

Tekst 4

It's not what you report, it's the way you report it



1 AS A child of the Sixties, I have vivid memories of news bulletins about Vietnam. Men in grey suits would stand in front of incomprehensible maps showing parts of the world I never knew existed and talked, apparently in code, about eighteenth parallels and troop escalations. My small appetite for news beyond Dover was further reduced by an approach which assumed an encyclopaedic knowledge of geography and vocabulary. Despite watching countless news bulletins, I remained blissfully ignorant of the history, context and politics of the Vietnam war.

2 I therefore have great sympathy with those who have argued within news organisations that television news needs to become more 'accessible'. Critics are wary of this term, accessibility, fearing a dumbed-down, unthinking approach to news which panders to the ignorance and laziness of the viewer. The argument goes that avoiding complex words or making few assumptions about viewers' background knowledge compounds the growing problem of an information McNugget society, in which everything has to be fed to the masses in bite-sized chunks. Why not make people work a little harder for their news?

3 The answer is, partly, that they won't. They will switch off, switch over or ignore the gobbledegook coming out of their sets. More importantly, the question itself suggests a certain journalistic hubris – an unwillingness (or inability) among journalists to work harder at making stories interesting and relevant to viewers. There is a difference between pandering to audiences and adapting sometimes very complex stories to a mass medium that demands good pictures and an engaging script.

4 This question of how stories are treated on television is different to the question of how stories are selected. The focal point of the research released this week on trends in TV news was the content of evening bulletins on the five terrestrial channels – in other words, the broadcast news agenda. Our conclusion was that over 25 years there has been a fairly consistent and healthy mix of light and serious content. But this positive conclusion came with a health warning: the combination of budget cuts in the face of growing market competition, plus a proliferation of news outlets that is stretching

resources still further, could have damaging consequences for the broadcast news agenda.

5 For an illustration of why we should be worried, it is worth looking at research carried out in America by the Pew Research Center into American viewers' attitudes to television news. Their findings for April this year reveal that 62 per cent of viewers watch television news with remote controls in hand, and that 64 per cent 'only follow international events closely when something important or interesting is happening'.

6 In other words, bring on an item about elections in Zimbabwe or tensions in Bosnia, and millions of remote controls go zap; along with the disappearing viewers go millions of dollars of advertising revenue.

7 The Pew research also tells us how the networks can hang on to those fickle news audiences. The top three most closely followed story tapes were crime, health and sports news. This presumably explains why the average American bulletin consists of gory details of shootings and burglaries, followed by a glowing report on the local baseball team.

8 It would be complacent to assume that these findings are peculiar to America. We ought to recognise that serious, unfettered competition in broadcasting is a very recent phenomenon in Britain. As an already crowded marketplace becomes even more competitive, the pressure on commercial broadcasters to maintain peak-time ratings will be immense. If news bulletins come to be seen as the 'weak link' in evening schedules, how long will it be before someone has the idea of making stories more viewer friendly – in terms of selection as well as treatment?

9 A preoccupation with terrestrial TV news may seem bizarre in an age of online news and 24-hour news channels. But with a combined audience of nearly 20 million people, those bulletins offer a window on the world to people who would not seek out that information elsewhere. We should be worried if the business requirements of the broadcasting industry recast television news as *The Sun* with moving pictures.

Steve Barnett in *The Observer*

■ Tekst 4 It's not what you report, it's the way you report it

- 1p **4 ■** What is the point made in paragraph 1?
- A In the Sixties, the writer's interest in world affairs was diminished by a constant flow of news about the Vietnam war.
 - B Public opinion about the Vietnam war was heavily influenced by misinformation about strategics.
 - C The extensive media coverage of the Vietnam war helped raise the political awareness of the writer's generation.
 - D The writer failed to gain a true understanding of the Vietnam war due to the manner in which it was covered.
- “Why not ... their news?” (lines 26-27)
- 1p **5 ■** Who ask(s) this question?
- A “I” (line 14)
 - B “those” (line 14)
 - C “Critics” (line 17)
 - D “the viewer” (line 20)
- 1p **6 ■** How could “adapting ... script” (lines 36-38) be qualified, considering Steve Barnett's view?
- A As being sensitive to audience needs.
 - B As turning news into something resembling fiction.
 - C As turning the audience into passive viewers.
 - D As underrating the audience's intelligence.
- 1p **7 ■** What is it that we should be “worried” (lines 54-55) about, according to paragraph 4?
- A Financial considerations affecting the content of news broadcasts.
 - B TV news exaggerating the importance of trivial events around the world.
 - C Viewers avoiding programmes they do not find accessible.
 - D Viewers gradually losing interest in bad news from abroad.
- 1p **8 ■** With which of the following could the sentence “If ... treatment?” (lines 84-89) also begin?
- A Even so, if ...
 - B However, if ...
 - C Therefore, if ...
- “making stories more viewer friendly – in terms of selection as well as treatment” (lines 87-89)
- 1p **9 ■** How should stories be made more viewer friendly, according to the writer?
- By improving
- A both selection and treatment.
 - B selection only.
 - C treatment only.
- 1p **10 □** Waarom vindt de schrijver het zorgwekkend als het nieuws op de tv zo schraal zou worden als dat in *The Sun*?