

CHANGING MEDIA LEADERSHIP AND ITS PERCEIVED IMPACT  
ON NEWS OBJECTIVITY

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explore how media leadership has evolved in the United States and how leadership styles of media owners have impacted the perceived objectivity of news stories. Objectivity of news stories has been a major problem in the media industry in the U.S. and journalists are blamed often for lack of credibility of news stories. This study explores how select leaders have a major influence on journalists' approaches to news, which ultimately influences news objectivity. This thesis employs a historical analysis approach using the four theories of the press as a framework to understand media leaders' leadership styles. The analysis begins with the leadership styles of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, owners of traditional, 19th-Century newspapers, and concludes with an evaluation of the leadership styles of present-day tech giants, Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey, owners of Facebook and Twitter, respectively. Further, this study analyzes how yellow journalism has led to the present problem of fake news to attract readership in the new media and argues that media leaders have a major influence on how journalists approach news they cover.

*Keywords: Fake news, leadership, new media, news objectivity, theories of the press, and yellow journalism*

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The media has gained increasing political importance particularly since the 1880s in the United States. Libertarian theory positions U.S. media to serve as a tool to inform the public, create awareness, and allow members of the public to reflect on public policies and government decisions in a democratic milieu. As such, Madhok (2015) defines news as “factual, accurate, interesting and relevant information about an event, a happening or an issue occurring anywhere in the world and honestly reported in time, fairly and objectively, without any political bias or prejudice of any kind” (p. 2).

Monmouth University Polling Institute (2018) notes that 77% of Americans report that major news outlets are involved in disseminating fake news and 87 % believe that interest groups post fake news on social media platforms to propagate their political agendas (para. 2 & 9). Over 60% of Americans perceive bias in political news coverage and report that most news favors the Democratic political party over other political parties especially the Republican Party (Swift, 2017). Recently, more Americans trust online news now than in the late 1990s, as Gallup report shows that 40% of Americans rely on online news as a source of information (Brenan, 2019). Fake news is rapidly growing on social media in this technology-savvy generation, and fake news continues to have an impact on the public’s political and social views (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Vargo, Guo, & Amazeen, 2017). This trend has consequences in American public opinion as partisan and sensational news disseminated on social media platforms often make it difficult for the public to differentiate between facts from fiction and consider social networks news as more credible than mainstream media (Qiu, Oliveira, Shirazi, Flammini, & Menczer, 2017).

Ideally, through objective news stories, the media is perceived as a tool for eradicating social injustice and empowering the less privileged by disseminating information to members of the public in the form of news through media channels. Among the news media, the newspaper is the oldest form in disseminating news stories, followed by broadcast media which includes radio and television. Those media were followed by the advent of new media which includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as, YouTube. News, debates, and discussions on media channels are used to empower the public through participation in discussions of public interest. Madhok (2015) argues that news must be understood by its audience otherwise news becomes irrelevant (p. 2). Furthermore, objective news is free from the journalists' or editors' personal views and such stories are reported as they occur (Madhok, 2015, p. 14).

The use of Twitter by President Donald Trump has increased readership and viewership of news on social media as the platform encourages viewers to actively participate in discussions, exchange their opinions and ideas which has become a major threat to traditional media accompanied by an increase in the online community for news and interpretation of the news. Pavlik and McIntosh (2019) explain that "the influence social media, especially Twitter have in crowdsourcing, election monitoring, and the use of tweets encourage voters to the voting polls" (p. 399).

Social media is a powerful tool in politics, as the media played an important role in electing the former U.S. President Barack Obama (Katz, Barris & Jain, 2013, p. 14). Support from the media, internet users, and media owners helped Obama during his campaign to be elected as a democratic leader, as citizens' participation on social media captured the attention of America voters (Katz et al., 2013, p. 14). The media also played an important role during the 2016 U.S presidential election, and news agencies were "overstretched" to cover Donald Trump



and Hillary Clinton, political scandals and opposing political views that divided the American voters (Diddi, 2018, p. 25).

After the 2016 presidential election, top news agencies constantly attack the elected President Trump's leadership because of his hostile criticism of mainstream media news as fake news (Kurtz, 2018, p. 5-6). Flood (2019) describes Trump's frustration with NBC News White House Correspondent Peter Alexander and *The New York Times* over lack of objectivity of news and offers a "backhanded compliment to CNN" as more credible than NBC news (para. 1) Grynbaum (2017) also illustrates Trump's use of Twitter to attack the media and discrediting news posted by mainstream media agencies such as CNN, ABC, NBC, and The NY Times as fake news because they fail to support his leadership. Trump condemns the mainstream media as the "enemy of the people" and this leads reporters and journalists to project to the American people that the president is failing in his leadership and his tweets and words that are often not true.

Wolf (2019) criticizes Trump's claims on Twitter about his leadership, the president's rants about him being the "chosen one" and his behavior that has caused tension between the United States and China and other countries. Perry (2019) reports Shepard Smith, an American news anchor, who used the president's tweet about the media as fake news and called out Trump for disseminating fake news after the president insisted that, "Alabama was at risk of hurricane Dorian" (para. 4). Dorman (2019) also highlights how Jim Acosta talks about Trump's dishonesty with the American people, and the president's hostility towards the press.

Hackman and Johnson (2004) note that organizational leaders can make poor decisions because of their personal views or philosophies about the world which affects the quality of their judgment (p. 238). Leaders of media organizations have the potential to control news content and

ensure that news favors their sponsors as well as owners' ideology before the news is disseminated to the masses. Kurtz (2018) argues that "organized journalism is built around rules, traditions, and the careful parsing of words" (p. 5).

Media leadership is currently experiencing changes as widespread availability and adoption of information and communication technology such as the internet, personal computers, and mobile phones have led to the emergence of alternative journalism. Social networking sites, blogs, and mobile phones providing alternative platforms for discourse about governance and social issues leads to an increase in online sources for news on social media. The journalism profession is currently going through an identity crisis as people no longer depend on traditional media but rather depend on new media for news because of the need for alternative voices that cater to specific community interests.

Social media is a powerful tool in disseminating news stories as users cultivate friendship, professional relationships, and social media users serve as opinion leaders for sharing, interpreting and discussing political information among their followers (Highfield, 2016, p. 78). Social media also gives its users the opportunity of news sharing and the creation of news stories without editorial filtering or control. Mainstream media outlets, such as those in television, radio, or print, also use their accounts to comment on certain topics or issues on social media to test for reliability and authenticity. It is still uncertain if the news on social media portrays the truth and accurate information. The authenticity of information is a major concern on all social media platforms as users have the opportunity to rephrase text and exaggerate images using Photoshop and editing skills to sensationalize news story which alters the objectivity of news stories on this media platforms (Highfield, 2016, p. 79-80).

The topic of media leadership is relevant today because, the media industry is often owned by business tycoons and moguls who have little or no experience in running a media agency for the public interest but instead as business owners looking to exploit the media for personal, financial or even political gains. Exploiting the media for financial gains gave birth to yellow journalism during the era of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer when news stories were sensationalized to encourage readership and viewership, an effect of an unhealthy competition for customers. Those efforts of leaders in that era of great change in the advertising function of news media clearly had great impact. Similarly, we are in a period of change now with the mercurial role of social media in the news landscape. Understanding media leadership in times of change is crucial because of its implications for how the public is informed and for the endurance of news objectivity.

Research on leadership in times of change in media will provide insights into the challenges media organizations are facing when it comes to reporting objective news stories as well as leadership practices in the media sector. Leaders in media organization will influence both their subordinates (i.e. editors, journalists, as well as, freelancers) and content of news in the newsroom through their own public profile and in some cases their institutional authority, setting the tone for newsroom cultures and internal newsroom practices

This study of media leadership and with an eye toward its impact on news objectivity will include historical analysis of, the aforementioned leadership styles of Joseph Pulitzer, a pioneer of new journalism, and William Randolph Hearst, editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*, then juxtaposing them with new social media giants Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder; and CEO of Facebook, and Jack Dorsey, co-founder and CEO of Twitter. While these more recent leaders may seem of a different ilk entirely, the reality is that, even without their own newsrooms, they

have developed and steered their respective platforms in ways that have, perhaps unintentionally, had significant impact on the way that news circulates and how it is framed. With the introduction of their and other social media platforms as alternative spaces of news circulation offering a diverse range of news, both traditional news outlets and new operators have had to work differently to draw the attention of large audiences. News sharing via these platforms has signaled another major period of change in which we are seeing a redefinition of journalism as a profession. Ultimately, looking at these leaders in these different moments of change will contribute to the understanding of how leaders of these media organizations have influenced journalism in both direct and indirect and indirect ways.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has been criticized for repealing the government's net neutrality rules for internet providers in 2018. Net neutrality emphasizes equal access to the net without discrimination or charge; however, repealing net neutrality can impose tougher neutrality rules that would affect internet providers and forgoing FCC's mission to serve competition and public interest. Ajit Pai the current FCC chairman notes that the internet has become the primary avenue through which most Americans are receiving their news, yet FCC regulators have not factored this into significant revisions of policy, which are still geared towards print and broadcast news media (Pai, 2017). Shepardson (2019) reports that Ajit Pai emphasizes that federal appeal court judges "has taken the authority for themselves, blocking any attempt to modernize these regulations to match the obvious realities of the modern marketplace" (para.4). This study seeks to help fill the gap in the research by exploring changing leadership from the traditional media to the new media, which has the largest worldwide audience based on its approach to news.

This study, aside from contributing to the knowledge of media and leadership, will benefit media owners and advertisers and serve as a guide to researchers that will want to further investigate how changing media leadership influences news objectivity. This study will also be useful to students, as reference material and to media organizations on how a change in media leadership can influence news objectivity.

Chapter two of this study offers an overview of prior literature on journalism, news media, and leadership, including a review of the four theories of the press, theories of various leadership styles, an overview of media ethics, and critical work on news objectivity. In chapter three of this study, historical analysis will be used to gain a thorough understanding of what a historical analysis encompasses, how the use of secondary interviews from scholarly books, articles, and the media helped shaped the study of media leadership narratives, and how historical narratives on media leadership will be organized. Chapter four will provide a critical analysis of media leadership in the United States from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by comparing the leadership styles of Joseph Putlizer and William Randolph Hearst with contemporary media leaders Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey. The analysis will also elaborate on the competitive and the leadership styles of the select media leaders and how it influences news objectivity and the rise of fake news following 2016 presidential election. Its analysis of contemporary media leaders, Zuckerberg and Dorsey will provide insights on how leaders have contended with the circulation of fake news and their attempts to enhance news objectivity through their respective platforms. The result will be to shed light on how these various approaches to leadership in times of change in the media landscape have impacted the ways that publics receive and process information about the world in ways that have significant impacts on our political existence.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

A new perspective on the role of journalism continues to emerge in the United States in the wake of the global collapse of dictatorships. Consequently, research on media leadership needs to be constantly updated because it is a fertile area of study in the field of journalism. Schudson (2009) acknowledges that leadership in news organization is ignored and “very little research on organizational environment in the newsrooms and almost none on how editors and publishers effect change or stimulate improved output from their employees” (p.163).

Media leaders have always influenced journalistic approaches to news since at least the era of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst who sensationalized news stories to increase readership and eliminate competitors. Noam (2009) states that “William Randolph Hearst... used his newspaper to start a war, and..., promoted himself for mayor, governor, and president” (p.7). The term “yellow journalism” became popular as a result of the Pulitzer/Hearst rivalry and the resulting sensationalist approach to news toward which they steered their publications. Schudson (2009) notes that leadership in the newsroom is more complex than leadership in sports or profit organizations because the goal of leadership in the newsroom is to “serve the public and uphold the cause of freedom of information in a democracy” as well as stay profitable to remain financially strong and independent (p. 166).

The rest of this chapter will review existing literature that explores various areas of interest for this project. First is a review of what leadership means by highlighting three prominent concepts of leadership styles. Second is a review of the four theories of the press that have shaped the understanding of journalism in the world both historically and contemporarily. Third is an overview of scholarship that has examined the role of media in the society, followed

by, a look at work on media ethics. Finally, I will share some insights of scholarship on media leadership specifically and its connections to news objectivity.

## **Leadership**

Various scholars have described leadership as a relationship that exists between leaders and followers, and this relationship is based on the leaders' influence to articulate a vision and model a positive change to achieve a common goal (Astin & Astin, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Northouse, 2015). Bolden, Hawkins, Gosling, and Taylor (2013) argue that there is no widely accepted definition of leadership and no common consensus on how to best develop leadership and leaders. Paus (2013) states that leadership effectiveness "involves a person's ability to create a vision, to establish guidelines for actions, to unite the individuals for achieving the vision, to realize the vision with team members, to track the project in its processuality, to achieve results through organization, control and problem solving and teamwork seen as a sum of complementary forces which identity is given by the following and achieving a shared vision" (p. 74).

The ability of a leader to influence subordinates is the most common in the definitions of leadership and this influence may be from an institutional power attached to their position or an informal power they can access (Friedkin, 1993; Yukl, 1989; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Individuals exercise informal power by influencing group members that they do not have formal authority within the group (Friedkin, 1993; Wheelan & Johnston, 1996). Adair (2009) suggests a military perspective to the definition of leadership by defining leadership "as an activity of influencing people to pursue a certain goal with power of mind behind the leader and a strong personality that attracts followership" (p. 21-22). Gill (2013) notes that leadership involves "winning the hearts and minds of people to achieve a common goal using one's strong

personality to give a clear direction and involves commitment in the achievement of the common purpose by generating feelings of challenge and excitement” (p. 7). One study shows that a leader’s power is based on persuasiveness in influencing relationships and mutual understanding over followers (Hollander, 1978).

