then giddily covers the wet and stained audience reaction while ignoring the burning of fact?"

So, it is the media system itself, not Donald Trump or some crazy, that is the real "carnival barker" in the President's words, Their programs program the audience by constantly and continually framing issues in a trivial matter. Manipulating emotion is their modality, doubt their currency and cynicism their methodology, except, of course, on issues like the economy, Israel or US wars.

The shame of it is that they know what they are doing, know what the impact of what passes for "coverage" will be, but do it anyway.

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