

## Chapter 5 Journalism Today

### Selecting and Reporting the News

#### The Characteristics of News

- News stories possess certain characteristics or news values
- According to Jack Hart, former editor of The Oregonian, says a good story should have the following characteristics:
  - An interesting central character who
    - Faces a challenge or is caught up in a conflict
    - Whose situation changes as
      - Action takes place
      - In an engaging setting
- Newsworthy events are those that possess:
  - Timeliness
  - Impact
  - Prominence
  - Proximity
  - Unusualness
  - Singularity
  - Conflict
  - Controversy

#### Timeliness

- Journalists stress current information and try to report it ahead of their competitors
- Web news allows print journalists to get stories to the public sooner than they can with the print publication

#### Impact

- Reporters stress important information that has an impact on their audience: stories that affect, involve or interest thousands of readers or viewers

#### Prominence

- Even routine events become newsworthy when they involve prominent individuals
- Ordinary people become prominent for the news media when they are involved in a news event
- Once the story runs through a news cycle, it is no longer considered newsworthy

#### Proximity

- The closer an event is to home, the more newsworthy it becomes

#### Singularity

- Deviations from the normal are more newsworthy than the commonplace
- Journalists must be alert for the unusual twists in otherwise mundane stories

### Conflict or Controversy

- Conflict between government officials or agencies, private organizations or private individuals can be viewed as negative news, but often provides readers and viewers with different opinions about policies and problems

### Other Characteristics

- Reporters look for humorous stories, straightforward events
- Journalists have been less adept at reporting complex phenomena

### The Nature of the Medium

- News varies somewhat from medium to medium
- Daily newspapers emphasize events occurring in their communities during the last 24 hours
- Dailies provide extensive national and international coverage occasionally
- Weekly news magazines report events of national interest, often more in depth
- Television reports headline news
- A news organization's size and the size of the community it serves affect the selection of news
- The day of the week in which news occurs is important
- Newspapers publish more advertisements on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays
- News organizations also develop tendencies and traditions to emphasize some types of news stories over others

### Types of News

- Two major types of news:
  - Hard news - Serious and timely stories about important topics
  - Soft news - Feature or human interest stories
- On average, one-tenth of newspaper content concerns violence

### Public/Civic Journalism

- Journalists should do what they can to support public life
- Journalists must listen to all voices
- In public journalism, reporters should ask the following:
  - Who - cares, is affected, needs to be included, has a stake, is missing from the discussion?
  - What - are the consequences, does it mean to citizens, would this accomplish, values are at work?
  - When - were things different, can things be different, should talk lead to action?
  - Where - are we headed, is the common ground, should debate take place, is the best entry point for citizens?
  - Why - is this happening, do we need discussion, are things not happening, should we care?
  - How - does it affect civic life, did the community do, does my story encourage action or help the public decide?

### The Concept of Objectivity

- Journalists must gather information and report it as factually as possible
- Journalists should not comment, interpret or evaluate
- Routine newsroom practices encourage impartiality

### Details Newspapers Are Reluctant to Publish

- Reporters must learn to recognize what information is not newsworthy
- Offensive details
  - Editors omit material that is obscene, gruesome or in poor taste
- Sensationalism
  - Most news organizations avoid sensationalism, but not sensational stories
  - Sensationalism - An emphasis on or exaggeration of stories dealing with crime, sex and oddities
- Rumors
  - News organizations are reluctant to report rumors, especially harmful ones
- Rape
  - Most news organizations refuse to identify rape victims, even when they have a legal right to do so
  - Afraid mentioning names will discourage women to disclose rape occurrences
- Other details reporters avoid
  - Juveniles accused or found guilty of a crime
  - Trade names

### The Importance of Accuracy

- Accuracy in Facts
  - Reporters never should guess or make any assumptions about the facts
  - Accurate writing requires specifics instead of generalities
- Accuracy in Names
  - News organizations are particularly careful in their handling of names
- Obstacles to Accuracy
  - Reporters sometimes lack the time to perfect their stories
  - Sometimes news organizations unknowingly report a source's misstatements
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