

MEDIA FORUM EXAMINES WAR COVERAGE

Abu Dhabi: Journalists can be influenced, especially while covering wars, but it all depends on the objectivity of the journalist, said media personalities at the Second Arab Broadcast Forum.



Hosted by Abu Dhabi TV, the two-day forum brought leading broadcast news professionals from the Middle East and around the world to discuss important issues facing the industry.

The first talk session featured Dr Mohammad Reza Khatami, Iran's former deputy speaker of Parliament. He said reformers in Iran consider the conservative government "is making a mistake when it comes to Iran's nuclear programme.

"The policy followed now by the government gives excuses to the United States and others to interfere in Iranian affairs. I believe the solution is the return of a reformative government and suspension of the nuclear programme," he said.

The second session, 'Competing Realities: News and Views in Conflict Coverage', was hosted by Emad Al Din Adeeb, Chairman and CEO of Egypt's Good New Group.

The session discussed case studies of Arab and Western media coverage of the wars in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine.

Debate: Discussion on ways to improve news content

In June 2006, for the first time, the region's top broadcasters and journalists met for two days of extensive, open, honest and controversial debate examining the state of the industry and how to better improve content for the audience. Co-hosted by Abu Dhabi TV and Al Arabiya, the inaugural conference in June 2006, attracted nearly 300 leading Arab and western broadcasters. For more information visit: <http://www.abfonline.net>

Source: GULF NEWS

MAKE THE MEDIA BE ACCOUNTABLE

In the public's eyes, just about the only folks struggling with believability issues more than the Bush administration are journalists. And before the latter can hold the former accountable, they must address more of their own problems.

Journalists largely have themselves to thank for their low public approval ratings. This week, newsrooms nationwide are observing Ethics in Journalism Week, and they have a sorry state of affairs to consider.

Since the mid-1980s, Americans have been increasingly skeptical of the information they receive from the news media, and no major news outlet has escaped the trend, according to The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

Last year, only 19 percent of people surveyed by the Project for Excellence in Journalism said they believed "all or most" of what they read in their daily newspaper, a drop of 10 points in eight years. Another 40 percent believed only "a good deal" of what they read in the paper.

The loss of public trust should come as no surprise. Journalists have been caught making up stories (Jayson Blair, formerly of The New York Times, and others); rushing stories into the public domain ("Al Gore is our next president. No, make that George Bush. No, make that ..."); accepting payment from the government in exchange for news coverage (three journalists formerly at El Nuevo Herald in Miami, and others); plagiarizing (too many culprits to name here); and juicing their stories with loaded language

and sensational imagery (again, we don't have enough space to start naming names).

Business agendas are also getting in the way of good journalism. What else would explain an ABC reporter's "story" about a medical procedure that just happened to play a starring role in an episode of "Grey's Anatomy" that aired right before the newscast? What happens to local news coverage when hundreds of reporting positions are cut to satisfy investors' expectations, or one corporation owns hundreds of news outlets?

Good journalism is at the heart of our democracy. Like it or not, a free press - warts and all - is what creates an informed citizenry that can hold business, government and the institutions that affect our lives accountable. This nation is great because it has a free - albeit noisy and messy - news media.

The easy thing for a cynical public to do is watch passively as journalism reels from its self-inflicted wounds, or bash the news media until they deliver nothing of substance or value.

The media most certainly need to win back the public trust they've lost. That trust starts with a commitment to ethical news production, which is, above all, accurate, fair and independent of special interests. Many news organizations publicize their ethics policies online. (You can read The Denver Post's at www.denverpost.com/ethics.)

The Society of Professional Journalists' code is widely considered the gold standard of the industry and can be found at www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp.

SPJ members routinely debate journalism ethics online and encourage the general public to join their conversations.

Rather than tune out, readers, listeners and viewers should hold news organizations and the companies that own them accountable for their news coverage and the business decisions that undermine responsible journalism. Write letters, send e-mail, make phone calls or blog. We'll all be better for it.

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