ICD Teaching Contest Entry, AEJMC 2019

The BMZ News Presentations

Abstract:

The BMZ News Presentation assignment is an oral presentation in a Media Relations class (primarily serving PR students but also Journalism students). Students identify news information that covers a particular issue, product, person or event. The students then compare and contrast coverage of the topic or issue from domestic and international news conduits. The students are encouraged to parse headlines and lede paragraphs, and to deconstruct how a story is positioned in light of bias. Examination of persuasive technique is discussed along with the observation of ethics.

The exercise is meant to accomplish three things: first, challenge students to compare and contrast headlines and copy from different news sources in order to determine what is successful and not successful; second, examine a story to determine how 'spin' creeps into and affects perception; third, give students, future media practitioners, an opportunity to practice their oral presentation skills. All of this is wrapped by the charge to include media organizations from various places around the world.

Description and Explanation of the Activity:

The BMZ are enjoyable presentations about what may be controversial or colorful elements in the news that are easy to compare and contrast in the use of words, tone (the bias or direction of the article or story), color (the use of certain fonts, b/w vs. color, and nearby photos or graphs), and positioning (in page design ... top or bottom, next to what other stories).

The BMZ presentation allows for one 5- to 10-minute oral presentation for each student in a Media Relations class (primarily serving PR students but also Journalism students) to compare and contrast news information in a print and/or digital article, story, blurb or blog that covers a particular issue, product, person or event from domestic and international news conduits. The students are encouraged to parse headlines and lede paragraphs, and to deconstruct how a story is positioned in light of bias. Examination of persuasive techniques (how did the story headline and lede capture your attention) is discussed along with the integration of ethics (would you do it in a similar or different fashion? Why?).

The intention of this exercise is to challenge students to compare and contrast headlines from media organizations around the globe on a particular issue or topic and to determine what is successful and not successful in reaching a targeted audience and in building rapport and relationship. Also, the exercise allows students to explore how 'spin' creeps into and affects perception. Finally, all media practitioners need to perfect and hon their oral presentation skills and this gives opportunity for students to do so.

The story under examination by a student must be no more than six months old. Written stories are suggested for the analysis, but visual/video clips are also allowed for review. Students must be certain their selection is news, not advertisement.

The slides can vary but must include the following:

- Students must have a slide that identifies them followed by a context slide which is 5-8 full lines that give an idea of the person, product, event or crisis in question. The context suggests where the news in leading the consumer ... what is the emphasis, and if the news sources disagree. Students include one line as to what they intended to see from the start of the analysis (which may be different than their conclusion). A slide following this one identifies the news sources and mediums the student will use and an explanation as to why you've chosen them and the topic at hand.
- The following slides can examine the headlines, lede paragraph, and photo/graph comparisons of the stories side by side or in a list; these are prompts to the analysis the student gives orally. The student emphasizes anything odd, as bias, or as extremely effective in communicating a message. Students are encouraged to speculate the WHY in these observations.
- Towards the end of the presentation, students are asked to have a slide that states conclusions as to what was observed in the reporting of the topic.

Student presentations are encouraged to do the following:

- Look for **Unique Word Juxtaposition** in the headline, sub-headline and in subsequent paragraphs. A word juxtaposition is two or more words linked together to create a strong mental image or elicit a strong emotional reaction. What is the purpose of such juxtapositions? Why are they being used?
- Look for any **Verb** that either works or does not work with the actual information being reported. If it doesn't work, students must write in the open margin a verb they would use in place of it.
- Look for **Word Play** ... such as **Pun** where the world has more than one meaning When and why would one use a word play since the meaning must be obvious to a significant number of readers, listeners and/or viewers.
- Look for any **Alliteration** being used in the headline or sub-headline. Does it work? Why even use alliteration in a headline.
- Look for (mostly on print paper versions, but sometimes on digital ones) the **Length of the Headline**. Students are encouraged to be aware of the economy of word usage and when it is more than just necessity, but is being used as a method to state something powerful.
- Look at the first real **Direct Quote** in the story being used. How potent a quote is it? Is it timely and relevant? Why is that quote positioned as the only one or first one in a series of quotes?

One of the learning objectives is for a student to be able to evaluate the presentation of news from a structural perspective. What this means is that the student can ask of a story if it was positioned a certain way (visually or in the word content) by one of the media organizations and whether or not how the story was positioned was effective in creating the impression that the writers/ reporters intended. The student must show contrasting and repeated elements in three different headlines from one or various news mediums as well. This continues to demonstrate an understanding of the structural formation of news surrounding an issue or event.

This assignment also achieves another learning objective related to expanding the perspective on news happenings beyond only domestic media. By requiring students to read and review news happenings through the lens of another culture, they are expanding their understanding and awareness beyond their typical consumption of news information.

Another learning objective for this assignment is to give students the opportunity to present before their peers. Because all students are required to present at a mini-conference as part of their culminating course, assignments leading up to that final semester give students opportunity to demonstrate their growth in presentation. This assignment challenges students to include strong vocabulary, good use of inflection in their voices, good tempo and strong physical poise, balance and eye contact as they share about their news issue or story.

