

## **MARKET CENSORSHIP**

**Fleetwood, “The Broken Wall”**

**Berner, “Holiday Greeting...”**

**Shapiro, “On MTV, No free plugs”**

**Coke memo**

## **FLEETWOOD, “THE BROKEN WALL” & COKE MEMO**

**A *New York Times* journalist uncovers a great story about Tiffany's getting a \$4.5 million tax break that it doesn't deserve. What happened to his story?**

His editors at the Times “buried the lead.”

**Why?**

**What happens when advertisers don't like an article in a newspaper?**

They pull advertising, sometimes organize boycotts (*San Jose Mercury News example*)

**New York *Daily News* wanted to run a story about how phone service is 10 times worse in poor neighborhoods than rich ones. Why was that a problem for the *Daily News*?**

The head of Bell Atlantic is on the board of the company that owns *Daily News* (Boston Properties) and wouldn't want an article critical of his business.

**This type of censorship is widespread. A few more examples, which aren't mentioned in the reading:**

- Cereal companies frequently request that programs they buy into don't have characters that eat bacon & eggs for breakfast.
- The American Gas Association succeeded in having all references to extermination by gas omitted from *Judgement at Nuremberg*, a made for TV movie about the Holocaust.
- Florists Asso. has successfully kept bereaved characters in TV shows from saying that contributions to a charitable organization should be in lieu of flowers.

**In general, what sort of content do advertisers like?**

Things that put people in the mood.

**What was that Coke memo about? What sort of content does Coke require publishers to keep away from its advertisements? Why? Coke isn't the only company to make such demands. What effect do you think this has on magazines?**

**How do you think journalists respond after their articles are pulled?**

Journalists learn from their “mistakes” and avoid topics that advertisers and media company execs won't like. This is known as “self-censorship” and it's much more common than overt censorship.

**What is the purpose of newspaper "soft" sections like "Home & Garden," "Arts," and "Style?"**

Advertisers want them; their subject matter is things people can buy (in contrast to war coverage or political news).

**What sort of information is difficult to publish (and, thus, rare) in a newspaper?**

Articles critical of car dealers, realtors, airlines; common retail scams; *in short, anything critical of advertisers or media company owners*

**Newspapers refer to an imaginary "wall" separating advertising and editorial.**

**What is the purpose of this wall? How does it benefit journalists?**

It allows them to credibility and thus readers by helping prevent new bias. This is not just an ethical issue, but a practical one.

**Why would advertiser want to blur that wall?**

To get his company or product mentioned favorably in the news; for example, a car dealer would love to have a newspaper columnist rave about a new model he is selling. Readers are more likely to read and trust editorial coverage than advertisements. News is considered more trustworthy.

**How does the line between advertising and editorial benefit advertisers in the long?**

Because if all advertisers dictate the content of the news, readers will stop trusting the newspaper. And if readers stop trusting the newspaper, they'll stop reading it and then won't see any ads.

**According to the article, why are newspapers audiences declining?**

Newspaper readers are getting older, while young people prefer other media. Newspapers, which are geared to a general audience, are losing advertising dollars to more targeted media.

**The article mentions gradual change in ownership of newspapers.**

**Who owns newspapers? Who used to own them?**

Large corporations own newspapers. In the past, most large papers were owned by wealthy men.

## **BERNER, “HOLIDAY GREETING...” (ADBUSTERS ARTICLE)**

*View the commercial discussed in this article via the link on my website.*

### **What happened when *Adbusters* tried to run the pig commercial?**

The TV networks refused to run it.

### **Why? The commercial didn't attack any particular company.**

CBS says it's "in opposition to the current economic policy in the US."  
GE's NBC says it's antithetical to their legitimate business interests.

### **What about the First Amendment? Does First Amendment apply?**

If George Bush has stopped it, that would be a problem. But it's legal for NBC to censor it because NBC is a private company.

## **SHAPIRO, “ON MTV, NO FREE PLUGS”**

*While discussing this article, I'd recommend taping some MTV programming, showing a 5-minute clip in class, and asking students to jot down all the possible advertisements they see. MTV frequently runs specials about a particular artist, video, or movie—a clip from one of these would be ideal. In class you can discuss who, other than MTV, probably paid for the program and how such programming would boost MTV's revenues.*

### **What's the source of this article? Who is the intended audience?**

Wall Street Journal, business audience

### **What happened to the “invisible wall” on MTV? Ramifications?**

The wall between advertising and editorial/programming has been obliterated. MTV has a policy stating that companies that buy advertising can get their artists on the channel; those who don't buy advertising, can't. All programming on MTV is paid for, in other words.

### **Every notice how MTV blurs logos in some videos? Why do you think it does that?**

MTV wants all ads on MTV to be paid for. If a logo appears that hasn't been paid for, they blur it.

### **How do the MTV execs explain their decision to make companies pay for programming (and to only feature those who advertise)?**

- “All exposure on MTV is a valuable commodity... It would be silly to give that away.”
- They argue that distinctions between paid advertising and programming are

arbitrary

“What’s the difference between airing an special on the creation of Madonna’s new album and a commercial for the new album? Not much.”

**This article doesn’t quote any artists. What might they have to say about MTV's policy? How might the opinions of major label artists differ from those of independent artists?**

Artists who have financial backing from major labels and can afford to buy advertising probably like it. Independent artists probably hate it because it means they can’t get on the air. With this policy, talent becomes largely irrelevant.

**What ultimately determines the profitability of a TV show or publication?**

Whether it is popular with advertisers.

Neither of these alone is enough:

- Quantity (size) of audience
- Quality (demographics, psychographics) of audience
- Content of show

*Why:*

*Not audience size* — Remember, ABC wanted to replace Nightline with David Letterman, even though Nightline had a larger audience.

*Not audience quality* — Remember *San Jose Mercury News* story. Critical consumer reporting is popular with middle and upper-class readers, who love to read about car dealer scams, poorly designed products, corporate fraud. But though this type of coverage is popular with the “right” audience, advertisers hate it.

Another example: "The Shield" (a popular cop show on f/x channel) has been very popular with young male audiences audiences. But since it pushes the boundaries of sex, violence, mainstream advertisers wouldn’t touch it in the first couple of seasons and there was a threat that it would have to go off the air. Burger King, Office Depot, Subaru, the U.S. Army, and Gillette bowed out.

Not *content*. Programing/editorial conducive to consuming is most likely to win advertisers, but not if it doesn’t reach the right audience.

A combination of these factors determine profitability—that's because audience size, audience demographics, and content determine whether advertisers will support a given program or publication. In other words, what ultimately determines profitability is *whether it is popular with advertisers*. A program or newspaper could conceivably attract a large, young, rich audience and still be unsuccessful (if the program/content is

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#### **ADDENDUM (NOT IN READING)**

**We've look the ways advertiser bias influences media.**

**How can the public find news and information that isn't slavishly indebted to advertisers?**

- Rely on diverse group of sources
  - \* Business Press. **Why did the WSJ report on MTV?** Because it affected other businesses.
  - \* Seek out independent, alternative media
- Be willing to pay for quality content

**Who has HBO? How is HBO different from most cable television?**  
Viewers pay extra for it. No advertising, therefore HBO doesn't have to be as concerned about ratings and advertisers and can focus more on creating interesting content. It is widely considered the "gold standard" in adult programming (Sopranos, Three Feet Under, Sex in the City).
- Be an active consumer of media; don't just read or watch whatever is handed to you.