

Recitation 02 - The Battle Over Information

OBJECTIVE

Today you look at controls over the flow of information. The CPJ paper, reflections on what they learn about CPJ's work, does a good job of sparking outrage, but it also puts the work of journalism in the larger context of the battle for information. You do want them to develop an attitude about their beliefs about it. And then they are ready for a more nuanced discussion about their decision as CEO of Google.

Google's controversial operation in China is rich with material for discussion about the battle for information and they will have written their papers about what they'd do if they were the CEO of Google. Be prepared to provoke a little bit of ethics/morals debate about Google's obligation to stockholders and its obligation to the public interest. The discussion can move on to other examples of censorship mentioned in the lecture, among them North Korea, Iran, Russia, and Mexico. It's always fun to ask if developing countries can afford to relax controls on information.

Lest the debate lapse into xenophobic China bashing, raise questions about efforts by the United States government to censor information and spread propaganda among its own citizens or abroad.

Organization

1. Take attendance
2. Review syllabus and Blackboard
3. Remind students that they are responsible for following the news closely each week.

News Quiz

NOTE: Check with your lecturer on whether your group is beginning weekly news quizzes this week or next. If you are giving a quiz today, it's best to review the answers as soon as students complete the quiz. Also, Recitation #2 is commonly when we quiz students on syllabus contents

1. Question 1
 - a) comments
2. Question 2
 - a) comments

Recap Lecture

Students should be able to:

- **Use new vocabulary to describe the human need for information and categorize it into three broad types. (Alerts, Diverts, Connects)**
- **Compare modern examples of the power of information to historic examples. (Egypt/Napoleon)**
- **Use specific events and examples to illustrate the power of information and to demonstrate a global understanding of press freedom (CPJ data: 3 journalists per month, etc)**

Review Assignments

PEW Findings in News Literacy Context

We have discussed three types of news people of all cultures need: Alerts, Diverts, Connects. Do you find those categories in these fresh data?

Do these data support or undermine the assertion that people have a fundamental need to both receive and spread information?

How do the uses and impacts of Facebook compare to those of the talking drums of West Africa or to smoke signals, which were used by soldiers on the Great Wall, by early cryptographer Polybius in ancient Greece and by the North American Plains tribes

In what way have social media like Facebook changed the way humans act on their ancient and universal relationship to information, particularly information that alerts, diverts and connects us?

Kimberly Dozier video

Ask why journalists like Kim Dozier take such chances. They watched the video about her. Do they think she was in the wrong place, or that bombers meant to harm her along with U.S. troops.

- Ask students for their reactions to the CPJ's work. Which specific cases are they reacting to. Are they surprised by the statistics? Why?
- Revisit the story of Lasantha Wickrematunge, the Sri Lankan editor whose final editorial portended his own assassination.
- Let students make an argument for taking such risks or not.
- Would you do it? Why or why not?
- What is gained when reporters go to these places?
- What is lost when they don't?

- Are citizens worse off in places like North Korea, where the government has rendered the masses deaf and mute? (Don't be afraid to play the Devil's advocate)

Read aloud the quote from the late Razia Bhatti, a female Pakistani journalist and champion of press freedoms:

"I see the journalist's role as both reporter and crusader. In a civilization that seems to be regressing into new holocausts, we must seek and speak the truth, for we are the voice of voiceless millions. Having chosen this profession, we cannot be afraid to speak the truth no matter what the cost. And by speaking, I personally believe we can change the world."

Does her approach raise questions of independence? If you declare yourself the voice of the voiceless, are you an advocate? How is this different from a journalist declaring herself the voice of students at Stony Brook or the voice of any sub-group of students? (gender, race, religion, politics, major, etc)

***Class Discussion

This is where the discussion zooms in on China as an example of government censorship. Stress that China is just an example. Refer to lecture info on how widespread censorship is.

Start by asking students to summarize the situation, based on the readings. How did Google come to operate in China? What compromises did it have to make to get a share of that market?

Prompt them to debate the ethics and efficacy of those compromises. Review the written assignment:

- What would you have done as a Google executive?
- As a foreign journo, Would you pursue news stories that might violate China's policies on foreign media?
- Or would you comply with Chinese restrictions?
- Why or why not?
- Discuss info from readings on how Chinese netizens cope, in part by evading the censors, and how others take risks to publicly protest censorship.
- What are the competing forces at work here?

Reference Kristof's columns on how the internet is changing China and how more info is getting through.

Can wrap up with reflections on the U.S. State Department's internet freedom program and diplomatic attempts to pressure repressive governments to loosen their holds on info. Note that Secretary of State Clinton has made this push about economic prosperity as well as human rights. Why could the economic arguments be more effective?

News Literacy Channel Videos (optional)

These three short videos (about 21 minutes total) help illuminate some of the concepts covered in Lecture #2: The Power of Information. Why do powerful organizations and people want to control information and what prompts journalists to take the risks to get that information out to the public.

1. CBS foreign correspondent Kimberly Dozier speaking to Stony Brook students as part of the School of Journalism's "My Life As..." lecture series. We have chosen a segment during which she describes the effects of a car bombing during her last assignment in Iraq for CBS News. A 14-year veteran foreign correspondent, Dozier had covered the Middle East for the CBS Evening News, CBS Radio, The Washington Post, BBC World Service and several other news outlets. (7 minutes)
2. Former Newsday foreign correspondent Matthew McAllester speaking to Stony Brook students as part of the School of Journalism's "My Life As" series. We chose a segment where he describes what motivates him to report from "the places where the bombs are going off." McAllester was imprisoned by the Iraqi government at the outset of the first war against Iraq. (9 minutes)
3. Former U.S. News & World Report Baghdad Bureau Chief **Ilana Ozerney** discusses courage and tells the story of the moment she decided she had covered enough war: <https://vimeo.com/channels/newsliteracychannel/44251915> (7:36)

Students should take notes as they watch and be prepared to discuss in class. What compels a journalist to take these risks?

Announcements

Check your course schedule and brief students on upcoming readings, viewings and written work assignments.

Recent stories and links that might prove useful:

More stories on censorship in China. The *New York Times* reports that the Chinese government is pressuring businesses to aid in the censorship effort.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/world/asia/china-pressures-businesses-to-help-censor-web.html?ref=censorship>

China blocked the *New York Times* website after a report on the Chinese premier's allegedly shady finances.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/27/world/asia/china-criticizes-the-times-for-article-on-premiers-family-fortune.html?ref=censorship>

For context, see this June 17, 2012, story from CNET, in which Google reports that it had received, over the prior six months, more than 1,000 requests from government officials around the world to remove content. Google complied with a bit more than half of them. Though China may have stricter controls than many other countries, all governments have an interest in controlling information.

http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-57454920-93/google-sees-alarming-level-of-government-censorship/

An October 12, 2012, story from the *New York Times* about the German government's censorship of a Neo-Nazi groups Twitter feed. This raises some ethical issues: Germany doesn't have a First Amendment protecting free speech like the United States does, but are Germans better off without access to such hate speech?

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/19/world/europe/twitter-blocks-access-to-neo-nazi-group-in-germany.html?ref=censorship>

New York Times news analysis on free speech in the age of YouTube, written in response to the offensive anti-Muslim video that caused controversy (and violence) last year.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/sunday-review/free-speech-in-the-age-of-youtube.html?ref=censorship>