

The CNN effect: but does global news connect?

lse blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/06/01/the-cnn-effect-but-does-global-news-connect/

2010-6-1



Watching History

Congratulations to CNN on their 30th anniversary, they are now a venerable and profitable part of the global media eco-system. In many ways, the debate around their rise and rise parallels that around the Internet.

When CNN started few thought it could make money. The business model of a global network running 24/7 seemed impossible. It was accused of filling the airwaves with low-grade journalism and bias.

Now every self-respecting state hosts a rolling news channel in the same way every tin-pot dictator and banana republic used to covet its own airline.

I think that the best of these competitors for CNN, like Al Jazeera, have made a major difference to media freedom and political plurality. And the worst? Well, they just add to

the gaiety or banality of much of global communications.

We can see domestically how rolling news changes news agendas. The UK election covered by BBC and Sky 24/7 meant that incidents such as the Gillian Duffy furore come and go with brutal speed but perhaps limited long-term impact.

Bear in mind that while few people watch news channels for much of the time, it all adds up to a lot of people over a 24 hour cycle. And a lot of those people watching are key opinion-formers in newsrooms, political offices and City dealing rooms.

Internationally, we saw how a story like the Haiti earthquake can saturate the airwaves making it impossible for anyone on the planet to ignore a crisis. That is, if the news channels chose to make it the subject of their all-day (and night) attention.

But what if they don't chose to cover something? Remember that CNN was actually quite slow to pick up on the Iran protests, for example. Some people claim it was only the Twitter CNNFail campaign that persuaded CNN news editors to move the Tehran demonstrations up the running orders.

And do all these news channels actually make us care any more about what happens in distant lands? Even if they cover big international stories they frequently do so in a shallow way that stresses the action not the explanation. Perhaps we feel that we have 'done our bit' simply by watching the misery unfold, live and direct, from Out There to our sofas.

Of course, people say all the same things about the Internet. And the point is that media platforms themselves don't change the effect of the news directly. It all depends on the nature of the content.

That's why it's interesting to see the global news networks like CNN beging to combine their TV channels with online reporting, often involving their own viewers.

This Networked 24 Hour News is starting to pay off for them in editorial terms as I found out when I used Sky News as a case study for a report on networked journalism that will go to our [big journalism conference on June 11th](#).

We'll publish that soon. Meanwhile, check out the conference details [here](#).

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science