In the end, students reach the benchmark for the assignment by presenting to their peers the context of an issue and/or news report, their own observations and analysis, comparing and contrasting the words used, the tone, and the layout (if applicable) of visual images in and around a news headline of product, event, person or place. A requirement of at least three article headlines and opening statements are examined with at least one being from an international source (e.g., TV/CABLE: BBC News, NHK News from Tokyo, AlJazeera in Middle East, CTV News of Canada; PAPERS: The Japan Times, UK Guardian, China Daily, and/or Times of India). Students must answer the questions as to what, how and why certain words were used and juxtaposed in the headlines and lede paragraphs. Students must address whether stories were effective in reaching their desired audiences.

Rationale:

David Kolb is one of the most well-known theorists for experiential learning; he defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb 1984). If we apply Kolb's theory, the experience causes students to *understand* selected material rather than only having *knowledge* of it. It is with this foundation of experiential learning theory that this assignment for students in a Media Relations course taught for both Journalism & Public Relations students finds its place. The BMZ presentation allows for each student in the course to read, analyze, understand and share the news issues and events as reported both domestically and internationally. Deconstructing and examining headlines, lede paragraphs and photos is a sound exercise for communication professionals in PR, Business, Marketing-Communications, Journalism and Copywriting. The BMZ assignment provides awareness of methods, ethics, and facilitates the development of a personal techniques in telling and analyzing a story. The exercise is intended for students to become aware of distinctions in bias and style in the delivery of a story seen on different mediums and also from different sources. When a students sees these similarities or distinctions they need to interpret the direction, emphasis and possible bias of the news reporting on that particular subject matter.

Sharing the information further influences the reinforcement of learning. This can be explained through the Bloom's Cognitive Domain in the Taxonomy. The domain classifies thinking by six levels of complexity: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, create. Each builds on the other, challenging students to move from one to the next in their processing of knowledge. A student working in an upper level of the domain is assumed to have already mastered the previous levels.

A key outcome for the assignment is the engagement that students have with each other over news issues and events with global perspective and consideration. A presentation turns into a discussion where students consider the way information is being communicated and the different influences in that process. For instance, recognizing how different a news source from Europe reports a U.S. happening than a U.S. media source allows students to consider the role of media in various communities and how governments play a role in the distribution process as well.

By comparing and contrasting headlines and ledes, students are able to evaluate what is successful and not successful in reaching targeted audiences and in building rapport and relationship. Also, by examining a story, students begin to determine how 'spin' creeps into and affects perception.

Learning outcomes:

One of the key outcomes from this assignment is that students would demonstrate a deeper understanding of news coverage and the value of international news in gaining perspective on news events.

"**Through the project, it was reinforced to me that I should pull from a variety of sources in order to have an informed perspective!" a PR Student**

One example of a student BMZ Presentation was on the topic of DACA and the decision by the Trump administration to end the program. The student presenting on this topic used CNN, Fox News, NBC News, The Washington Post and Al Jazeera as her sources.

As she began to share the headlines and ledes for the stories from the various media on this topic, she shifted from content screens (Figure 1) to highlighted screens (Figure 2).

"**Trump administration ends DACA, with 6-month delay**"

"The Trump administration on Tuesday announced the "orderly wind down" of the Obama-era program that gave a deportation reprieve to illegal immigrants who came to the U.S. as children – putting pressure on Congress to come up with a replacement." **(Fox News)**

"**Trump's DACA decision triggers anguish, political firestorm**"

"President Donald Trump prompted anguish for 800,000 people brought illegally to the US as children by deciding to end a program shielding them from deportation on Tuesday." **(CNN)**

"**Trump Ends DACA Program, No New Applications Accepted**"

"The Justice Department announced on Tuesday it is ending DACA, the Obama-era program that allowed undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children to remain in the country, while also giving Congress a six-month window to possibly save the policy." **(NBC News)**

Figure 1: Headlines and ledes from media organizations.

Figure 2: Highlighting key terms from headlines and ledes.

As you can see in the screens pulled from this student's presentation, identifying how different media groups handled the same topic allows the students to engage with classmates during a

presentation on the topic as well as how the topic was handled by media groups. The next slide (Figure 3) allowed her to highlight key conclusions from the BMZ research and presentation.

Conclusion

- CNN used descriptive words like "triggers," "political firestorm," "extreme," "Cruel"

- Al Jazeera seems to provide the best overview of what is going on

- Headlines are powerful

The inclusion of an international news media group allowed students to see how outside perspectives can vary greatly from those from within a country.

"**This assignment taught how to read into different major news headlines, and how to depict what is true and what is spin." PR Student**

One aspect of the evaluation through the rubric challenged students to "prove to be adept in answering any query in a Q&A format." It asks student to " be able to answer questions from students with competence and sound reasoning." Another part of the rubric observes whether or not students "show competence in knowing events surrounding the article and headlines chosen. Knowledge of dates and proper ID of key players in a story is reflected in the presentation."

"**I learned so much about the art of media relations... [The] goal for this course was to open our eyes to the world of media relations and begin to understand just how essential of a skill it is to have a broader understanding and knowledge of how this realm of communication functions. News informs, and if we are the ones who take part of the ways in which important information is received today, we need to do so with transparency, advocacy and drive." PR Student**