

Case Study: Media Coverage in the Trump Era

Applying journalism ethics to coverage of President Trump

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Case Description

This case describes the challenging landscape the news industry faces covering President Trump and asks students to consider the ethical responsibilities journalists have to a democratic society. It applies the Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics.

Case Synopsis

Covering Donald Trump and his administration has been a major topic of discussion since the businessman announced he was running for president in the middle of June 2015. Challenges continue to mount as he begins his first term as President of the United States. Many media outlets did not take his bid for presidency seriously, and as a result, his supporters feel those media outlets are out of touch with the majority of the nation, don't care about that contingency, or are biased against Trump. Many statements Trump has made during the presidential campaign, and many actions he has taken since assuming office, have caused alarm among journalists, who consider it their duty to inform the public. However, their methods of covering Trump, often critically, only fuel the fire of a nation growing less and less trusting of journalists who have already been proven wrong by Trump before. Truthful information makes this self-governing country free, but there is a battle raging over what is truthful reporting, and what is not.

Journalism Code of Ethics (<https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>)

The Society of Professional Journalists believes that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. The SPJ Code of Ethics is a statement of abiding principles supported by explanations and position papers that address changing journalistic practices. It is not a set of rules, rather a guide that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the information they provide, regardless of medium. The Society declares these four principles as the

foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

- Seek Truth and Report It
- Minimize Harm
- Act Independently
- Be Accountable and Transparent

Questions

1. What are the journalistic responsibilities of covering President Trump?
2. What should the ethical response of journalists be to allegations they are biased?
3. As a journalist who follows the journalism code of ethics, what would you do if you were covering a source who makes false claims and accuses you of bias by reporting those false claims as false?
4. Changes in communications technology and the economic organization of journalism, has led to a flood of undifferentiated information that is changing the audience for news and information from passive receivers to pro-active consumers who decide what they want, when they want it and how they want it. Are there new responsibilities of journalists to assure they keep a nation informed and monitors those in positions of power acknowledging these changes?