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**“It’s Not ‘News:’ It’s Infotainment”**

Many great conversations begin with “It used to be.” And so it is with this discussion of television “news” sources.

It used to be that all news sources were easily accessible to the public. Reporting “news” events was fast and simple. There was a telephone number to call. In the Internet age, telephones were replaced by an email address. In either case, there was an opportunity—NO, an “explicit request”—to report news.

This may be true today for newspapers (a fastly disappearing “news” source), local radio stations and networks, and for local television stations.

However, for the major television news networks from whence many Americans

obtain their daily diet of “news,” independent and close-to-the source news appears to be undesired.

We explored this topic when we became perturbed by the lack of coverage of an important ongoing news event in Alabama: In June 2022, Yolanda Flowers became the first Black American in Alabama’s history to serve as a gubernatorial candidate for a major political party. This was news to us, and we wanted to help ensure that the story was told to the nation.

We went to CNN first. Fortunately, we were able to identify an Internet page to report the story. Unfortunately, the page malfunctioned (due to system overload, system failure, by design, ???).

Table 1.—Major News Networks and Explicit Requests for News Tips

Line No.	News Networks	Website	Key News Program	Explicit Request for News Tips/ Story Ideas	Explicit Request for Comments/ Program Feedback
1	ABC	abcnews.com	ABC News	X	X
2	CBS	cbsnews.com	CBS Evening News		X
4	CNN	cnn.com	24X7 News	X	X
5	FOX	foxnews.com	24X7 News		X
6	MSNBC	msnbc.com	24X7 News		X
7	NBC	nbc.com	NBC Nightly News		X
8	PBS	pbs.org/newshour	News Hour		X

Source: The Internet; BlackEconomics.org representation.

We turned to PBS and identified a telephone number (not an explicit request for news content) to the “News Hour” program, but it was after working hours and there was no voicemail box.

Consequently, we decided to check all the “major” television news sources for ease of access to reporting “breaking news.” Table 1 (previous page) reports what we found. It shows that only two (2) of the eight (8) major news sources extend to the public explicit requests for “news tips/story ideas.”

In our view, this is *prima facie* evidence that television “news” is not “news” anymore. Rather, the television news networks provide stories that are filtered through “news” services, newspapers, radio stations and networks, and local television affiliates. Often, what we receive is warmed-over information that is designed to fit a popular narrative crafted by gatekeepers that will attract advertisers. And due to “competition” (or collusion), many of the television networks carry the same “news stories,” even if more “earth shattering” or important events are unfolding in the nation or around the world.

“News” is not “news” anymore. It is infotainment tailor-made for the audience. It informs us of what others think is important, and keeps us entertained; i.e., we want to go back for more.

What is the economic import of this Brief Essay? Simply put, decision making—especially economic decision making—is improved by the quality and timeliness of

available information. Therefore, we should desire high-quality and timely information. When the “news” does not deliver such information, then we receive infotainment that is designed to keep us in the dark.

Those in the light (i.e., those who can afford to obtain high-quality and timely information—“real news”) play the role of the early birds who get the best worms.

In other words, an absence of high-quality and timely information results in business enterprises and/or economic efforts that are unsuccessful or less successful than they would be otherwise.

We have concerned ourselves here with predominantly White television news sources and say nothing about Black-owned/operated news sources. What we know is that the former Black News Channel (BNC), which was unveiled in 2020, faded earlier this year. Fortunately, media mogul Byron Allen’s Entertainment Studios (ES) bought BNC and plans to integrate it with an existing ES property—TheGrio.

To be successful, TheGrio news must provide high-quality and timely information. It can accomplish this outcome by making it easy for Black Americans—with their cellular telephones at the ready—to share vital information that is relevant and beneficial for Black America’s economic decision making and otherwise. It appears that the TheGrio is on the right path. The public is given clear instructions on how to submit news content using a “Contact” link on TheGrio homepage.

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