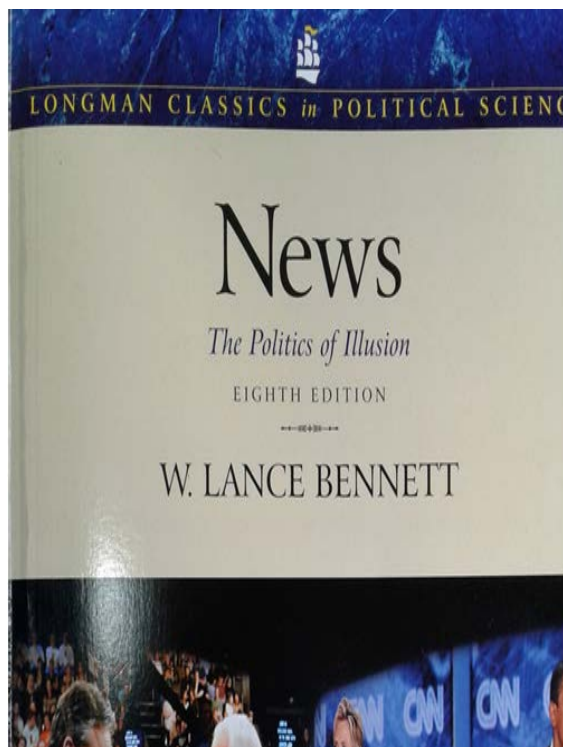


TAKRIZ

A BOOK REVIEW ON “NEWS: THE POLITICS OF ILLUSION, 8TH EDITION (2009)”

By Won Tai SEOL, PhD;



I. Introduction

The book entitled “*NEWS: The Politics of Illusion, 8th edition* (2009, Pearson/Longman)” offers insights into another aspect of American journalism with the background of American politics. This book, written by W. Lance Bennett, a political scientist teaching at the University of Washington, shows how the traditional or orthodox journalism theories should widen their perspective while dealing with the topic of journalism and politics. The eighth edition of this book has a foreword by Doris A. Graber (1912–2018), who is renowned for her insights into relationship between politics and journalism. She wrote books on journalism and politics including “*Mass Media and American Politics, 6th Ed.* (2002)”, which Seol also read years ago in Seoul.

Seol read the book’s 3rd edition (1996) in 2005 two times, but he read the book’s 8th

edition again in 2019. The 8th edition with 334 pages, grew thicker than the 3rd edition with 252 pages. Seol remembers that this book was one of the must-read books for graduate students of journalism at a certain American university. And Seol used this book in crafting his master thesis dealing with relationships between American presidents and American news media entitled “*Presidential Image of George W. Bush as Depicted by the New York Times*”, which was approved in December, 2003 at the School of Journalism and Mass Communications, San Jose State University, CA, USA.

At that time, Seol thought that this book could be an eye-opener for working journalists and journalism educators and journalism researchers. While reading the 8th edition in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in July of 2019, Seol has almost the same feelings. Seol, who has been teaching journalism for four years at the State World Languages University, Journalism and Mass Communications University, and the National University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is sure that journalism students, teachers, and practicing journalists in Uzbekistan and in South Korea and in other countries should read this book to have a deeper understanding of the interaction between journalism and politics, and to realize the limitations of journalism in even an “exemplarily” democratic society such as America. Readers of this book will see the clear limitations of news media in America, seen from inside and from outside. In fact, Seol is assured that journalism is linked to almost all areas of human activities and natural phenomena and even human imagination. Journalism students and teachers should study broader and more diverse areas than students of other academic disciplines.

This is a book which melds journalism and politics. Journalism students, journalism

teachers, and working journalists who cover politics should read this book to understand how politicians can distort or spin news coverage of themselves and political reality in their interest. Journalists could be frequently taken advantage of by politicians while they are not aware, if they do not understand the mechanisms that work between politics and journalism. At any rate, although this book deals with American journalism and American politics, in this respect the author is quite modest in his argument in that he does not write his observations are applicable universally, this book could be a must for journalism-related people in any political system all over the world.

II. Overall view of the book

A. Why did Seol choose this book?

In 2005 Seol read the third edition of this book. Afterwards, Seol bought the eighth edition again. The book grew a bit thicker with Graber's foreword. Seol liked this book, because the book shows a different perspective in looking at journalism from a political scientist's point of view. To be very frank, while reading books on politics or international politics, Seol finds that books published by political scientists appear to be better organized and more sophisticated than those written by journalism experts. In this respect, media scholars in the world need to do more in-depth research and should try to organize their media books with better logic and better sentences. While reading books on journalism and politics, Seol finds that politicians have more power than journalists have. That is, political power is stronger in setting public agenda than journalism's power is in setting them. This could be a personal feeling, but this is the evaluation that Seol has reached while reading journalism books and politics books together. Seol likes to read books on politics and journalism and their interaction.