Northouse (2004) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Malek, Book, and Tanford (2015) highlight the powerful influence a leaders’ words can have in the society when statements are mass disseminated (p. 28). Malek et al. (2015) also notes that the timing of a leader’s words affects the way the public reacts to messages which can change the original intent of the leader’s message and can negatively affect the “convention industry” (p. 39). For example, people are more likely to react negatively to economic talks during recession, than during strong financial stability (Malek et al., 2015). Paus (2013) also notes that the new media cannot be ignored when it comes to leadership and the channel of mass media communication affects leaders’ messages. Paus (2013) argues that feedback and opinions on the new media have a powerful influence on leadership and organizations. Therefore, leaders should always work towards favorable image and publicity to avoid challenges on leadership (p. 77-78).

## **Leadership Styles**

Although there are many styles of leadership that scholars have identified and outline, there are three that are most prevalent: authoritarian, democratic, and transformational.

**Authoritarian leadership style.** Countries of the world globally practice authoritarian leadership styles in various contexts especially in the military, sports, and certain eastern and western countries (Cheng et al., 2014; Geddes, Frantz & Wright, 2014; Kellett 2002).

Authoritarian leaders have total control over subordinates and expect unquestionable obedience



from their employees (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 96-97). Studies have shown that authoritarian leaders are predominant in Asian and African cultures, and authoritarian leaders strive to remain in power through absolute control of their followers (Chen & Farh, 2010; Guo et al., 2018; Zhang, Huai, & Xie, 2015). Cheng et al. (2004) illustrate that power asymmetry in an authoritarian leadership style affects the quality of communication between leaders and followers, and authoritarian leaders deliberately withhold vital information from followers to remain in control. Authoritarian leaders apply a high level of control over their followers to keep them docile, and authoritarian leaders do not provide adequate explanations to followers when decisions are made to avoid them from questioning (Farh & Cheng, 2000).

Northouse (2015) notes that “authoritarian leaders perceive subordinates as needing direction and do not encourage communication between followers and prefer followers to communicate with them directly” (p. 90). Aryee et al. (2007) emphasize that authoritarian leaders initiate their structure, rules, and regulations to define goals and promise rewards for adhering to the rules to the accomplishment of set goals, and punishment for failing to accomplish goals and not following instructions. This leadership style is opposite to the democratic and egalitarian leadership style wherein leaders and followers participate in the decision-making process to achieve the set goals (Aryee et al., 2007; Bass, 1990). For example, North Korean President Kim Jong-un and operates under the authoritarian leadership style (Koo, Choi & Kim, 2016). Another example of a famous authoritarian leaders is Donald Trump (Kellner, 2016). Authoritarian leadership can create discontent, hostility and even aggression because members of the society feel left out in the decision-making policy that affects them directly.

**Democratic Leadership Style.** This leadership style involves every group member in the decision-making process, and everyone is allowed to contribute and participate under this leadership, and the leader with authority makes the final decision for the group (Woods, 2004). Positive outcomes are mostly related to the democratic leadership style because of the inclusion and participation of all group members for better decisions to be made. According to a study by Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi, and Shaikh (2012) democratic leadership increases group morale, productivity, and effectiveness in achieving set goals.

Democratic leadership faces criticism from scholars as many have argued about the effectiveness of this style under certain circumstances especially during times of pressure that require a leader to make a decision swiftly (Lewin, Lippit, & White, 1939). Gastil (1994) illustrates the difference between democratic leadership and being authoritarian and explains that democratic leadership empowers group members through distribution of responsibilities and assistance provided by group members in the decision-making process. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) emphasize that leaders should adapt their leadership styles to situations when the need arises. The most significant characteristic of this leadership style is that democratic leaders do not make decisions solely but rather consult with team members to hear their ideas before arriving at a conclusion for setting goals, plans, and policies. Democratic leadership can also be referred to as shared or participative leadership (Starrat, 2001). Democratic leadership benefits both individuals and the organization as subordinate's knowledge and experiences are valued and accounted for in the decision-making process which increases subordinates' motivations, creates loyalty to the team, and reduces tendencies for future miscommunication in an organization. An example of example of a democratic leader is former President Barack Obama (Greenstein, 2009, p. 4).

**Transformational Leadership Style.** “Transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration” (Bass, 1999, p.11). Transformational leadership is a concept developed by Burns in 1978. Burns (1978) emphasizes that the role of leaders over followers is to inspire followers to achieve uncommon goals to mutually benefit both parties (p. 18-19). The visionary and charismatic leadership style makes up the transformational leadership style (Northouse, 2010, p. 173- 175).

Hacker and Roberts (2003) explain that “transformational leadership is the comprehensive and integrated leadership capacities required of individuals, groups, or organizations to produce transformation as evidenced by step-functional improvement” (p.3). Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009) argue that transformational leadership increases individuals’ creativity in an organization and both the individual and organization benefits from this leadership style (p. 469). Bass (1985) notes that followers respect, have confidence in, and look up to transformational leaders because of the persuasive nature of this leadership style in influencing followers. Transformational leaders develop strong bonds with followers and help followers develop their leadership skills to be innovative and creative in their leadership capacity (Jung, Chow, Wu, 2003; Shin and Zhou, 2003). The major difference between this leadership style and other leadership styles is that transformational leaders are more concerned about developing the followers to become leaders and enhancing their performance in an organization (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Northouse, 2014).

**Laissez-Faire Leadership Style.** A laissez-faire leadership style is a non-authoritarian leadership style. This leadership style is not common in the literature of leadership as it is commonly associated with negative outcomes especially from a lack of motivation from

leaders to followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Skogstad et al., 2007, 80-92). A laissez-faire leader provides subordinates with the least possible guidance, “abdicates responsibilities [and] avoid[s] making decisions” (Luthans, 2005 p. 562; Robbins, Judge, & Sanghi, 2007, p. 475). Scholars have argued that laissez- Faire leadership could be beneficiary as team members may be self-motivated; determined through autonomy, the leader provides subordinates the freewill to “let group members make all decision[s]”( Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Mondy & Premeaux, 1995, p.347; Spreitzer, 1995). A Laissez faire leader believes that subordinates excel better without supervision (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014).

#### **Four Theories of the Press**

To illustrate how leadership styles and theories of the press synergistically influence news productions and media organizations approaches to news, this section will review the four theories of the press; authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist theory of the press written by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm. The review will illustrate how different philosophical approaches to the press and its functions in society influences news productions and media organizations’ approaches to news.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from interfering, suppressing, and oppressing the press and as such, the press must remain independent and free from all external control (Craft, 2010, p. 44). The press is protected by the judicial system in a democratic milieu to enlighten the public about government activities and the political system that helps the public in exercising their sovereign powers (Bollinger, 1991, p. 1). Craft (2010) argues that freedom of the press allows the press to perform its ethical duties as custodians of valuable information as well as be accountable for information disseminated in a democratic political regime (p. 44-49). Studies have shown that it is ethical to censor information of national

security that is likely to endanger the lives of the public if its mass disseminated especially information of military security; however, scandalous information about politicians' personal lives, not capable of chaos is not justifiable of privacy protection as the media serves as checks and balances to the excesses of the government (Belsey, 1992, p. 77 80; Williams, 1992, p. 158). Belsey (1992) further notes that individuals who depend on the media for publicity should be able to accept all publicity they get from the media either good or bad since "all publicity is good publicity" (p. 84).

**Authoritarian theory of the press.** The authoritarian theory is the oldest theory and it is mostly used by dictatorial countries. This theory is sometimes used in democratic nations especially when it involves issues of national security during wars or conflict. In the authoritarian theory of the press, the press is a servant to the state and information in this theory is censored (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 2).

News content in the authoritarian theory of the press is controlled to allow citizens in the society to be informed of only information the rulers think is appropriate for mass consumption and policies that need public support (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 2). The state controls all information including the media, to preserve social order and peace in the society. The government controls all information that challenges the ruling authority, and non-threatening minority views towards the governing elites are not censored in this theory of the press. The press in this system is under the control of governing elites, and censorship is enforced to suppress journalists' rights to freedom of expression to comment or challenge the policies of the ruling government. Private ownership of the media is restricted except when special permission is granted which can also be withdrawn at any time if the press goes against the ruling authority (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 2). In

addition, the press license does not grant freedom of expression as the license can be revoked if news published undermine royal policies or governing authorities.

In the authoritarian theory of the press, media communication technology is controlled by the ruling government for propaganda. The press in this theory do not serve as checks and balances to the ruling government, and the media is used as an instrument to strengthen the power of the ruling government through censorship of unfavorable information against the royal policies of those in power (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 3). The media is controlled and exploited by the ruling régime for favorable publicity, and the media is monopolized to eliminate competition that could go against the royal policies (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 3). The press role in this theory is to educate the public of government policies and prevent threats and opposition using censorship (Siebert, 1956, p. 10).

Vaca-Baqueiro (2018) explains authoritarianism in Mexico and how the governing elites and the press mutually benefitted from each other as the ruling authority granted incentives to media agencies that support the government and its policies (p. 37). Vaca-Baqueiro (2018) argues that explaining the authoritarian theory of the press goes beyond dictatorship or strict control over the media but rather there is more clarification that needs to be discussed about the authoritarian theory (p. 36-42). Vaca-Baqueiro (2018) further adds that media agencies that pretend to be independent and still depend on the governing authorities for financial support in return for favorable news should be classified under the authoritarian theory even in a libertarian political regime (p. 36-42).

**Libertarian theory of the press.** The libertarian theory of the press is present in the First Amendment in the U. S constitution. The libertarian theory offers a distinct alternative to the authoritarian views and by putting individual decision- making front and center, believing people

are rational and can judge good ideas from bad ideas. International trade, urbanization, and changes in the economic, political, social, and global landscape undermined the power of rural aristocracy which led to the introduction of the libertarian theory of the press (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 3). Siebert et al. (1956) emphasize that in the “libertarian theory, the press is not an instrument of government, but rather a device for presenting evidence and arguments on the basis of which the people can check on the government and make up their minds as to policy” (p. 3).

The premise of this theory is “information is knowledge” and “knowledge is power” and access to information allows members of the public to decide between good or bad decisions. The libertarian theory of the press emphasizes freedom of the press from all external control and all ideas are heard for truth to emerge, and the libertarian theory is present in the Bill of Rights (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 4-5). The Hutchins Commission demands proper functioning and a socially responsible press and criticizes the government and public ownership of the media (p. 4-5). The Hutchins Commission demands proper functioning and a socially responsible press and criticizes the government and public ownership of the media (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 4-5). The Commission on the Freedom of the Press states that protecting the press from the government was not enough, as few individuals control the media, using the media as an instrument to express their own opinions, and ideas rather than the sole purpose of the theory to allow all ideas to get a fair hearing (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 4-5).

The libertarian theorists ignore reasonable control of the media and excess freedom of the press sometimes leads to defamation of the government in pretense of reporting accurate and true account of an event (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 48-49). The government in the libertarian theory of the press is a servant to the people, responsible to its citizens and the media serves as a watchdog

to government activities (Siebert et al., 1956 p. 50-51). For example, WikiLeaks tends to leak confidential information and documents some of which have been about the Afghanistan war, corruption investigation in Kenya, and confidential emails and documents about Hillary Clinton's campaign during the 2016 US presidential election. Information leaks to the public undermine government activities and sometimes leads to the defeat of the government in power. This discourages the government to accept this theory of the press because excess freedom of information may lead the public to have negative perceptions about the government, especially when it involves information of national or military security, which can sometimes be difficult to comprehend if it is not well interpreted.

**Social responsibility theory of the press.** The social responsibility theory of the press modifies the libertarian theory of the press by adding some aspects of the authoritarian views, to improve the integrity and trustworthiness of the media profession. In social responsibility theory, the press is taken to be for the people and society. The duty of the press in this theory is to make a code of conduct and abide by it, improve journalism, as well as, protect journalists from fines and penalties in case of violation of the code of conduct.

Siebert et al. (1956) note that “the motive for introducing the social responsibility theory of the press is to impose on the press an obligation to be socially responsible and ensure all sides are presented, and that the public have enough information to make a decision and if the media does not take such responsibility it may be necessary for other agencies of the public to enforce it” (p. 5). Vaca-Baqueiro (2018) further adds that Schramm's study on social responsibility theory of the press targets influential media conglomerates who have liberal views and the introduction of responsibility of the press is to allow diversity in viewpoints and objective representation of news (p. 4 & 16).



This theory of the press helps promote democracy as private media owners can publish within the ethical guidelines in a responsible way which encourages public participation through comments and responses to press news. The social responsibility theory of the press adds to the role of the press from reporting only objective news stories to interpretative reporting by allowing the press to interpret information to ensure complete and accurate news, and the press is responsible for the content of news disseminated to the public (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 74-76).

**Soviet communist theory of the press.** In the Soviet communist theory of the press, the press is taken as a part of the state as ownership of press is with the state and the Soviet press is controlled by the ruling party, and the media is used as a propaganda tool of control to promote the success and continuity of the Soviet socialist system (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 5). The Soviet press is provided with basic knowledge about government activities, but there is also valuable public information that is kept concealed from the media. The rulers control all information and whatever they say becomes the ruling idea.

