
Book Review

Thussu, Daya Kishan, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment*, 2007, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore, Sage, ISBN 978-0-7619-6878-8.

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In his new book, Westminster scholar Daya Thussu puts the focus on the rise of global infotainment. Since the deregulation of television in most Western nations and the introduction of commercial television after the collapse of the communist nations in the former east, there are an increasing number of TV channels all around the world, and commercialization has become the driving force behind the development of global television. On the one hand, the international trade in TV formats, fictional and factual, is part of an increasing market where entertainment programmes are sold all over the world. On the other hand, international news has seen a worldwide expansion, under the sign of commercialization. Thussu claims, 'as television news has been commercialized, the need to make it entertaining has become a crucial priority for broadcasters, as they are forced to borrow and adapt characteristics from entertainment genres and modes of conversation that privilege an informal communicative style, with its emphasis on personalities, style, storytelling skills and spectacles. Its tendency to follow a tabloid approach, its capacity to circulate trivia, blend fact with fiction and even distort the truth is troubling' (p. 3). The author argues that there is a need to go beyond the debate about 'dumbing down', the so called infotainment, because it works as 'a powerful discourse of diversion, in both senses, taking the attention away from, and displacing from the airwaves, such grim realities of neo-liberal imperialism as witnessed in the US invasion and occupation of Iraq; the intellectual and cultural subjugation by the tyranny of technology; of free-market capitalism and globalization of a profligate and unsustainable consumerist lifestyle' (p. 9).

In the following chapters Thussu thickens his arguments in discussing infotainment in its historical context, highlighting the political, economic and technological context of this development. He shows how the globalization of infotainment is forced by the US model of market-driven journalism and is leading

to a global homogenization of news. The most intriguing chapters are the ones about the 'Bollywoodization' of television news in India and the representation of war on television news around the world. Thussu furthermore argues that the global infotainment phenomenon serves as an ideology for a neo-imperialism of neo-liberalism. Especially in this chapter, the arguments are sometimes a little bit simplistic. For example, when he argues that the educated youth in India are victims of a 'virtual migration', because 'they are trained and coached by the medium of US television programmes such as *Friends* and *Sex and the City*, thus acquiring the requisite cultural capital to operate successfully within the neo-liberal imperium' (p. 154). Sometimes a glimmer of conspiracy theory seems to underlie the arguments; overestimating the effects of the media.

The last chapter of the book calls for a more positive assessment of infotainment. Thussu shows that there is a great capacity to provide a greater diversity and thus a more democratic character: 'In the new global infotainment sphere, multiple messages, voices and images can be transmitted instantaneously, from the many-to-the-many as well as one-to-one, informing and entertaining, with identifiable social and political effects' (p. 161). Likewise, infotainment programmes are often particularly able to encourage young people to civic engagement. Even if there is a global homogenization in the presenting of news and a concentration of media ownership in the news sector, Thussu argues, 'television news has certainly diversified' (p. 176).

The key value of this book is that it shows how contradictory the developments of infotainment and news commercialization are. Unfortunately, there is no consideration of the ideological power of the notion of infotainment in a historical perspective. Concepts such as information and entertainment are determined by their usage in the society's discursive field. They are mutually exclusive; whatever is considered 'information' cannot be 'entertainment', and what is entertainment cannot be information. The two terms are used to carry on a communication of exclusion. Thus they are exposed as discursive elements of symbolic force, which serve to establish claims to power and dominance. In the tradition of the Enlightenment, the measure of all things for the ruling bourgeois elite can only be information. Entertainment circumvents this requirement because the popular and aesthetic pleasures of the masses resist rational discourse and can thus, at least in some cases, be subversive in nature. If we take a closer look at the terms information and entertainment from this perspective of discourse analysis, their ideological function becomes apparent. They serve to perform societal and social exclusions. It is no coincidence that critics perennially bemoan the poor educational level of infotainment and emphasize the superior culture of serious information. In the bourgeois public sphere, this systematic division between information on the one hand and entertainment on the other serves to expunge the life-world perspective from the dominant discourse. The rise of infotainment

puts the life-world and everyday life perspective of the majority of audiences into the attention of the media and the news. These are the democratic forces behind this development. Thus, it provides intriguing insights into the changing world of news as global information and infotainment.