

## Communications: An Overview

### **Notes on Journalism lecture**

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- What is news? News consists of events that are out of the ordinary. Run-of-the mill happenings such as 'Dog bites man' would not excite or tickle the fancy of your audience. But 'Man bites dog' would.
- News involves conflict irrespective of whether the news item deals with political affiliation, government policies, religious beliefs and social and class divide.
- What is the truth? Most, if not all news events, do not tell the truth. At times news does not even have a semblance of truth.
- Your view of the truth depends on a series of variables such as your baggage, religious and political beliefs and social standing. Truth cannot be defined in black and white compartments. Bob Woodward who together with Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate scandal once wrote that reporters try their best to come up with a version that is as close to the truth as possible.
- You will see or perceive the truth behind a news item depending on which side of the river you are standing. Your view of the story much depends on your view of the world. So one has to see first: Who is telling the story, their agenda and vested interest and second: Who are the financial backers and whether the media you are following promotes Western so-called liberal, democratic views or else Eastern so-called restrictive, communist views.
- Don't ever assume or jump to conclusions. You need to have

enough reliable information on which to base a rational judgement. Jumping the gun often means shooting yourself in the foot. So hold your horses.

- The internet has added to an every growing information overload leaving us either confused, mesmerized or lost or all of these three states by a never-ending torrent of news items and at most times useless information. Finding story ideas on the internet does not mean you do not need to seek out other sources to verify you story. You often need to double source and, at times, triple source.
- Political parties are among the organisations that employ spin doctors mostly to fly the kite – to check whether upcoming policies will sit nicely with the electorate or else as a form of damage limitation when a party screws up. Spin doctors are employed 'to sugar the pills' such organisations dream up and which the people would rally against. Remember that a lot of news is manufactured to suit a particular purpose.
- The internet and social media has played havoc with the circulation of newspapers and magazine. A case in point is Playboy magazine whose circulation has plummeted from seven million copies in its heyday to 800,000 copies now. Playboy executives have decided they will no longer feature pictures of nude women in the magazine mainly because now everybody can get pictures of nudes from the internet at the click of a button for free.
- "If it bleeds, it leads" means that if a story is based on human interest then it's bound to make the front page and be among the first items on a news bulletin.
- "The first victim of war is the truth" is a long-standing adage. So as communication students, we need to look at the patterns behind of the news and who is telling the story.

- The elements of news include proximity, timeliness, drama and emotion among others. Remember to steer away from opinion when writing news. News depends on hard facts.