The Authoritarian theory and the Soviet communist theory of the press share similar characteristics; the authoritarian government allows private ownership of the media with restrictions, but in Soviet communist theory, the control of the media is in the hands of few leaders in the Communist party of the, Soviet Union (CPSU), and the government is not subject to checks and balances by the media. Modern mass media communication technologies are controlled to regulate the mass dissemination of information. The major difference between the authoritarian theory of the press and the Soviet communist theory as Siebert et al. (1956) note that the difference between the Soviet communist theory and authoritarian theory is that, the Soviet government allows truthful information and does not allow private media owners to manipulate the truth, and the Soviet government allows press feedback in this theory of the press

(p. 5-6). The CPSU serves as a “custodian of values and determiner of goals” and the press is an instrument of propaganda to promote only one valid political and social philosophy by the CPSU (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 132-133).

Siebert and colleagues identify different periods that relate to the theories of the press to describe modern functioning and the importance of the media, and its influence in the society under various political administration. The theories of the press highlight how political leaders and governing elite influence to restrict or allow freedom of the press which ultimately influences news objectivity (Vaca-Baqueiro, 2018, p. 29-30).

### **The Evolving Place of News Media in the Society**

“The mass media in the United States are arguably the most powerful institutions in American society today” (Blanchard, 2013, p. 1). The libertarian theory of the press allows the press to be free and all interlocutors have the opportunity to share their ideas for truth to emerge. Curran (2002) notes that the media serves as “check on the state” and exposes the misuse of official power under the “traditional libertarian theory” (p. 217). Boutros- Ghali (1998) states that “the media today are as important as the branches of government, and have a direct impact on each of them: the executive, the legislature and even the judiciary” (p. 23).

In Afghanistan Algeria, Zimbabwe and other developing countries where the media is not free, government controls information disseminated to the public by punishing journalist who go against the government, in certain developed countries of the world like the UK that “operates a highly secretive system” denies the press access to confidential information and control the press access to government political, military, and financial information, and selectively reinforces a particular political view about favorable aspects about the ruling government as well as regulations enforced by the jurisdiction laws to intervene and restrict undesirable news content

(Street, 2001, p. 103-119). Because of the enormous power the media possesses, the government in developing countries control the press through censorship, secrecy, propaganda, and regulation in countries where the press is not free (Street, 2001, p. 103-119). The presence of freedom of information in the media fosters democracy in society through mass dissemination of information to the public. (McQuail, 1998, p. 13-14).

The media is used by the government during political campaigns and announcements of government policies. The media plays an important role in politics as the media “conveys information directly to the public”, “conduct[s] opinion polls” and takes editorial positions based on public opinion” (Boutros- Ghali, 1998, p. 24). Political candidates are aware of the power of the media and make use of the media especially television for political campaign advertisements, political debates as well as use the media to “leak” scandalous confidential information about political oppositions to have a lead in the election polls ("The power of the press: The media and political campaigns," 2018, para 1).

News is an “announcement of special interest and importance” and when mass disseminated on television, radio or newspaper it is more valuable and different from government officials’ messages disseminated through the internet because of the legitimate importance news have in fostering democracy (Schudson, 1998, p. 29-34). Stromer-Galley and Jamieson (2001) argue that the media plays an important role in the public acceptance of government policies and decisions. Bill Clinton used the media to advance the “balance budget debate of 1995-6” which helped to publicize the need for the acceptance of the budget because of enormous support he enjoyed from the media and this reduced publicities from opposing political parties’ views (Stromer-Galley & Jamieson, 2001, p. 173-174).

Social media offers cheap dissemination of information that can play a major role in shaping political attitudes and behaviors with no control of information from the government. Before the advent of social media, political campaigns on traditional media were one-way communication between political candidates and the public. With feedback options, social media offers two-way communication between political candidates and the public. Special features on social media allow users to create news, select and share news with a community of like-minded individuals who support the same political views (Gainous & Wagner, 2013, p.4-5). Smith (2011) observes that YouTube was a successful political tool for former President Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election and in 2010 mid-term elections in informing the majority of voters. Social media also played an important role during the 2016 presidential election as voters reported they got political information about Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders on social media news and political candidates post on social media especially Twitter and Facebook (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016).

As the preceding scholarship indicates advancement in media communication, technology and the introduction of the internet allows political figures to have access to a wide audience in an inexpensive way, and they can provide feedback to their audience through special features on social media platforms. The media fosters democracy by serving as watchdogs against government misuse of political authority. Democratic and authoritarian leaders want to remain in power and will try their best to censor or limit the information available to the media that would likely undermine their authority or policies. Through the media, the public is aware of government intentions and disseminates such information to members of the public which would help filter decisions that do not favor the public through political debates on broadcast media as

well as information available on social media. The media also performs a variety of other social roles such as entertainment, advertising, and education.

### **An Overview of Media Ethics**

“Media ethics concerns right and wrong, good and bad, better and worse actions taken by people working for media” (Merrill, 1999, p. 1). Writing and selecting a news story by a journalist for mass dissemination can communicate the “personal standard” and “moral character” of the media personnel (Merrill, 1999, p. 1). Adam, Craft, and Cohen (2004) propose that ethical journalists reach for the truth, avoid news bias, serve the public, maintain trust, avoid influence, and act in a manner that is socially responsible for news to be mass disseminated. Media ethics are a major concern in the media industry as ethics improve the trustworthiness, credibility, and respect for the journalism profession (Merrill, 1999, p. 2).

Corporate ownership and business owners operating news media organizations for profit poses ethical challenges to truthful journalism, leaving journalists powerless to make ethical decisions. Baker (2007) argues that media ownership concentration can be abused by media conglomerates and the ruling government to promote government activities thereby eliminating diversity in viewpoints and a threat to democracy (p. 16-17). Bertrand (2000) notes that media owners in the U.S attribute lower importance to media ethics than in Nordic countries (p. 51). Blevens (1995) notes that “the foundation of ethics should move from newsrooms to boardrooms” (p. 133). Fink (1998) argues that “good journalism isn’t cheap ..., [and] responsible journalism must come not from the newsroom, but, rather, the executive suite,” and media owners must be willing and committed to funding journalist’s pursuit for credible and accurate news stories (p. 104).

With the presence of global news such as CNN, Al Jazeera, BBC, and Sky News reaching wider audiences all over the world with their reporters in every country, these agencies face ethical challenges when covering news where the press is not free. Globalization of the media is crucial, and it is important to have ethics to guide this media. Ward (2013) explains “mixed news media,” global media ethics” and “globalization of news media” are caused by advancements in technology and social media news, ultimately redefining the journalism profession (p. 1-3). Mixed news media refers to citizens’ access to and participation in news being available through an array of media platforms such as blogs, websites, and social media; the globalization of news is essential due to the impact of certain global topics, news which are beyond a country’s border such as climate change. Global media ethics includes respect and value for diversity all over the world. News perceived as normal in one country may be offensive in another country, and even lead to public unrest or riots. Ward (2013) notes that global media ethics should also include: “ethical principles such as truth-telling and objectivity, forms of journalism as watchdog investigative journalism and ideas such as serving the public or democracy” (p. 7).

Christians, Fackler, McKee, Kreshel, and Woods (2009) note that CNN lost its credibility in reporting Saddam Hussein’s leadership when they were criticized for “withholding vital information about the regime” (p. 42). CNN executives were faced with the dilemma of saving the lives of their reporters or reporting accurate stories that could lead to the deaths of their reporters in Baghdad, hindering accurate representations of Hussein’s leadership and leaving questions about CNN’s ability to properly serve its audience, the global public (Christians et al., 2009, p. 43). Freedom of information plays a major role in democracy and “journalism is part of the political process,” and an influence from the arms of government

violates journalist ethics with possibility of negative consequences in a democratic society (Belsey, 2002, p. 14-15). Reporting global news is morally complex and rationally complicated as freedom of the press varies from country to country, and so does punishment when news does not favor the ruling government.

### **Leadership and News Objectivity**

According to Baker (2007), distribution of ownership of the mass media fosters democracy and provides the public access to various information and interpretations of that information (p. 6-8). Public access to news is easier for Americans in recent years due to technological advances, but these same advances pose major challenges for citizens and U.S. institutions when it comes to differentiating facts from fiction. Freshman journalism students are introduced to the optimal characteristics of news being objectivity, timeliness, accurate, impact, important, proximity, originality, but they increasingly struggle to be able to translate theory into practice in their reporting of news stories (Dunaway, Davis, Padgett, & Scholl, 2015, p. 772). However, Mills, Sanders, and Hussain (2019) explain the lack of required leadership courses for media undergraduate students and the importance of required leadership and ethics courses to help students who will become media leaders to be better prepared for maintaining ethical journalism principles in case of conflicting views on media ethics. Leaders of media organizations play a major role in maintaining accuracy and fairness in news reports and if undergraduate media students are more focused on “digital skills courses” than media ethics and leadership courses, this will adversely affect students understanding of leadership and ethics in the media industry (Mills et al., 2019, p. 273).

Bagdikian (1997) notes that to end 19th -century sensationalism, news objectivity was imposed on journalists to improve the quality of journalism and this “strengthen[ed] the growing

sense of discipline and ethics in journalism” (p. 179). Still, “objectivity” was criticized by some for “leaving reporters powerless” if reporters were unable to get accurate accounts of an event from a reliable source and “news was superficial”..., “leaving unreported areas of genuine relevance that authorities chose not to talk about” (Bagdikian, 1997, p. 180). In the 1960s, changes in the media sector led to the media industry focusing more on sensationalism, rumors, scandals, and entertainment-oriented political news, and this resulted in a decline of quality competition among media agencies and loss of economic motivation among mainstream news organizations (Sabato, 1992, p. 128).

Scholars have argued that corporate ownership of media organization affects news objectivity as shareholders have the power to control and slant news to favor sponsors to remain financially stable (Bagdikian, 1997; McChesney, 2004; McManus, 1994, p. 1996). Bagdikian (1997) agrees that journalists’ work is controlled by their superiors to utilize the media industry for profit, increase market share and expansion of the industry rather than enhancing accurate and objective news (p. 236). Hamilton (2004) observes that privately-owned media organizations are less motivated by making profit than publicly owned media organization with shareholders who buy and sells the company’s shares publicly. McChesney (2000) also notes that big corporations have little respect for the journalism profession and show little responsibility to objective news (p. 52). Over the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, various conglomerates have acquired hundreds of smaller media companies, effectively reducing the number of true holders of power across the media industry to a fraction and further shifting away from the public service goal of journalism reporting fair and balanced news stories and toward the making profits as seemingly interchangeable components of business ventures. Journalists are at the lowest rung in the hierarchy and are expected to perform their



responsibilities based on corporate policy without ethical conscience (Boylan, 1999, p .4; Lucious, Sonnenfeld, & Reese, 1996, p .69).

Oreskes (1999) notes that journalists must always maintain professionalism and journalist ethics when faced with both internal and external pressures (p. 3). However, being conscious of bias is not a simple task. A study shows that bias is difficult to measure or explain as individuals interpret bias from the way they view reality (Noam, 2009, p. 17). Bias in political news coverage has been measured by scholars in various ways by comparing language patterns between newspapers and members of congress, over or under coverage of political scandals using the agenda-setting theory as well as the positive or negative tones used in the coverage of political news (Genzkow and Shapiro, 2010; Larcinese, Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; Lott & Hassett, 2014; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011).

During the 2016 U.S. presidential election, social media especially Facebook, allowed for the mass dissemination fake news about presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, ultimately favoring Trump but also driven, in part, by the economic factors at play, including the lower cost of producing content without adhering to journalistic ethics and the money made by those social media platforms allowing users to find messages they want regardless of their veracity (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Silverman (2017) further argues that most fake news on social media during the 2016 presidential election was in support of Trump and detrimental to Clinton, likely playing at least a partial role the election. However, as Mitchell, Simmons, Matsa, and Silver (2018) found it is still though globally to be unacceptable to be biased in reporting political news as the majority of people in 38 countries of the world disagree with partisan journalism in the coverage of political news (para. 2).

This chapter reviewed much relevant on leadership, the press, and the evolving media landscape's impact on journalism. Chapter three will explore the approach of the study that will be used for this research. Chapter four will analyze historical narratives of media leadership in the 1800s to understand what media leadership was in the past and changes that have occurred over the years in the media industry. Chapter four will also analyze the relationship between media leadership and news objectivity and how media leaders influence journalists' approaches to news.

### CHAPTER III: APPROACH TO THE STUDY

This chapter explains the approach to this study of leadership in the media industry and its utilizing of a historical approach to explore the relationships and similarities between traditional media leadership and the new media leadership with references to how they influence news objectivity. This historical analysis builds upon the comprehension of credible narratives and differentiates between expression of opinions and historical evidence. “History is the record of all experience...,” [and] “without history we have no knowledge of who we are or how we came to be” (Daniels, 1996, p. 3-4). Daniels (1996) also notes “that the record of man’s past offers a challenge for inquiry and understanding...,” of past events and occurrences of previous generations expressed in an entertaining and educative form (Daniels, 1996, p. 4). Godfrey (2006) notes that “history is the heritage upon which the future is constructed” (p. 5). History provides a guide to solving modern-day problems, even though no two experiences are precisely the same, and analyzing and interpreting history offers solutions to the present problems through understanding past failures to make the future better (Daniels, 1996, p. 4, 8; Godfrey, 2006, p.6).

