

BREAKING: ROOTS OF “FAKE NEWS” EXPOSED – COMMERCIAL GRADE JOURNALISM and SYNTHETIC NEWS!

The following long lost and forgotten commentary was first published in 2001.

News: The Commodity With a Future, The Industry to Watch (and to Keep an Eye On)

Worried about the news? Don't be. It'll be there for you when you need it. News is clearly the industry to watch, the commodity with a future in these turbulent times. But there are major changes looming on the horizon that any successful investing strategy must take into account.

The advent of commercial grade journalism was a milestone for the industry, helping to meet the booming post-war demand for light, low cost news. But what of the future in an era when the public is growing ever more demanding and segmented, and most manufacturing industries face resource shortages and stiff environmental opposition?

To answer those questions in reverse order – news, unlike so many other consumable luxuries, is entirely acceptable to modern sensibilities. After all, news is cholesterol free, non-fattening, non-carcinogenic (as far as anyone knows), non-polluting (in one sense), and completely renewable. Perhaps best of all, news has an extremely short half life, decaying almost immediately into mere history. This inert by-product, as every school boy knows, can be safely buried and forgotten. It doesn't even overburden the landfills.

The very perishability of news also means constant replenishment is required. In a time when so many of the little luxuries we've come to enjoy, and even depend upon, are slipping beyond our grasp into the shadows of public disapproval, the demand for news is forecast to grow astronomically. So say farewell to your Big Macs and big cars, guns and margarine, popcorn and paper bags – have another helping of news!

Gorge on it, revel in it, flaunt it! Don't worry about offending even the most sensitive soul.

Don't worry about running out of news either. There are vast conventional reserves largely untapped at present and exploration is strong. Potentially of even more importance to the industry is the trend toward synthetic news. Field trials of synthetic news have shown general approval of the quality but a strong negative bias when the synthetic origin is disclosed. This is often the case with the introduction of synthetics however, and time and a good public relations campaign usually overcomes consumer resistance.

Besides ready availability, synthetic news offers several advantages over the natural product, including standardized quality control, and easier customization to fit differing consumer demands.

What to look for in coming years? Cable news channels targeting specific socio-political segments with "Give'em what they want" newscasting will be hot growth stocks in the near to mid-term. But beware of long term investments in news makers. There may be a revolution waiting out there. The future of news may be PC (personal computer that is). Newscasts tailored by the viewers to suit their own tastes – the ultimate self-indulgence – may mean the end of the industry as we know it.

The foregoing satirical commentary on the 'news media' was first published in the *Thinking Out Loud with Bill Kitchens* feature in *Tuskaloosa Magazine*, No. 72.

Update:

Prophetic? Perhaps, but not uniquely so. Anyone could have foreseen what was coming. In 2001, I cynically, though somewhat amiably, dismissed America's "main stream media" (msm) as "commercial grade journalism" pouring out a stream of "synthetic news". Today's popular designation for the main product of the msm is "fake news". Though less artful, that is perhaps a more accurate description, for it acknowledges the now undisguised, hard edged partisan political objective of the "news". Yes, it is 'objective journalism' – but in the sense that the supposed reporting of news has taken on the objective of destroying one side, while whitewashing the other side in the political/cultural war engulfing this country. Perhaps 'scurrilous disinformation' would be an even better term than 'fake news'; except that it is a bit long to tweet.

The reasons for such "objective journalism" vary, I'm sure; but one certain factor has to be the post-modern disbelief in absolute truth. That being the case, a journalist would be foolish wasting time searching for 'truth' behind any story. The holy grail of modern journalism is the 'uniform narrative'. That is the ticket to Utopia, where everyone has 'the same set of facts'. That is also, of course, the dream of totalitarian governments everywhere.

The one official source of facts is so easily turned into a fountain of disinformation. The International Communist Revolution depended upon disinformation, widely known in the past as ‘agitprop’, a contraction of agitation and propaganda. Agitprop flowed out of the Soviet Union and its “useful idiots” worldwide in art, literature, and yes, the news media especially, and was alarmingly successful in swaying public opinion. The New York Times was one of the main outlets for Soviet agitprop. That charge has been more than adequately documented over the years in such studies as Herman Dinsmore’s *All the News that Fits*. Soviet Communism’s successor “Socialist” movements today still depend upon agitprop, not truth, for their power. And the NYT remains one of the major outlets. Perhaps then, dusting off the old Cold War term ‘agitprop’ for today’s use makes sense; and it is tweet friendly.

Let’s try on ‘agitprop’ for fit with today’s NYT. A major topic of recent *Times* headlines has been the claim that 17 intelligence agencies confirm Russian meddling in the US election, with the implication that they did so to help elect Donald Trump. Let us examine only the ‘17 agencies confirm’ claim. After weeks of ballyhooing that claim, it was shot down in sworn testimony by former Obama administration Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. It was not 17 agencies, according to Clapper, but a panel of “*a dozen or so... hand picked... experts*” from three agencies (CIA, NSA, FBI) who made the determination.

Who were these ‘hand picked experts’, and why were they picked? Of that we know nothing. What about the trust worthiness of James Clapper? Clapper lied to a Senate Select Committee in 2013 about illegal surveillance of Americans and there were calls from the Senate and the House for his firing, and even his arrest for perjury – not to mention the illegal surveillance. But the Obama administration, and the msm, ignored those calls and allowed Clapper to resign after the last election.

So, if we can believe Clapper, instead of 17 agencies confirming Russian meddling, or even the 4 agencies now claimed by the Times (apparently counting Clapper’s NIA), there was no agency confirming it. Intelligence agencies have protocols for vetting information before accepting it. Whether this group had any such protocol is unknown. It was a hand picked star chamber proceeding ordered by President Obama, and presided over by an ethically, and legally, compromised Obama appointee specifically for undermining a duly elected President of the opposition party.

That now infamous ‘17 agency’ fake news’ was one of the major factors in the appointing of a Special Counsel empowered to investigate “Russian meddling”, “collusion”, and anything else it wants – with the express purpose of destroying the Trump Presidency.

‘Agitprop’ is the correct description for this type of reporting by the news media. As far as the star chamber proceedings themselves, ‘treason’ is the appropriate term.

On a lighter note, one last thing before leaving the subject of New York newspapers, you might enjoy Charles Dickens’ delightfully nasty parody of New York City newspapers in his 1840’s “Quarrel with America”. Click on the HISTORY button.

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