

Covering news subjects like Trump through unbiased lens



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At the onset of Donald Trump's bid for president in 2015, The Huffington Post published a statement regarding their coverage of Trump's campaign. It stated: "[After watching and listening to Donald Trump since he announced his candidacy](#) for president, we have decided we won't report on Trump's campaign as part of The Huffington Post's political coverage.

Instead, we will cover his campaign as part of our Entertainment section. Our reason is simple: Trump's campaign is a sideshow. We won't take the bait. If you are interested in what The Donald has to say, you'll find it next to our stories on [the Kardashians](#) and [The Bachelorette](#)."

As Trump's popularity surged, media organizations found themselves compelled to cover him as a serious contender. The Huffington Post subsequently reversed their initial decision in a cleverly crafted post, titled "[We Are No Longer Entertained](#)."

In the statement, they pointed out that their change of position was prompted by Trump's call for a "[total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States](#)." They emphasized the inherent danger of such a pronouncement and stressed that their coverage of the campaign would involve consistently reminding their audience about who Trump was, and what his campaign represented.

The position adopted by The Huffington Post is not an isolated case. Several media entities initially dismissed Trump's candidacy, but as he gained ground and could no longer be overlooked, media platforms found themselves grappling with the headache of how to handle him.

Trump's theatrical interactions with journalists, at times, appearing more like entertainment, further complicated matters.

He often disparaged journalists with terms such as 'fake dudes' and 'nasty people', habitually dismissing their content as 'fake news'. Covering him was presumably not a pleasant undertaking. Throughout his presidency, his relationship with the media remained volatile.

This Trump dilemma reflects a broader predicament faced by traditional media organizations that wish to break away from the norm but are hesitant to offend legacy audiences, funders, partners, and political groups by producing content that could be perceived as overly critical, biased, or simplistic.

This issue extends beyond particular news topics or coverage of specific events; it reflects the overall approach to journalism in an era where digital platforms have emerged as 'news organisations'.

It is this dynamic that leads some individuals to view legacy media as elitist or snobbish, due to the perceived disparity between their traditional practices and the evolving landscape of news dissemination. In essence, opting to ignore Trump – or publishing his campaign stories in the entertainment section – may not necessarily have a detrimental impact on his political campaign, as he has various alternative platforms through which he can communicate with his audience.

This scenario presents a news coverage dilemma, more so at a time when Trump is back in a presidential race. When content that media organizations initially deem less deserving becomes mainstream news, what decisions do they make? Do they capitalize on it, or continue to disregard the news subject?

The ideal approach is to focus on fair coverage and factual reporting, personal biases notwithstanding. However, judging by the recent CNN interaction with Trump, it is evident that covering him continues to be unpredictable and exhausting. Also, digital disruption has weakened and even compromised some media entities.

CNN's primetime town hall featuring Trump demonstrates this predicament, as the network faced criticism, including from its own staff.

The backlash isn't so much on hosting the former president, but on the nature and quality of the engagement, which diluted journalistic standards. Trump repeatedly made unfounded claims about the 2020 election being stolen, placing CNN in an awkward position as fact-checking him live proved difficult.

According to the network's own newsletter, CEO Chris Licht faced "a fury of criticism – both internally and externally over the event." This is a test for Licht, who is reported to be intent on repairing the relationship with Conservatives at a network that appears less enthusiastic about fostering that bond. In the past year, the new CEO was [reported](#) to be making efforts to regain the trust of Republican lawmakers, persuading them to return to the network.

There is also pressure to reverse declining ratings. According to The Hill, while ratings for cable news network's generally declined since Trump's first term in office, CNN was hit most acutely. It is not surprising that some media commentators viewed the town hall as an attempt by CNN to boost ratings. The network was reported to have registered a more than 300 per cent increase from a typical weeknight due to the town hall.

With Trump's return to the political race, a question arises: how will mainstream media handle his presence? Additionally, there is concern about how media platforms dependent on hedge funds will stay true to their objectives. *The Guardian* reported in 2021 that financial firms have gained control of half of the US daily newspapers, a situation exacerbated by the challenges brought by Covid-19 to the industry. This development has raised concerns among media observers about the future of journalism in America and its role in upholding a functioning democracy.

With political coverage and news subjects like Trump, what matters is maintaining objectivity and providing fair coverage to all perspectives. This requires diligently fact-checking and correcting misinformation as well as unfounded claims without editorializing stories based on political or personal biases.

Without these measures, it's difficult to envision how the media can effectively serve the public interest while staying true to credible journalism rooted in factual reporting.