A historical approach emphasizes the “time dimension” of events and ideas and recognition of various approaches to history (Daniels, 1996, p. 8). “The task of historical research is to discover the foundations of historical truth and understanding in the deep substrata of detail” (Daniels, 1996, p. 78). Beringer (1986) suggests that “all historical research employs content analysis” (p. 221). Computer technology has aided larger sets of data to be analyzed; however, the historian needs to understand and present accurate findings from the historical evidence (p. 225-226).

Historical evidence, most often incomplete, is collected through “written words, oral traditions, pictorial materials, and artifacts” and is gathered, analyzed, and interpreted by

historians in a chronological order (Benjamin, 2006). This study offers historical analysis on media leadership styles in the 1880's and 1890s of Joseph Pulitzer a newspaper publisher of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and *New York World*, as well as, William Randolph Hearst an American businessman, politician, and newspaper publisher of The *San Francisco Examiner*. This is put into relief through historical analysis of the more recent leadership of Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder, and CEO of Facebook and Jack Dorsey, Twitter's co-founder and CEO. The comparative analysis offers perspective on the impacts of differing leadership styles across different media epochs while evaluating pre-existing major debates among historians and exploring current narratives about new media leadership. This study also explores challenges journalists and editors experience in their approaches to news stories based on media leaders' influence.

To conduct this study, the researcher depended on secondary sources of information from credible scholarly books, and journal articles to understand the 1800s media leadership of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Secondary interviews of Jack Dorsey and Mark Zuckerberg on YouTube, Newspapers, and scholarly articles were reviewed to understand what these leaders are doing in light of questions about news objectivity on social media and the spread of fake news in the light of and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The reliability of information was measured by taking note of recurring themes and/or narratives. Critical scrutiny of information, comparing and contrasting studies by different scholars and sources on media leaders' influence on news objectivity also helped to filter facts from fiction. Findings from scholarly books and journals were analyzed based on historical narratives and personal interpretations of how media leaders influence journalists' approaches to news.

The use of secondary televised interviews with Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey helped to add depth to this study since it was impossible to interview these superstar media leaders. Zuckerberg and Dorsey's interviews were analyzed to understand their leadership styles through their actions and communication styles. Broadcast interviews provided insights on how to analyze Zuckerberg and Dorsey's leadership styles since they are relatively new leaders in the news media industry. The researcher organized all interviews by date and relevance. Notes were taken during the live broadcast. The researcher categorized similar topics together. Handwritten notes were taken during the transcribing of interviews. The researcher interpreted, analyzed and used scholarly articles, books, and newspapers to support the analysis in chapter four of this study. Materials were selected to enrich diversity of interest in media leadership perspectives by selecting scholarly articles, televised interviews, and books to stimulate research growth and knowledge in media leadership. Appropriate comprehensive materials were selected and principles were placed above prejudice in the selection of specific resources.

Joseph Pulitzer's and William Hearst's leadership style were worthy of historical investigation as the lasting impact of their achievements, shortcomings, competition, and ruthless leadership styles can be seen in today's media especially with newly growing concerns of fake news in the American mainstream and social media. This study takes special interest in the term "yellow journalism" which was introduced during the Spanish-American War, and the role of popular media through diverse cultural materials, using the lens of post-colonialism. The study also notes how these leaders have contributed immensely to the public perception of modern-day journalism.

The more recent state of media leadership over social media is a relatively new phenomenon as Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey started their respective social media sites

with the intention of social networking with families and friends, not expressly for news purposes. Regardless, Facebook is the largest social media platform with over two billion users, and Twitter has over three hundred million active users globally (Clement, 2019, para. 1; Clement, 2019, para. 3). With these usership numbers in mind, Gottfried and Shearer (2016) note that “Two-thirds of Facebook users (66%) get news on the site, nearly six-in-ten Twitter users (59%) get news on Twitter” (para. 4). Millions of people in the U. S. depend on social media for political news especially Twitter, often getting messaged directly from political figures there, such as President Trump who uses Twitter to “promote policies and interact with citizens and other officials” (Clement, 2019, para. 3).

In 2016, social media platforms played important roles in the U.S presidential election and are still under investigation for “foreign interference in the US [sic] elections, fake news, propaganda through bots, and online abuse” (No perfect solution to curb fake news, says Jack Dorsey, 2018, para. 4).

This chapter explained the approach to the study as historical analysis is utilized to compare the styles and impacts of leadership in journalism in an important era of the print media and in this still evolving era of social media. This chapter provided background knowledge and identification of media leaders to be discussed in chapter four. Towards such an end, chapter four is an analysis of media leadership and its effects on news objectivity.

## CHAPTER IV: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Journalists are often criticized or placed in danger for reporting news objectively. Globally, during journalists' quests for informing the public, they can sometimes be harmed or killed because they are key witnesses to events. Simply reporting on unfavorable aspects of a ruling government or a powerful individual can pose life-threatening risk to journalists all over the world. For instance,

Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and a contributor to *The Washington Post* was murdered on October 2, 2018, in the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul, and, evidence showed he was murdered under the orders of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a ruling figure whom Khashoggi had repeatedly covered in some unflattering ways (CNN Library, 2019, para. 1). This act is a clear indicator of the pressure under which journalists operate, and many hoped that the U.S., with its stated commitment to the freedom of the press philosophy, would condemn such activity. However, this has not been the case, and Bell (2019), among others, has felt the need to admonish President Donald Trump over his lack of concern for the murder of Khashoggi, his unstated forgiveness of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, consistent with his support of world leaders with oppressive reputations, such as Russian President Vladimir Putin (para. 5). Despite the dangers and challenges associated with journalism, the press have a responsibility to gather and share valuable information and disseminate objective news to the masses.

During the Gilded Age in the United States, newspaper companies were privately owned with a sole purpose of making profit, and newspaper owners had authority over editors to fill news pages with their preferred slant in politics, science, and religion to maximize readership and sponsors (Smythe & Kilmer, 2002, p. 207). Editors focused on "politics and public-opinion

role of the press” to conceal the profitable side of the newspaper business from its readers (Smythe & Kilmer, 2002, p. 207). The changing media leadership attracted entrepreneurs to exploit the media industry for personal and financial gains. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst engaged in “unethical practices,” “dissemination of misinformation,” and “news sensationalism,” which popularized the term “yellow journalism” (Streitmatter, 2016, p.60-61).

This chapter will provide a critical overview of some of the historical ramifications of media leadership in the United States, using those to then help unpack how contemporary media leadership is impacting journalism now. For that historical foundation, this study will consider the leadership styles of Joseph Pulitzer, a pioneer of new journalism, and William Randolph Hearst, editor of the San Francisco Examiner, in light of the journalistic practices that arose from their media outlets. For the contemporary perspective, the study will then move to examining new media leaders Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and owner of Facebook, and Jack Dorsey, co-founder and CEO of Twitter. This chapter will highlight the impacts of the competitive and ruthless leadership styles of Pulitzer and Hearst and what relationships they have to leadership in today’s media industry. Of particular interest given the changes in media ecology and accessibility in recent times, the study will look at the role of fake news in the new media and what these new media leaders are doing to manage it. The similarities between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century media leadership will be discussed, ultimately focusing on a common leadership trait shared by these past and present media leaders and its influence on news objectivity.

### **Joseph Pulitzer**

Joseph Pulitzer was born in Mako, Hungary, on April 10, 1847 (Barrett, 1941, p. 5; Streitmatter, 2008, p. 76). Pulitzer had his superstitions about the number 10 as he was born on



the 10th, arrived at St. Louis on the 10th of October 1865, merged the *Post* with the *Dispatch* on the 10th of December 1878, and bought the *New York World* Newspaper on May 10, 1883 (Barrett, 1941, p 5). Scholars reported that Pulitzer went to “New York in 1883 to take over the *World*”, a local daily newspaper (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 223-224). Pulitzer knew that New York was an ideal city to explore his journalistic talents (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 223). He was popularly known for his innovative ideas and success in the circulation of the *St Louis Post Dispatch* and the *New York World* that redefined journalism (Topping, 2016, p. 1).

The actions of Pulitzer in the newspaper industry are viewed differently by scholars depending on the lenses they use and the historical records they choose to examine. Scholars have positioned Pulitzer as being passionate for news, having altruistic ideals, being a positive force for objective journalism by leading his papers to nonpartisan in their reporting. However, others have described him as being a force for bringing in superficiality to print news and/or have found him to have contributed to partisanship. Many historians describe Pulitzer’s notable attributes and achievements differently, which is expected of a prominent historical figure.

In 1868, a colleague of Pulitzer wrote about his funny appearance and “unquenchable thirst for news” (Swanberg, 1967, p. 10). As Topping has put it , “Pulitzer was the most skillful of newspaper publishers, a passionate crusader against dishonest government, a fierce, hawk-like competitor who did not shrink from sensationalism in circulation struggles, and a visionary who richly endowed his profession” ( 2016, p. 1). Pulitzer was interested in creating news for the “underdog.” These were primarily immigrants in New York, a city filled by immigrants, and his newsroom meticulously avoided news that undermined immigrants (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 232). Pulitzer valued accuracy, liberty, fairness, and showed sympathy for the poor; he opposed influential individuals who abused their power, as well as, those who misinformed and

concealed public information from entitled citizens (Emery, Ault & Agee, 1997, p. 115; Barrett, 1941, p. 10; Seitz, 1924, p. 3).

Pulitzer made news livelier by filling newspaper pages with pictures and illustrations, which was one of the features of “sensationalism” (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 232). Emery et al. (1997) noted that Pulitzer “had rare ability to blend solid news and stimulating editorial opinion with sensational headlines, eye-grabbing graphics, and human-interest stories, the stuff of which street circulation is made” (p. 115). Juergens (1966) added that Pulitzer’s taste in interesting and provocative stories increased circulation of the *New York World*, as he was able to entertain and inform at the same time (p. 43-44). Pulitzer’s *New York World* quality of reporting was attributed to the sensationalism of news by filling his newspaper with gossip, scandals, sensational tidbits, and illustrations including crime scenes, disaster drawings, and political cartoons (Juergens, 1966, p. 43-45; Sandman, Rubin, & Sachsman, 1982, p. 51).

Pulitzer “establish[ed] himself not just as a printer of news but as a non-partisan social critic” (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 231). In 1878, most newspapers focused on the elite, but Pulitzer wrote for the common person (Emery et al. 1997, p. 166-177; Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 223-224). Morris (2010) also emphasized Theodore Welge’s words that “Pulitzer was fighting the most powerful and most corrupt ring in St. Louis with money and patronage to back it” (p. 50). He regularly exposed the vices of society, government and corporate America on his newspaper front page (Emery et al. 1997, p. 116-117; Streitmatter, 2008, p. 76-77). Pulitzer’s paper became known as the “people’s paper” because it exposed public evils such as voter fraud, public prostitution, and monopoly abuse (Streitmatter, 2008, p. 77). He criticized corrupt government officials in his reporting and did not accept gifts or money from corrupt individuals while he was a reporter at *Westliche Post* (Morris, 2010, p. 44-50).

Not all critics have seen Pulitzer as a force of objectivity. It is a basic fact that Pulitzer ran for and held political office as a member of the Republican Party. In 1869, Pulitzer was elected as Senator from Missouri two years after he arrived in the United States (Swanberg, 1967, p. 11). Pulitzer was a Republican who made friends with people in power (Morris, 2010, p. 44-50). Seitz (1924) argued that Pulitzer's editorial pages supported the Republic Party over the Democratic Party; however, both sides of political parties were reported in pretense of maintaining news objectivity (p. 327-333). Seitz (1924) added that there was a relationship between Pulitzer and politicians', and Pulitzer favored Republican political candidates by helping Republicans to communicate their political agendas and arguments succinctly in his papers (p. 232-251).

Pulitzer expanded the definition of news by including women's pages, etiquette, decorating, and romantic advice (Streitmatter, 2008, p. 77). Pulitzer noticed that new stories in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were too masculine as it focused on politics, stock market, and business and to engage women in his news pages he expanded the definition of news to include other feminine features tailored specifically to his female audience (Juergens, 1966, p. 132-134). Streitmatter (2018) also added that by expanding the definition of news, Pulitzer and advertisers were able to target female readers to his paper who ultimately were the target of advertisers in his papers because they regularly purchased items at retail stores (p.62).

Several scholars have noted Pulitzer's great ability to increase circulation for the newspapers he acquired by publishing and distributing newspapers at low prices, and Pulitzer achieved the greatest circulation for the *World* newspaper in the United States as circulation rose from 15,000 to 250,000 within four years (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 226; Juergens, 1966, p. 43-45; Streitmatter, 2008, p. 77). Pulitzer "passed the one-cent Evening News" with the "highest

circulation in New York with 207, 000 subscribers” within two years. (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 232). Ten years later both morning and evening circulation reached 400, 000 (Sandman et al., 1982, p. 51). Everett and Campbell (2002) noted that other papers imitated Pulitzer’s success in the newspaper industry because of his “remarkable success and profits he made from newspaper publishing” (p. 232).

After the death of Pulitzer in 1912, the Columbia School of Journalism was founded and the first prizes of his awards were distributed in 1917 (Topping, 2016, p. 3). Joseph Pulitzer included endowments for four journalism excellence awards in his Will, and he made provisions for future adjustments for these awards to suit future trends in journalism (Topping, 2016, p. 1). Topping and Gissler (2019) added that “Pulitzer specified solely four awards in journalism, four in letters and drama, one for education, and five traveling scholarships” (para. 2). Pulitzer’s Prize is “Journalism’s highest honor” as journalist are recognized for their role in disseminating information in a democratic society (Streimatter, 2016, p. 103).

