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The Orlando Nightclub Shooting: An Analysis on how Different News Sources Skew Information for their Audiences

In today’s day and age, there are an ample amount of news sources, which take the same news stories and skew them towards the liking of their audience. There are many different types of news sources with different principles and perspectives that have different logos, pathos, and ethos: all aimed at getting the attention of an individual’s views on an issue. Some news sources may be more biased towards one side or the other of a given political party to appeal to their audience, which in turn potentially skews the information that the audience is absorbing.

On June 12, 2016 at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida an individual, Omar Mateen, opened fire. Pulse was a nightclub that attracted individuals from the gay community, giving them a space to be themselves with other individuals who were like them. As news broke about the shooting, multiple different news sources began and continued to cover the events that took place. There was only so much information available about the events that were happening, but with so many different news sources covering the same story, there was a high likelihood that some of the information would come out biased, based on the ideals of the audience that obtained their information from a specific news source.

One news source that covered the Orlando Nightclub Shooting was Fox News, a news source that is skewed more towards the right side of the political spectrum. Fox News is a right bias news source that resides primarily with the Republican political party.Fox News used many different elements within the articles “49 killed in shooting at Florida nightclub in possible act of Islamic terror” to appeal to its audience. The title of the article is one way to get the attention of readers with the words “Islamic terror”; an issue that many Republicans feel strongly about conquering.Many supporters of the right side of the political spectrum are more supportive of sending the military to fight battles, especially battles against Islamic terrorism. The title alone therefore could trigger reader’s emotions through the use of pathos with the words “Islamic terrorism” to want to read more about it if it could be about such matters.

Another way that Fox News appeals to its readers is my providing ethos in the form of credible sources to support the information that they are reporting. In this article, Fox News provided quotes from then President Barak Obama, the county sheriff, the Orlando police chief, the governor of Florida, other news sources such as The Washington Post, and ATF officials. At the end of the article, Fox includes quotes from individuals who were present at the time of the attack which added even more credibility to their article. By including such credible sources, Fox News is able to establish credibility in the form of credible sources to its readers.

NBC, a left biased news sourcewhich is aimed more towards Democrats on the political spectrum also covered the Orlando Nightclub Massacre. The title of the article was “Orlando Nightclub Shooting: Mass Casualties After Gunman Opens Fire in Gay Club”. The title alone is much different than that of the Fox News article about the same event. Fox appears to jump straight to the conclusion that there is a very high likelihood that the event was possibly an act of Islamic terror. NBC put a different interpretation on the title, focusing more on the people who were directly affected by the event, rather than making assumptions to place blame.

The end of the NBC article contained the heading “Orlando Massacre: These Are the People Who Were Killed at Pulse Nightclub” followed by pictures of every single one of the victims who lost their lives in the shooting. Below the thumbnail sized pictures of all the victims were larger pictures of each victim with text about who the individual was. NBC appealed to pathos at the end of this article by including the pictures and short biographies of the victims. When most people read about an event where multiple lives are lost it generally stirs up emotions within an individual but when pictures of the victims are included, it makes the impact of the emotions that the reader is feeling much stronger giving a face to a name and a story to the face.

While comparing and contrasting the information in the NBC article to the information in the Fox article it was identified that both Fox and NBC used many of the same sources within their articles. The ethos was essentially the same, but the rhetoric that went along with the credible sources was skewed towards what the reader of the news source would prefer. In both articles, former President Barak Obama was used as a credible source to appeal to ethos. However, in the article from NBC, the quotes used from President Obama’s address on the event were focused more towards on people who were affected rather than using quotes from the same speech that reflected assigning blame. President Obama said “This is an especially heartbreaking day for our friends fellow Americans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Filedstadt)”. NBC ensures to take a quote that reflects empathy for the people affected by the event rather than Fox, who quoted the President with “We know enough to say this was an act of terror and an act of hate (FoxNews.com)”.

After having looked at two different news sources that reported on the same event, one being more left biased and the other being more right biased, it is important to look at a news source that has minimal biases when reporting information. USA Today is a more neutral news source with fewer biases towards one side of the political spectrum or the other than other news sources. When USA Today published “Fla. Shop alerted FBI to body armor inquiry”, another article about the Orlando Nightclub Shooting, it appeared as is this article focused more on the events leading up to the shooting in terms of how the shooter, Omar Mateen, obtained the protective equipment that he would later use to help him with carrying out his shooting. The article uses sources such as the FBI, who was quoted by USA Today with saying “During this visit [to Lotus Gunworks], Lotus personnel advised that there had been an individual who had been in the store days earlier asking about specific type of body armor (Johnson).” Throughout the article, more focus is put on the investigation that took place within the FBI about the events that led up to the shooting, rather than the aftermath of the event. Additionally, there is not a lot of focus in this article on pathos, but rather on ethos and logos; there is much more factual and credible content embedded within the article than there is content that would appeal to the emotions of the reader.

Throughout all of the articles that were analyzed, it was clear that there was a strong presence of appeal to authority. In all three articles, the authors made it a point to include what different authoritative figures felt and said about the Orlando Nightclub Shooting. By including the thoughts of authoritative figures such as the former President, it allows for the reader of the article to go along with what is being said by a figure whose ideas confirm and support their own.

All three news sources are sure to include credible sources to increase the credibility of them to further their image as a credible news source. The NBC article about the Orlando Nightclub Shooting appeals more to pathos in terms of pulling on the heartstrings of readers rather than the articles from Fox or USA Today do. One of the reasons that this could be is because NBC is a more politically left driven news source, and individuals who side more with the left end of the political spectrum tend to care more about the feelings involved with events. Fox news also appeals to pathos, but more so in terms of anger or hatred; trying to place blame. This could be due to the fact that since Fox News is skewed more towards the right side of the political spectrum, that they are trying to appeal to what their readers want, which is figuring out who committed such a crime, and then going into battle to protect themselves. In contrast to both NBC and Fox News, USA Today appeared to lack an appeal to pathos, which may be due to their specific audience of more politically neutral readers.

It is important to understand that the different rhetoric that news sources provide can have an impact on how an individual perceives an event. When multiple news sources cover the same event, more often than not the same factual information is reported, but the way in which it is reported is different. News sources use different appeals of rhetoric in order to be more relatable to their audiences. One news source may use pathos to induce the feeling of anger and hatred whereas another news source may use pathos to induce the feeling of sorrow in an individual. How a news source uses their rhetorical appeals to get across to audiences can have a major impact on how a specific event is viewed by large groups of individuals with similar views.

Works Cited

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