### **William Randolph Hearst**

William Randolph Hearst was born in California in 1863, and he admired Pulitzer as a student at Harvard (Sandman et al., 1982, p. 51; Streitmatter, 2016, p. 62-63). Hearst dropped out of Harvard and with a family fortune at his disposal, yet he searched for power to control other people (Lundberg, 1936, p. 23). Hearst moved to New York and got a job with Pulitzer's *World* and later became a publisher at the *Examiner* at age 24 after his dad handed over the *Examiner* and pursued his political career (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 233; Sandman et al., 1982, p. 51; Streitmatter, 2016, p.63). In 1895, Hearst purchased the *New York Morning Journal* in order to engage in competition with Pulitzer’s *World* (Emery et al., 1997, p. 117; Sandman et al., 1982, p. 52).

Hearst shared similar leadership traits with Pulitzer by appealing to the grassroots (Streitmatter, 2016, p.63). Hearst emphasized to his reporters that content of the news must be readable by telling them about “a gripman on the Powell Street line-he takes his car out at three o’clock in the morning, and while he’s waiting for the signals he opens the morning paper. Think of him when you are writing a story. Don’t write a single line he can’t understand and wouldn’t read” (as cited in Streitmatter, 2016, p.63). Hearst's *Journal* matched Pulitzer’s *World* at “700,000 weekly circulation,” and the *Journal*’s “600,000 Sunday circulation” was close to, even if a bit less than, Pulitzer’s *World*’s Sunday circulation (Sandman et al., 1982, p. 52).

Hearst competed ruthlessly with Pulitzer for circulation, and in doing so, both sought the inclusion of more salacious material in their papers, which led to the popularization of the term “yellow journalism” (Emery et al., 1997, p. 117). Sandman et al. (1982) illustrated that “[Hearst] used special trains to get his reporters to the scene first, and hired the finest and most sensational writers he could find, whatever the cost” (p. 51). “News for Hearst was defined as anything that made the readers say[,] “Gee Whiz”-and the columns of Ambrose Bierce and sob-sister “Annie Laurie” (Winifred Black Bonfils) more than filled the bill” (Sandman et al., 1982). Hearst staged news based on how he defined news and thought “actual news was too boring” thereby paying couples to have extravagant weddings and hunters to have action experiences predestined for exclusive stories (Streitmatter, 2016, p.63). The “Hearst method” was regarded by many as “false stimulation” and “perpetration of fraud” with the use of his family fortune to fund sensational news (Lundberg, 1936, p. 23). Tebbel (1952) argues that Hearst was more interested in circulation of news, than in truthful news as the scope of Hearst papers focused on sensational headlines and stories (p. 78). Tebbel (1952) describes Hearst like a salesman who

handled news like a commodity and was interested in achieving the highest newspaper sales (p. 78).

Hearst constantly attacked and sensationalized editorial news columns of his opposition, which made the “liberals” and the “White House” in the 1900s distrust him; however, he was admired by the working class (Emery et al., 1997, p. 117). Lundberg (1970) also noted that the *Examiner* criticized “municipal abuses, sneer[ed] at big corporations, and... scuttle[d] the Republican and Democratic machines of the city” (p. 28). However, in the 1890s, the *Examiner* did not challenge the railroad until Hearst’s father’s death because the Southern Pacific controlled the State of California and Senator Hearst was interested in political power and being friends with big corporations’ owners (Lundberg, 1970, p. 36). After Hearst father’s death, “the *Examiner* charged the Southern and Collis P. Huntington with legislative bribing, franchise stealing, tax juggling, maltreatment of labor and the farmers, and general perfidy” (Lundberg, 1970, p. 36).

Hearst continuously filled the *Examiner* with creative and entertaining content to increase customers and profit (Streitmatter, 2016, p.63), but Hearst's newspapers were also regarded as “champions” by labor unions because of his active support toward the working class (Emery et al., 1997, p. 117). This made the *Examiner* a trendsetter in American journalism increasing readership from “12,000 to 200, 000” (Streitmatter, 2016, p. 63). Hearst sold adverts at cheaper rates than Pulitzer, and this encouraged preference of advertisers towards his paper (Sandman et al., 1982, p. 52). Hearst invented the slogan: “While Others Talk the *Journal* Acts” (Lundberg, 1970, 61). Emery et al. (1997) argued that the Liberals and the White House had negative perceptions about Hearst’s papers’ sensationalism, bitterness of his editorial attacks on his opponents, and near cynicism of his news policies” (p. 117). Hearst paper’s circulation declined

in the 1930s as it was “less progressive in outlook and editorial content” until Hearst’s death in 1951 (Emery et al., 1997, p. 118).

### **Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst Rivalry of Leadership**

Upon coming into the New York news market with the *Journal*, one of Hearst’s boldest moves was to systematically hire Pulitzer’s staff from the *World*, who were already popular in New York market, in an effort to pull along many of their loyal readers (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 233; Lundberg, 1970, p. 52 ; Swandberg, 1961, p. 82). Swanberg (1961) noted that “Hearst evolved the idea that by raiding the *World’s* able staff he would at once cripple Pulitzer and strengthen his sheet” (p. 81). Hearst accomplished this by offering higher salaries. Once this started, those remaining on the *World’s* staff waited anxiously for Hearst’s call to work for him (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 233).

During the 1890s, Pulitzer introduced comics first, and later color comics as an improvement to the *World's* appearance which he was recognized for during this period (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 225). Richard Outcault designed Yellow Kid while he was working at the *World* (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 225). When he left the *World* to work at the *San Francisco Examiner*, he brought over with him the Yellow Kid cartoons on that paper as well (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 225). Outcault drew Yellow Kid cartoons for the *Journal*, and George Luks, Pulitzer’s new artist, continued drawing the Yellow Kid cartoons for the *World* at the same time; as a result, both papers included the Yellow Kid which was the seed that brought about the term “yellow journalism” (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 225; Swanberg, 1961, p. 82). Observers criticized these papers using the term; “Yellow journalism [a] sneering pejorative perhaps most frequently associated with misconduct in newsgathering” (Campbell, 2001, p. 25).

Pulitzer and Hearst were entrepreneurs who helped create change in the news publishing industry and their unhealthy competition to outsmart one another led to “yellow journalism” (Streitmatter, 2016, p. 60). In addition to yellow journalism, Hearst argued that “Everyone loves a bargain. I will supply them with a better paper at a penny than Mr. Pulitzer gives them for twice as much” (Winkler, 1928, p. 99). Streitmatter (2016) noted that Hearst dropped the price of his newspaper from two cents to one cent and introduced color printing to attract advertisers to the *World* newspaper (p. 64). Newspapers became cheap as a result of their rivalry. Pulitzer dropped the price of his newspaper in 1896 to improve sales of the *World* and crush the *Journal* (Swanberg, 1961, p. 82). Surprisingly, the price drop in Pulitzer’s *World* did not make significant changes on the sale of his newspaper as Hearst was leading circulation at that time (Swanberg, 1961, p. 82).

Hearst’s *San Francisco Examiner* copied the *New York World* in appearance to maintain a professional image, as Hearst was not perceived as a serious newspaper owner because he was a Harvard dropout (Lundberg, 1970, p. 24; Swanberg, 1961, p. 80). Hearst was criticized for lack of originality in the late 1800s as he emulated all Pulitzer’s creativity and ideas, while also taking credit for them (Lundberg, 1970, p. 34). Hearst took credit for inventing the “expose” and the “human interest” stories which had already been used by Pulitzer while Hearst was still a student in Harvard (Lundberg, 1970, p. 34).

Hearst called out the Pulitzer’s newspaper “the wizard of the *World*, as a journalist who made his money by pandering to the worst tastes of the prurient and horror-loving, dealing in bogus news, such as forged cablegrams from eminent personages and by affecting a devotion to the interests of the people while never really hurting the interests of their enemies and sedulously looking out for his own” (as cited in Lundberg, 1970, p. 62). The competition between Pulitzer



and Hearst was focused on eliminating each other by making the other unnecessary or obsolete, thereby news was reported from similar approaches. The Pulitzer-Hearst rivalry also led to the fomenting of the Spanish-American War to increase circulation (Lundberg, 1970, p. 66).

Hearst exhausted Pulitzer's capacity for invention by forcing him into petty competition for readership and by imitating Pulitzer and hiring his best staff using his family fortune. Hearst and Pulitzer engaged in the most disreputable newspaper war in history (Streitmatter, 2016, p. 64). Historians placed Pulitzer as a leader who had good impulses even if they were complicated by his petty competition with Hearst to increase circulation of the *World*. A common consensus among historians was that Hearst instigated their rivalry and he stooped lower than Pulitzer in his effort to increase circulation through disreputable sensationalism and falsification of news.

### **Joseph Pulitzer Leadership Style**

**Transformational leadership style.** Looking at the accounts of these men, we can discern what style of leadership was most present in their actions. Considering Joseph Pulitzer was an inspiring and enthusiastic supervisor who worked closely with his reporters and corrected them whenever they made mistakes (Swanberg, 1967, p. 52-53). Pulitzer did not control his reporters or editors in newsgathering, and all editorial content was handled by experts who utilized their expertise to improve circulation of the *World* newspaper (Juergens, 1966, p. 25-26). Transformational leaders' value individual creativity and use intellectual stimulation to encourage employees to develop their creative and leadership capability through suitable performance measures and reward systems (Bass, 1985; Berson & Avolio, 2004). Individual ideas were allowed in the *World* newspaper as individuals with creative news content were always welcomed to write for the newspaper (Juergens, 1966, p. 26). For example, Pulitzer featured his reply for a job applicant seeking a position in 1884 in the *World's* newspaper

editorial page; Pulitzer wrote, “the *World* is the only newspaper in New York that holds encouragement to developing young men. We are always on the lookout for bright reporters, correspondent, editors, poets, artists, &c. We are always willing to give an ambitious young man a trial...” (as cited in Juergens, 1966, p. 26). According to Juergens (1966), the *World* encouraged young journalists to develop their creative skills, and achieve their ambitions (Juergens, 1966, p. 26). Pulitzer “hired the best men not simply because they would benefit the *World*, but because they brought honor to their calling” (Juergens, 1966, p. 27). Juergens (1966) added Pulitzer’s intentions to fund journalism projects and endowment prizes to support ambitious young journalists who are passionate about the journalism profession and “capable of evolving bright thoughts” (p. 26-27).

Pulitzer compelled his reporters to get financial information on the richest residents in New York and published such stories with catchy headlines to expose fraud in the society (Morris, 2010, p. 164). Transformational leaders such as Pulitzer inspired and motivated subordinates by setting an example to help in the accomplishment of their goals. Pulitzer for example served as a role model to his employees by exposing political injustice and misuse of power as well as helping his employees to grow and shape the journalism profession by motivating his reporters to report on injustice by the rich and powerful.

Pulitzer possessed certain authoritarian leadership characteristics that drove his staff members to accomplish set goals that improved circulation. Emery et al. (1997) noted that Pulitzer emphasized accuracy and newsworthy stories for his reporters (p. 166). Smythe and Kilmer (2002) emphasized the “vigorous newsgathering and exploitative journalism developed by Pulitzer” to attract investors and customers (p. 211). Although Pulitzer possessed certain authoritarian leadership traits based on the historical narratives, he employed the

transformational leadership style to implement change and guide his employees through his actions and expectations of employees in reporting injustice in the society. Pulitzers charisma, formal position as the owner of his newspapers and his intelligence helped to create change in the journalism profession which positions him as a positive force that transformed the journalism profession.

### **William Randolph Hearst Leadership Style**

**Authoritarian leadership style.** From the historical narrative, William Randolph Hearst's leadership style was authoritarian, and these types of leaders make all team decisions, expect subordinates to comply with laydown policies, and demand that subordinates attain outstanding results (Wang et al., 2013; Zhang & Xie, 2017). Hearst controlled the editorial content and believed his statements were more superior and "newsworthy" than the editorial team (Carlisle, 1979, p. 20). Winkler (1928) noted that Hearst would handwrite directions or advice for sub-editors and drop it on their desk and he would visit his staff to make sure they received his message (p. 71).

Hearst focused on attaining more power and audience in the newspaper industry by investing his inheritance in his newspaper businesses. Carlisle (1979) explains that the result was that "Hearst had great power..., no other private citizen could command such an audience" (p. 21). Carlisle (1979) also noted that Hearst "carefully supervised content and style to [e]nsure that his ideas would have [the] maximum effect" (p. 21).

Authoritarian leaders demand total obedience and exercise absolute control over subordinates (Farh & Cheng, 2000). The editorial staff of Hearst was manipulated to report news using the "Hearst method" to fill news pages with emotion-packed stories to attract readership. Carlisle (1979) noted that "Hearst exercised personal control...daily..., He would send orders or

editorials to be written; information to be obtained; personnel to be hired, fired or tried out in new positions; on promotional and advertising matters; and on such details as the location of specific features, the kind of type to be used in headlines, and the use of photographs” (p. 16). Tebbel (1952) stated that Hearst led editorial meetings and conferences of the *New York Journal*, and his staff listened to his policies and views on news (p. 80). The editorial staff of Hearst mostly followed all his policies carefully and punishments were attached to failure to comply depending on the situation (Carlisle, 1979, p. 17). Winkler (1928) noted that Hearst was born with a silver spoon, and “he will not brook opposition” (p. 26).

Sandman et al. (1982) emphasized that in search of absolute control in the newspaper industry, “Hearst often bought out, and merged or folded the opposition papers” (p. 53). Hearst wanted absolute control of the media industry as the most successful, most powerful, and the one with the highest circulation, which was a major reason for his rivalry with Pulitzer (Winkler, 1928, p. 25-26). Sandman et al. (1982) noted that “Hearst preferred power to profit,” as he pursued his political ambition in search of power (p. 53). Hearst demonstrated an authoritarian leadership style as he dictated policies and decided what goals to be achieved by directing and controlling all editorial policies in the newsroom. Hearst had total control over news, and he made most of the decisions about the content of news for his editorial team. The general agreement among historical narratives signals that Hearst independently presided over policies and processes in the newsroom positions him as an authoritarian leader.

### **News in the 21st Century and Challenges to Media Leadership**

Societal shifts to modern media technology offer greater access to information and news through the internet. Information on social media is largely user generated, and 60% percent of

American adults get news from social media sites (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan (2016) note that most Americans use multiple social media sites, and Facebook was the most used of all the social media sites with a 79% usage rate. Scholars have argued that social media may influence political participation because news is received from a trusted family, friend, or contact; for example, twitter news feeds from a close relation may expose individuals who have low interests in political news to be mobilized to participate in politics (Bode, 2012; Bucy & Gregson, 2001; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Tang & Lee, 2013).

Historically, objectivity of news has always been contested even before the introduction of the internet, as certain newspapers were known for their bias in news and misinformation of actual events (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Growing trends in the media industry have led to redefining the journalism profession and changes in media leadership from only traditional media leaders to the addition of new media leaders. All these leaders are competing for the same audience and this ultimately influences journalists' approaches to news. The basic tenets of the journalists' code of conduct and ethics are: "seek truth and report it", "minimize harm", "act independently", and "be accountable" (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). However, the channel of reaching audiences or readers has been redefined to suit modern technology. Social media is largely defined by platforms such as Facebook and Twitter who do not accept the mantle of being journalistic outlets, despite the fact that so many users find their information there. They instead want to be seen as "neutral" spaces for users to share content, including news, even as they compete amongst each other for audience. This has greatly shifted the media ecology; but the ethical code of conduct remains the same.

Societal shifts to digital technology have had a profound impact on the media industry and journalism profession due to the ability for “fake news” to be shared and circulated on social media, making it difficult for users to differentiate facts from fiction. Shearer and Grieco (2019) argue that most Americans criticize social media companies for selecting news they see based on their internet searches and posts, a mix which oftentimes is not an accurate presentation of the news they seek. The number of users on social media platforms has increased globally and news is distributed cheaply and easily to a mass audience.

The presence of diverse groups on these media platforms allows users to engage in discussions of news within their groups or form partisan journalism, which distorts the real occurrence of events and news; thereby, redefining the journalism profession without editorial filtering or organized in-house rules. Social media provides users the opportunity to post their personal or political views without any great level of “technical literacy.” This allows for the, offering of diverse content, and for users to become citizen journalists. While there can be benefits to these threats to traditional media, providing space for new voices and perspectives, there are also dangers to users having the opportunity to mass disseminate information of questionable veracity and to follow news feeds that supports their political ideologies without regard for the facts (Highfield, 2016, p. 15-16, 19).

In this new media landscape, the most powerful players are no longer the owners of media outlets with any ostensible news delivering mission. They are the owners of platforms that see themselves and their corporations as those more “neutral” providers of space through which messages travel regardless of their initial point of origin or ultimate destination. Perhaps the most emblematic of these figures in the American media context are Mark Zuckerberg (CEO and president of Facebook); and; Jack Dorsey (CEO and cofounder of Twitter). The next section will

consider how the actions of these popular social media leaders exemplify certain styles of leadership and how those styles are shaping the way Americans receive news.

### **Media Leadership of Mark Zuckerberg**

Mark Zuckerberg is one of the youngest self-made billionaires in American history (Hisrich & Kearney, 2004). Zuckerberg is an American computer programmer and Internet entrepreneur (Zuckerberg, 2016; Vargas, 2010). At age 13, he designed “a basic computer network for his family called ZuckNet” (Lüsted, 2011, p.20). Zuckerberg is popularly known for creating Facebook in 2004, a social networking site along with his colleagues at Harvard University (Zuckerberg, 2016). Zuckerberg started Facebook as a student directory for fellow students while he was at Harvard University; a concept that he later spread to other universities (Zuckerberg, 2016; Vargas, 2010). According to *Vanity Fair*, “Mark Zuckerberg is the undisputed King of Tech and one of the most important innovators ever” (Ramos, 2019, para. 2). According to Forbes (2019), Zuckerberg ranked in the third position among innovative leaders in 2019 only behind Jeff Bezos of Amazon and Elon Musk of Tesla, who were tied for first.

Over the years, Zuckerberg has achieved “a profound, unprecedented and unimaginable impact on American culture, especially its youth, and [continuously] spreading Facebook’s tentacles worldwide and into every aspect of our lives” (Alef, 2010, p. 1-2). Clement (2020) reports that there are over “2.4 billion” users on Facebook monthly, making the social networking site the most popular in the world. Facebook’s allows a diverse audience on its platform, and reports shows that “one in six people on the planet are on Facebook each day” (Galloway, 2017, p. 103).

Advertising on Facebook cost advertisers thousands of dollars, but Zuckerberg emphasized, “Facebook was about creating something useful, not chasing after cash” (as cited in Mccracken, 2016, para. 11). Political adverts generated revenue for Facebook as political candidates targeted users based on the data collected. The data gathered served as a propaganda tool in politics (see Eisenstat, 2019). With immense and unprecedented power over billions of users worldwide, Zuckerberg failed to recognize that as much as Facebook created a social value it also created social harm as users were exposed to a variety of paid harmful adverts and propaganda materials. Information on Facebook was filtered by algorithms, and adverts were tailored based on individual searches on the internet especially through videos and friends (Larson, 2016). Zuckerberg is currently the Chief Executive Officer and President of Facebook. Zuckerberg owns 60% of the voting power of Facebook, and he is the current chair of the board of directors for Facebook (BBC, 2019). Zuckerberg’s net worth was \$67. 7B as of October 2019 (Forbes, 2019).

### **How Mark Zuckerberg Navigated Current Events**

Granville (2018) notes that Cambridge Analytica is a political data firm that accessed private information from Facebook profiles of more than “50 million Americans... hired by President Trump’s 2016 election campaign” (para. 1). Private information on users’ profiles and interests were accessed to personalize digital adverts to Facebook users (Granville, 2018, para. 4). Mark Zuckerberg was interrogated by members of the European parliament about his company’s involvement with the Cambridge Analytica’s scandal. Mark Zuckerberg affirmed in April 2018 before the U.S. Senate that Facebook was aware of the presence of Cambridge Analytica in September 2015 and called for the firm to remove and delete all data received (Feiner, 2019, para. 4). Parliament and government regulators condemned Cambridge



Analytica's involvement in the Brexit Campaign in the U.K., and Aleksandr Kogan Cambridge Analytica's scientist was held accountable for violating Facebook rules (Rosenberg, Confessore, & Cadwalladr, 2018, para. 13).

Zuckerberg faced harsh criticism from lawmakers in the U. S. and U. K. Zuckerberg apologized to U. S lawmakers and reaffirms Facebook's commitment to Europe. The press called Zuckerberg's public hearing before the European Parliament and U.S Senate an "apology tour" and a deliberate Corporate Social Responsibility (Frenkel, 2018, para. 1). Zuckerberg responded to the issue of Cambridge Analytica in a lengthy Facebook post; "We have a responsibility to protect your data, and if we can't then we don't deserve to serve you" (Zuckerberg, 2018, para. 2). Zuckerberg also acknowledged his mistakes in his personal Facebook post and stated, "I started Facebook, and...I'm responsible for what happens on our platform" (Zuckerberg, 2018, para. 13). He added that he would make Facebook safer for users and vowed that data breach will never occur again on Facebook (Zuckerberg, 2018, para.13).

Zuckerberg recognized and acknowledged the presence of sensationalism, and misinformation in the media world today. Social media enables people to spread information faster than ever before, and "if we don't specifically tackle these problems, then we end up amplifying them" (Zuckerberg, 2018). Zuckerberg emphasized Facebook's achievements in human rights, interconnectivity in the community, and technological development as it relates to the value of Europe at the European Parliament hearing by stating "We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility. And that was a mistake, and I'm sorry for it," (CBS News, 2018).

In Zuckerberg's testimony to the US Senate Commerce and Judiciary committees, Sen Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) pushed him to state whether Facebook was a publisher or only a

technology platform. Zuckerberg responded that: “When people ask us if we’re a media company or a publisher, my understanding is what the heart of what they’re really getting at is do we feel responsibility for the content on our platform?...The answer to that, I think, is clearly ‘yes’, but I don’t think that’s incompatible with fundamentally, at our core, being a technology company where the main thing we do is have engineers and build products” (PBS NewsHour, 2018). Based on Zuckerberg’s response, he has come to a realization that Facebook is both a tech company and also one that serves as a channel that journalists, news agencies, and general users of Facebook use to disseminate news and information.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal may have even had a negative impact on Zuckerberg’s leadership as his Glassdoor approval rating among employees dropped slightly to 92% from previous years where he had a 99% approval rating from his employees (Glassdoor 2013; Glassdoor, 2019). Zuckerberg’s initiative to support a democratic society by funding journalism projects and paying publishers is a strategic way to gain the public’s trust in his leadership of Facebook. Zuckerberg invested millions of dollars to improve the favorable image Facebook once enjoyed as well as his unquestionable leadership of Facebook. Zuckerberg spent millions of dollars on public relations and government lobbying to restore the company’s image after Facebook evoked a backlash from allowing the “spreading [of] Russian misinformation during the [2016] U.S. [presidential] election and numerous privacy scandals” (Bergen & Wagner, 2019, para. 5). Facebook also invested \$300 million to journalism projects to support small media outlets in their newsgathering operations and increase their circulation (Brown, 2019). Campbell Brown, Facebook’s head of news, states that “news is a key part of Facebook’s mission to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. We’re going to continue fighting fake news, misinformation, and low-quality news on Facebook. But

we also have an opportunity, and a responsibility, to help local news organizations grow and thrive” (Brown, 2019, para. 12).

Use of information technology and the media to spread propaganda messages that may persuade voters has always helped politicians attain and maintain power. As people with more money are more able access to the media, they are more likely to wield political power in this way. Morrison notes that “whoever controls the media controls the mind” (as cited in Ferri, 2014). Social media political campaign adverts and fake news were, in many cases, essentially forms of propaganda that were seen by users without those users necessarily recognizing their propagandistic qualities. News on social media, especially Facebook, was personalized to users’ internet searches as well as location to make news to be of proximity to users’ community. Advertisers play an important role in financing a media company even though most adverts are false or exaggerated, yet media owners still need advertisers to fund their business. Political propagandist targets sponsored adverts or posts on Facebook as Metz (2017) reports that, “Facebook revealed that it had identified about \$100,000 in ads purchased on its social network by a Russian company linked to the Kremlin” (para. 1). Political propagandist used data collected by Cambridge Analytica to manipulate the US and UK’s election which was an effective way for authoritarian leaders to influence election results and maintain power in the society.

### **Mark Zuckerberg Leadership Style**

Mark Zuckerberg has largely been viewed as a leader who exemplifies the transformational leadership style, and “regarded as one of the most brilliant minds of his generation” (Leskin & Bhardwaj, 2019 para 1). Zuckerberg is popularly known for creating a social networking site: Facebook. As Facebook’s Chief Executive Officer, Zuckerberg owns the

majority of the voting power which gives him absolute control over Facebook meaning he would constantly be the focal point of any backlash or scandal Facebook faces. After the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Zuckerberg's actions and news stories portrays him as having both a transformational and authoritarian leadership style. It is hard to ascertain Mark Zuckerberg's leadership style, but his leadership style was determined based on his actions, innovations, and public and media perception of his leadership of Facebook.

Mark Zuckerberg exhibits an authoritarian leadership style based on his influence and power over Facebook board of directors as well as his legitimate power as the chief executive of Facebook. According to BBC News (2019), Zuckerberg possesses most of the voting power and leadership of Facebook as he has control over policies and decisions that concerns Facebook (BBC News, 2016). Pisani (2018) explains the power Zuckerberg has over Facebook shareholders because he owns most of the voting rights to the company "due to a dual class structure that weights certain shares over others" (para. 1). Zuckerberg controls the majority of activities and decisions on Facebook as he has the legitimate power as both the chief executive and chairman and board of directors (BBC News, 2016). With the enormous power and influence Zuckerberg possess, he certainly has certain authoritarian leadership traits as he has an enormous influence on policies and procedures for Facebook's board of directors regarding goals to be achieved.

Zuckerberg has a majority of the shares of Facebook, which makes him the front-runner and "Face" of Facebook. Facebook shareholders have tried to reduce Mark Zuckerberg's control over Facebook and have voted against Zuckerberg's corporate structure and control that one would think would have replaced or limited Zuckerberg's control over Facebook (Durkee, 2019). After the recent records of privacy breach and misinformation on Facebook, shareholders and

reporters have questioned Zuckerberg's leadership of Facebook, but he constantly avoids such questions and focuses on measures Facebook is using to manage misinformation on its platform. Mark Zuckerberg as both the CEO and the chair of board of directors clearly has absolute power over Facebook's operations.

However, Clifford (2017) illustrates how Mark Zuckerberg creates an organizational structure that allows his employees the freewill to be innovative by encouraging his employees to take risk in their quest to achieve Facebook's goals and improve user experience. In the 2013 Glassdoor survey, Facebook employee's approval of Zuckerberg's leadership was 99%, and recently he dropped to 92%, which still makes him one of America's highest rated CEOs (Glassdoor 2013; Glassdoor, 2019). Bass and Riggio (2006) note that "the key to success, particularly in the fast-paced, high-tech sector...is to challenge followers to perform beyond normal expectations, to stimulate them to be creative and innovative, and to develop their collective leadership capacity" (pp. 1-2). Zuckerberg utilizes his intelligence to make the world more open and connected by empowering his engineers and employees to develop new features and software to improve user experience on Facebook (Clifford, 2017). Facebook remains at the top among tech giants based on Zuckerberg's drive for innovations and empowerment of his employees. From his approval rating on Glassdoor, it clearly shows that Facebook employees accept Zuckerberg as their boss. Zuckerberg receiving a lower Glassdoor rating recently is expected, as he has suffered a lot of backlash from the government, the public, and the press after Facebook's scandal of interfering with U.S. presidential election, which could have developed tensions between him and his employees.

## **Media Leadership of Jack Dorsey**

Jack Dorsey is an American web developer, entrepreneur, and co-founder of Twitter. Dorsey sent his first Tweet on March 21, 2006 “just setting up my twttr” (Brenner, 2013 para 1; Dorsey, 2006). “Twitter is a web application for microblogging, or publishing mini posts called ‘tweets’, that are limited to 140-character messages” (Harvey, 2014, p. 1283). Twitter allows users to share, receive, and repost messages with limited text. Twitter connects users to the latest in entertainment, news, ideas, and opinions (Twitter, 2013). Twitter users can engage in discussions based on their area of interest or simply be a passive reader “with the latest information” (Twitter, 2013). According to Shearer and Mutsaers (2018) around seven-in-ten adult Twitter users in the U.S. get news from the site and U.S. political leaders have a significant followership among Americans who have an account on Twitter. According to a Pew Research Center report looking at public Twitter accounts from December 2018 through July 2019, 26% of U.S. Twitter users follow former U.S. President Barack Obama, 19% follow President Donald Trump, and 21% follow at least one member of Congress with 17% following a Democratic legislator and 8% following a Republican member (as cited Wojcik, Hughes, & Remy, 2019)

Apart from Twitter, Dorsey also cofounded Square, a mobile payment venture, and he is the current CEO of Square (Forbes, 2019; Hayes, 2019). Like Zuckerberg, Dorsey is also a college drop-out, having started but not completed his studies at New York University, and his real-time net worth was \$3.9B as of October 23, 2019 (Forbes, 2019).

## **Jack Dorsey’s Leadership and Fake News on Twitter**

Twitter’s popularity has allowed many political voices to keep audiences and expose like-minded opinions. Alex Jones, a radio presenter and conspiracy theorist, used Twitter as one of his

mediums to express his conspiracies, which has ultimately led to his ban from Twitter. Jones started spreading conspiracy theories immediately after the December 12, 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown (Williamson, 2019). Jones formulated and spread conspiracy theories against the government of fabricating the “killing of 20 first graders and six educators..., [and he accused] the government and victims’ families as part of an elaborate plot to confiscate Americans’ firearms” (Williamson, 2019, para. 2). Williamson (2019) reports that Jones alongside with Halbig “promoted a baseless tale that Avielle Richman, a first grader killed at Sandy Hook, was still alive” (p. 5).

Alex Jones was banned from Twitter permanently for violating “abusive behavior policy” (Schneider, 2018, para. 1). Schneider (2018) emphasized that Mr. Jones believed in his conspiracy theories and argued that, he was banned for telling the truth and the mainstream media news is fake news (para. 8). Before Alex Jones and his conspiracy theories were banned from Twitter, Dorsey believed Alex Jones did not violate his company’s policy, and Dorsey had no reason to ban him from Twitter. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey also explained in his tweets that “We didn’t suspend Alex Jones or Infowars...the reason is simple: he hasn’t violated our rules. We’ll enforce if he does. And we’ll continue to promote a healthy conversational environment by ensuring tweets aren’t artificially amplified” (Jack, 2019). Pressures from the public and mainstream media ultimately led to Alex Jones’ ban from Twitter.

Despite an unconventional outer appearance, Dorsey’s physical appearance and his actions show him to be a laissez-faire leader compared to other popular CEOs in the Tech industry. Dorsey’s appearance in the media has focused on self and personal health care as he has been criticized for devoting too much attention to himself rather than Twitter, which has made investors question his capability to lead Twitter (Bond, 2020; Rooney, 2019). Goldman

(2016) notes that Twitter has never been profitable, and billions of dollars have been lost since 2011 when Dorsey returned as the CEO based on inconsistencies in management and lack of innovations and designs. Bond (2020) also noted that “the media, President Trump, and political figures say it has been slow to innovate” (Bond, 2020). According to Forbes, “Twitter is still much as it was when founded a decade ago. It didn't keep innovating and doesn't seem to fit the market well anymore” (Hartung, 2015). Figerman (2017) mentions that Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook are constantly looking for ways to engage its users through upgrades in filters, applications and users' engagement.

Dorsey responded in a conference during Twitter Q416 Opening remarks "While we may not be currently meeting everyone's growth expectations, there is one thing that continues to grow and outpace our peers: Twitter's influence and impact" (Dorsey, 2017, para. 7). Based on Dorsey's comment, he seems to be too relaxed as a leader not looking at cutting edge innovations for Twitter to grow its user base. Facebook has continually become the most visited social media platform with the most users by improving its applications to be more user-friendly to create a better experience for its users.

Facebook's CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, also responds quickly to issues of a data breach, Alex Jones and Infor wars, privacy violation, as well as, all issues that may affect Facebook's favorable image, while Dorsey takes time to respond to issues that may affect Twitter. Dorsey was slow to respond to issues of harassments, bots, and fake news on Twitter; however, when it involves loss of huge followership, he takes action (BBC News, 2018; Snider, 2018). Dorsey has been criticized for his divided attention as he is the CEO of both Twitter and Square, a payment app (Bond, 2020). Investors have also criticized Dorsey over his desire to move to Africa for three to six months in 2020 leaving his duties as a CEO behind (Bond, 2020). The lack of strict



policies on Twitter and Dorsey's attitude of not interfering promptly on issues of fake news and misinformation qualifies him as a laissez-faire leader.

### **Fake News on Social Media: Emerging Challenge to Media Leadership**

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) define “fake news to be news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers” (p. 213). Fake news received attention all over the world during and after 2016 U.S. presidential election, as both domestic and foreign misinformation campaigns on social media platforms influenced the U.S. presidential election results (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Barthel et al., 2016; Shane, 2017). “Fake news and social media posts [were] such a threat to U.S. security that the Defense Department ... [launched] a project to repel 'large-scale, automated disinformation attacks’” (Norman, 2019, para. 1).

Facebook tried flagging fake news through a feature called “fake news alert”; however, certain Facebook users intentionally spread fake news and as such Facebook decided to discontinue the fake news alert feature because it was ineffective (Meixler, 2017). On October 30th, 2019, Dorsey announced a ban of all political adverts from Twitter to manage misinformation in the upcoming 2020 U. S. presidential election; however, Zuckerberg and Dorsey still seem to be intending to allow all political advertising campaigns (Room & Stanley-Becker, 2019). Explaining his decision, Dorsey tweeted “internet political ads present entirely new challenges to civic discourse: machine learning-based optimization of messaging and micro-targeting, unchecked misleading information, and deep fakes. All at increasing velocity, sophistication, and overwhelming scale” (Dorsey, 2019). Kim and Dennis (2018) state that misinformation shared by social media users was attributed to individuals who had no training in journalism, who oftentimes did not fact check information before sharing, and who, as such, shared misinformation because of a lack of editorial filtering (p. 1). The presence of fake news

has had a negative impact on the public's trust in journalism, and social media, especially Facebook, has been condemned for not taking necessary steps to curb fake news (Barthel et al., 2016).

Casero-Ripolles's (2012) study found that there is a decline in newspaper readership and an increase in readership of news on social networks among young people. According to Pew Research Center (2016) 51% of online users believe that most online political news are manufactured by online users. Barthel et al. (2016) study shows that posts users share on social media are often not real and fake news spreads faster than accurate news as users unknowingly or deliberately disseminated fake news on social media.

### **Similarities in New Media Leadership Styles**

Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey have a lot in common; especially, in the leadership of their social media platforms. Both leaders are tech giants competing for the same audience and have been criticized over the presence of fake news on their media platforms especially after the 2016 U.S. Presidential election political interference scandal. Undoubtedly, Facebook, Google, and Twitter are at the front-runners of digital advertising and marketing. Digital advertising on social media allows users to interact and purchase advertised product online with sophisticated features for user's convenience compared to outdoor, print or broadcast adverts that are majorly one-way communication. Facebook made over \$15b dollars on digital adverts in the second quarter of 2019 (Feiner, 2019, para. 3). In 2018, Twitter generated an estimated income of \$1.3billion from digital adverts in the U.S (Clement, 2019). Digital adverts on social media is a source of income for these tech giants in which profit is made based on the number of online users which places a disadvantage on quality information, as quantity is valued over quality when information is not filtered.

Zuckerberg and Dorsey are tech capitalists who are interested in getting more users to attract investors, political candidates, and, ultimately, advertisers to their platforms to make more profit from the sale of adverts. Studies have shown that social media sites are more politically diverse than traditional media and offer a political outlet for marginalized groups (Baek, Wojcieszak, & Carpini, 2012; Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015; Bekafigo & McBride, 2013). Social media platforms allow users to follow groups that agree with their political views, and excess diversity in viewpoints to allow for retention of numerous small groups on the platforms, thereby, increasing daily usage statistics of the platform, which is valuable in determining cost of adverts on either Facebook or Twitter.

Excess diversity in viewpoints are allowed on both social media platforms as long as it does not anger users or raise users' safety or privacy concerns. Initially, both Zuckerberg and Dorsey did not ban Alex Jones and his conspiracy theories because they did not expect users to criticize them for allowing Jones Infowars and conspiracy theories. However, after a lot of backlash on both leaders, their respective platforms each banned him (see BBC News, 2018; Darcey, 2019; Snider, 2018). In their pursuit for revenue, the aforementioned tech giants have created an environment where extreme opinions and perspectives could become more widespread and accepted. Recently, both Zuckerberg and Dorsey are still encountering challenges after the aftermath of data breach and misinformation, which was considered a political move to favor a political party over the other (Browne, 2018; Granille, 2018; Sides, 2016). These giant leaders are engaging in funding journalism projects and corporate social responsibilities to restore the favorable image and followership they once enjoyed especially Facebook.

Zuckerberg and Dorsey have monopolized social media and tech industry by acquiring competing tech companies. Their drive for continuous growth and innovations intimidates other social companies from growing or succeeding. Zuckerberg and Dorsey have expanded their control over many aspects of the media industry, providing their users with richer choices in news, networking, politics, and entertainment. For example, Facebook bought Instagram a photo and video sharing social networking site for \$1 billion in 2012 (Rodriguez, 2019, para.

1). Viewership for traditional news on TVs, radios, and newspapers are at a decline due to the presence of news on social media which has attracted youth readership and engaged audiences who watch news on their smart phones.

Competitions for audience, viewership, and advertisers arise between Twitter and Facebook similar to the 1800s of Pulitzer and Hearst; however, Zuckerberg and Dorsey have an indirect control over news content published by users on their media platforms. Competitions are channeled towards technological advancements and innovations that will make their platforms more user friendly, safe, and entertaining to gain users loyalty. The laissez-faire leadership style is the most defined in the early parts of Zuckerberg and Dorsey's leadership. They wanted diversity and freedom of expression on their platforms. Zuckerberg and Dorsey's unregulated social media spaces were exploited by corrupt partisan operatives, and these channels were used as an instrument of political propaganda to reinforce partisan values and political distortion through fake news and sensational news stories.

Recently, these social media leaders especially Zuckerberg and Dorsey had to reexamine their leadership after the 2016 presidential election after a lot of backlash for their carelessness by allowing Cambridge Analytica to gather private information from millions of users which was used to manipulate the 2016 U.S. presidential election. These leaders have taken more

proactive roles and responsibilities on their platforms leading them to be authoritarian and transformational leaders through policing their platforms to limit fake news and data breaches on their platforms.

### **Similarities between Media Leadership in the 1800s and 21st Century Media Leadership**

Capitalism was a common thread between media leadership in the 1800s, late 19th and early 21st centuries. The media leaders of these times valued growth and expansion of their industry over news objectivity. Pulitzer and Hearst exploited the media through methods of exaggeration of news and sensationalism to make news more interesting and have an advantage over each other through their rivalry, which was the seed of yellow journalism. The public's interest in salaciousness i.e. stories with entertaining contents especially gossips, scandals and misdeeds by politicians fueled yellow journalism in the 1800s and 1900s newspaper industry as it increased readership and sales of newspaper. The 21st Century media industry especially the new media giants abused news media industry by filling digital space with click baits of salaciousness to attract users and advertisers which gave birth to the rise of fake news on social media because the more users on social media the more money advertisers paid to advertise their brand or product. The ultimate goal of these leaders was to become more powerful and to increase circulation of their newspapers, but what these leaders failed to recognize was that inaccurate news, whether fake or just carelessness had consequences for the news media to serve well-informed citizens as they found it difficult to differentiate facts from fiction.

Zuckerberg and Dorsey's excess diversity in viewpoints and lack of editorial fact checking popularized fake news on social media as Alex Jones and his conspiracy theories were allowed on Facebook and Twitter to disseminate misinformation to millions of his followers. This example illustrates the capitalist nature of these social media tech giants as they are more

concerned about increasing users on their platforms over objective information. Cambridge Analytica a political analysis firm also raised concerns over the capitalist nature of these tech giants as the data received were used to predict users' personality traits and personalize adverts to individual accounts on both Twitter and Facebook.

Ultimately, capitalism situates the news media industry in a conflict of interest in reporting objective news. Although, Zuckerberg and Dorsey are not directly involved in disseminating fake news, but before the 2016 Presidential election they had no standard regulations to safe guard users against fake news. Excess diversity in viewpoints increases online engagement and online community for news that suits user's ideology or political views which increases these media tech giants revenue from online adverts. A shift in the news media leadership towards tech giants the ever-growing capitalist conglomerates with millions of users will eventually have an influence on news objectivity on social media. This chapter has provided a critical analysis of the historical ramifications of media leadership in the U.S. The final chapter will draw conclusions of this study and recommend suggestions for study.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to historically analyze how media leaders influence news objectivity. The various leadership styles of traditional print media leaders in the 1800s of Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, and social media leaders of Mark Zuckerberg and Jack Dorsey have been analyzed.

Sensational stories in the 1800s newspapers captured the attention of readers as subjects of violence, scandals, and sex filled the newspapers. Hearst and Pulitzer had control over journalists' approach to news using manipulative strategies in the 1800s to attract readership and increase circulation. Social media especially Facebook and Twitter under the leadership of Zuckerberg and Dorsey, have redefined the journalism profession and editorial practices in the newsroom (Anderson, 2011). Hermda, Fletcher, Korell, and Logan (2012) find that social media users relied majorly on news recommendations and shares from relations and friends. News on social media was distributed cheaply and easily to a mass audience without technical literacy.

Fake news circulating on open social media platforms and yellow journalism in print newspapers have similar characteristics, but they are not the same. While “fake news is an untruthful or inauthentic... material presented as real news-using similar design and style element used in “real news” but is generally produced for economic or ideological gain” (Ashley, Roberts, & Maksl, 2019, p. 140). That is, all content of fake news is false. With sophisticated technology and photoshop skills, fake occurrence can look real when fake stories are mass disseminated. Barthel, Mitchell and Holcomb (2016) emphasize that over 63% of American adults acknowledged that fake news disrupt major issues and events, and 39% feel very confident that they can recognize news that is fabricated, another 45% of adults felt somewhat confident” (para. 3).

Pulitzer and Hearst manipulated news objectivity through methods of exaggeration and sensationalism of news, and “Hearst method” employed these tactics (Juergens, 1966, p. 43-45; Lundberg, 1936, p. 23; Sandman, Rubin, & Sachsman, 1982, p. 51). Zuckerberg and Dorsey policies on excess freedom of information on their social media platforms had a negative impact on factual news and popularized fake news on social media (cf. Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Jack, 2019). Social media made it easy for individuals without journalism or technical literacy to share and create news without editorial filtering or fact checking (cf. Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Hearst and Pulitzer had total control over the news published on their newspapers as sensational stories were valued over objective news reports (Everett & Campbell, 2002, p. 232).

News on social media were not controlled by Zuckerberg and Dorsey as social media users have total control over news they create and share. News content posted by social media users were only censored or blocked in exceptional cases, when Zuckerberg or Dorsey perceived such user account as a threat to the credibility of their media platforms. For example, Alex Jones and his conspiracy theories were banned after Facebook and Twitter were criticized over abusive content and misinformation of Alex Jones and his conspiracy theories (eg., Conger & Nicas, 2018).

Zuckerberg and Dorsey as new media leaders are also tech giants who have no training in journalism practices, as a result they encourage excessive diversity of viewpoints without a standard policy on what constitutes abusive behavior or fake news. The lack of awareness of media ethics allows fake news to thrive on social media. With millions of users on Facebook and Twitter daily, Zuckerberg and Dorsey are tech giants who have exploited the media industry for their personal and financial gain. Excess diversity in viewpoints has been at the core of social media news, encouraging users to source for news online; because of variety of news choices



available to users to choose based on user's preference. Online engagement on Twitter and Facebook have a positive impact on the revenue generated from digital adverts. Social media users engage in speculative journalism by sharing and discussing news content which they have little knowledge about unlike mainstream media who employs experts to discuss on government policies and politics to avoid misinformation and rumors.

Fake news on social media is sophisticated as fake interviews are made up by independent individuals to prove to readers about the authenticity of the news story. Fake news is a major problem in the society, and it is important that all citizens, journalists, media owners, and political leaders help in curbing and eliminating fake news by addressing major issues in the society through the use of credible news media. To fix fake news, media leaders would have to eliminate all features of yellow journalism from their daily reporting of news and place principles over profit as yellow journalism started as a result of the need for more customers. Media owners should also avoid exploiting the media industry for profit and put in place measures and policies to curb fake news.

This analysis points to the need for a state leadership of new media, Dorsey and Zuckerberg can manage fake news through adding additional security features to online news sharing and clear policies on what constitutes abusive behaviors and fake news. During election times, warnings should be issued on all posts shared by partisan journalists to avoid the spread of misinformation or biased news content. Leaders of media organizations should focus more on objectivity of news stories than readership. Media leaders should not influence the editorial team on how news should be reported. The editorials team should be allowed to exercise autonomy over news content and news gathering. All internal and external influence from the government or media owners on journalistic approaches to news should not be allowed to distort factual

news, and journalists to perform their duties objectively. New media leaders should work together to manage fake news in the media industry, as managing fake news on only Facebook or Twitter will not solve the current problem of fake news in online news.

Competition allows for diversity in viewpoints of journalists; however, if such competition is toxic like Pulitzer and Hearst's competition for circulation, news would lose its objectivity. Competition in the media industry encourages diversity in viewpoints and opinions. Media leaders should also encourage journalists in their media organization to report news from an objective approach without the goal of marketing news. Undue pressure on journalists should be avoided, especially during elections periods. News reported by journalists should be subject to fact-checking before news is broadcasted. It is the duty of journalists to engage in extensive research of a story and make sure all sides are balanced and accurate to avoid speculations of bias in news or misrepresentation.

### **Contributions of this Study**

There are several contributions this study makes to the field of media and leadership. First, this study emphasizes the role media leaders play in news objectivity by critically examining prominent leaders in the media industry such as Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jack Dorsey. Their leadership style explains how media leaders influence news objectivity. "Yellow journalism" began because of two prominent journalists: William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer in New York in the 1890s as a result of their bitter rivalry. Hearst saw Pulitzer as a role model before he acquired his publishing industry. In order to have a breakthrough into the publishing industry, he offered sensationalism of news and made newspapers cheaper. In the 1890s, the majority of the reading public were working class and to attract their attention to editorial content, editors started to employ methods of sensationalism

such as Cathy headlines, scandals, and gossip to attract readership. For Pulitzer to retain and increase sales of his newspaper he joined Hearst in sensationalism. However, that was not enough to attract the masses to his newspapers as Hearst sold his newspapers at a cheaper price with his family fortune at his disposal. For Pulitzer to compete with him he had to drop the price of his newspaper to match Hearst's price. Hearst and Pulitzer did indeed push away from objectivity with their leadership in that competition drove them to develop yellow journalism where objectivity was less of a concern. Pulitzer used sensationalism to report government corruption and political scandals in which Hearst also joined him which made the newspaper industry in the 1890s to be focused more on profit and less on informing the American citizens.

The leaders of the new media, Zuckerberg and Dorsey, did not even think of themselves as newsmen when they started their social media channels, but they are currently seen as key players in the media industry as their actions and decisions have a major effect in the new media and they are blamed over fake news on social media. Sensationalism and "fake news" began in the 1890s by newspaper editors, while social networks disrupted news by exposing users to a wider range of viewpoints which often times were not real or held a bias. Zuckerberg and Dorsey thought of their platforms as more neutral channels through which information would flow, not realizing that by opening up those channels and popularizing them, that they would inadvertently become powerful players in the circulation of news. It is only now that they have been criticized by many for creating the conditions for more bias and misinformation to spread, that they are having to, in small ways, acknowledge their responsibility to the public.

This study on media leadership historically analyzes the influence leaders of media organizations have on news objectivity as media leaders are powerful players in supporting quality news by fighting misinformation and setting strict standards for online users and

eliminating misinformation. The study also highlights how the new media ecology is one that offers great challenge to the body politic in how freely and how far information, true or false, can travel. Social media and politicians engage in a symbiotic relationship by serving as a propaganda tool for having benefited from politics through revenues they generate from creating awareness for political candidates. Misinformation in the new media remains difficult to eliminate as leaders in the new media including YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit need to address their business model and algorithms used to prioritize sensational news. A large amount of the data these companies have collected from users should not be used to exploit users by tailoring adverts to users' interests or demographics. Findings from the study show that these leaders' leadership styles gave birth to "yellow journalism" in the 1890s and popularization of "fake news" in the media industry now. Next, this study offers insights on social media leaders' responses and actions to curb fake news by putting in place measures to fact-check online information and news.

Practical implications emanate from this study, as this study can be used by media leaders to enhance their knowledge about the media and leadership. Most technology giants have little knowledge about newsroom practices, and like every other profession that has its ethics, journalists are required to maintain news objectivity and report factual and accurate news to members of the public. This study might encourage media consumers and social media users to be active readers and be able to differentiate facts from fiction. Journalists need to uphold the ethics of their profession and be able to give logical reasoning to defend their news stories. Lastly, this study can finally be used to identify the challenges faced by journalists in their approach to news and how media owners influence news objectivity.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

This current study contributes to the theory and practice of media leadership and news objectivity in several ways, but it is not without limitations; Secondary sources on mainstream media as well as news articles are analyzed to determine the influence social media leaders Zuckerberg and Dorsey have on news objectivity as it would be challenging to interview these media leaders on their views on media leadership and news objectivity. The leadership styles of Zuckerberg and Dorsey are difficult to ascertain since these media leaders are relatively new and young and elusive.

Future research can historically analyze mainstream media leaders and social media leader's views on news objectivity. Future studies can also compare traditional media leadership in the broadcast and print media and examine how these leaders influence news objectivity. Research on the study of how in-house rules affects journalists' reports or newsgathering can be explored by media scholars to understand journalist's views on news objectivity. Despite these limitations, this study helps to close a problematic gap in understanding the influence media leaders have on objectivity of news stories.

## **Summary of the Thesis**

This study adopted the historical analysis approach by comparing Pulitzer and Hearst, traditional print media leaders of the 1800s to social media leaders of the 21st century, Zuckerberg and Dorsey. The study used the authoritarian, democratic, and transformational leadership style as a framework to analyze these media leaders.

Chapter one of this thesis began with a broad view on media, leadership, and politics. In addition, the power of social media as well as the increasing readership of news online was introduced. Chapter two began with the definitions of leadership and predominant leadership

styles i.e. the authoritarian, democratic, and transformational leadership style. Next, the four theories of the press were discussed to understand how different leadership styles affects the press functions in the society. The authoritarian, libertarian social responsibility, and Soviet communist theory of the press was analyzed. Thereafter, the evolving place of news in the society was explored to understand the functions of the press in the society especially in serving as checks and balances to government excess. After, an overview of media ethics was described to understand the journalist code of ethics which is to report truthful and accurate news and be socially responsible to news mass disseminated. Thereafter, leadership and news objectivity explored the enormous role media owners played in influencing news objectivity.

Chapter three discussed the approach to the study by utilizing the historical analysis approach for the study. The use of scholarly articles, historical books, televised interviews, as well as, online sources was used to evaluate the leadership styles of Pulitzer, Hearst, Zuckerberg, and Dorsey. Chapter four historically analyzed the leadership styles of the 1800s traditional media leaders Pulitzer and Hearst and juxtaposed the social media leaders of Zuckerberg and Dorsey of the 21st century. A brief overview on the biography of the 1800s media leaders of Pulitzer and Hearst was discussed, their ruthless competition for circulation, and their leadership styles. Then, news in the 21st century and challenges to media leadership of Zuckerberg and Dorsey were illustrated. The leadership styles of social media leaders Zuckerberg and Dorsey was analyzed to understand these tech giants' influence on news objectivity. Thereafter, an overview of fake news and the presence of fake news on social media was explored to understand the negative impact of fake news and the spread of misinformation on social media especially Facebook and Twitter. The similarities between the leadership styles of Pulitzer and

Hearst traditional media leaders and social media leaders Zuckerberg and Dorsey were discussed to see if there are similar trends in their leadership styles.

The findings from this study concludes that media leaders have an influence on news objectivity and the spread of yellow journalism and fake news was popularized as a result of these media leaders' leadership styles. This study contributes to media and leadership research and offers insight on how fake news can be managed on social media.

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