B. The structure of the book

To understand and review this book, Seol would briefly show the structure of the book based on the table of contents. After that, Seol will choose noteworthy points of the book and

add some personal interpretations. This book consists of eight chapters. Before the chapters start, Doris A. Graber wrote her foreword praising the strength of the book. Graber's eulogy could be summarized that Bennett provides a new approach to news and politics studies. Seol fully agrees with Graber's comment. Graber writes that this is a book that tries to search new theories and that readers could discover scholarly excellence in this book. Graber is a scholar who also tries to look at journalism from the standpoint of politics. Seol thinks that the major role journalism plays is the one that it is a major vehicle of political communication. Other roles that journalism plays such as tools for entertainment, sports, culture, and community service could be subsidiary. Seol is aware of the history of journalism that journalism of the countries in the world started as political tools and will continue to have that role.

In the preface of the book, Bennett says that news could be products that emanate from journalism's illusion of political reality. To cite some of Bennett's sentences: "Despite (or perhaps because of) their simplicity and familiarity, news images of the political world can be tragically self-fulfilling. Scary images of distant enemies can promote war or military interventions that in retrospect seem dubious (Vietnam, for example, and Iraq)"(p. xx). "The creation of news drama can blur the connection between news and underlying political realities. Is it really significant that a presidential candidate used the wrong word to talk about a problem?"(p. xx). Bennett goes so far as to sound a warning by writing that "news has no democratic guarantee" (p. xxi).

While pointing out the low level of political participation among the American public, he writes that democracy is meaningless without citizens' participation (p. xxi). Bennett's ideal of democracy seems that democracy should be realized by better roles played by journalism in forming appropriate public forum with active citizen participation. Bennett shows main points of eight chapters in his preface (pp. xxiii-xxv). Seol wants to show a more expanded version of his thumbnail

summary provided in his preface with direct quotations and Seol’s own interpretations.

B. Main body of the book

Chapter One (pp.1–31) has the title “The News About Democracy: An Introduction to Governing the American Political System”.

In this chapter Bennett deals with the run-up to the Iraq War in 2003 led by America. Bennett shows that American news media were manipulated by the powerful voice of high-ranking American officials who actually overwhelmed news media, resulting in media’s reluctant and powerless acceptance of the officials’ lead in the flow of information. In addressing the weaker role played by the American media (i.e., American media did not or could not highlight lack of solid evidence to start a war against Iraq), Bennett writes as follows:

“Beyond the loose facts and the foggy justification for the war, one thing became clear afterward: the battle for control of news images was the most important factor in shaping support both for the war and for the Bush administration’s capacity to govern effectively for several years after the invasion. The first media victory was predictably inside the beltway, among elected officials, where opinion matters most. As the government dominated the media imagery, opponents shrank from challenging the war. The few who spoke out were relegated to the back pages, if reported at all. From the viewpoint of the mainstream press, they were minority voices on the losing side of a policy decision. The second line of symbolic victory was over the American public, who grew increasingly attentive to an issue as big as waging a war against an alleged terrorist nation” (p. 8).

While discussing the fact that American media have tended to put more emphasis on profit-making, Bennett writes that “politically managed information and a profit-driven press do not brighten the prospects for an enlightened citizenry. Instead of providing competing critical perspectives or views of citizen engagement, the typical news day is filled with choppy and disconnected episodes from various

halls of government” (p.18). The above paragraph shows that Bennett does not place his trust in American media in setting proper public agenda.

Bennett also writes that because of soft news, i.e., consumer-driven news, the public turns away from news, that the First Amendment assuring freedom of the press cannot necessarily guarantee good information, and that the link between news and democracy is fragile. He raises a serious question related to journalism and democracy, “Why is something as important as public information (that is, news. Seol word) left to a turbulent mix of business profit imperatives, political spin techniques, and consumer tastes?” (p. 27). This question seems to fundamentally ask the basic philosophy of America’s free press. Does America need some degree of control in the flow of information?

Chapter Two has been entitled “News Content: Four Information Biases That Matter” (pp. 32–72).

This chapter might be the essence of Bennett’s analysis of the limitations of American news media in that they cannot or do not describe the political reality properly. He put forward the theory of “four information biases” prevalent in American journalism. It is said that journalists tend to have liberal bias, but Bennett’s four bias theory is of a different and profound dimension. He thinks that news stories tend to be “personalized, dramatized, fragmented, and described based on the bias of authority or disorder”.

As for the personalization bias, Bennett writes: “The tendency to personalize the news would be less worrisome if human-interest angles were used to hook audiences into more serious analysis of issues and problems. ... The main problem with personalized news is that the focus on personal concerns is seldom linked to more in-depth analysis. ... Even when large portions of the public reject personalized news formulas, as during the chaotic journalistic and political preoccupation with President Clinton’s personal sexual behavior, the personalization never stops” (p. 41). The above

paragraph describes problems of personalization of news.

As for the dramatization bias, Bennett writes: “As in the case of personalization, dramatization would not be a problem if it were used mainly as an attention-focusing device to introduce more background and context surrounding events. ... When drama is employed as a cheap emotional device to focus on human conflict and travail, or farce and frailty, the larger significance of events becomes easily lost in waves of immediate emotion. The potential advantages of drama to enlighten and explain are sacrificed to the lesser tendencies of melodrama to excite, anger, and further personalize events. ... ” (p. 42). Problem with the dramatization of news.

As for the fragmentation bias, Bennett writes: “The emphasis on personal and dramatic qualities of events feeds into a third information characteristic of the news: the isolation of stories from each other and from their larger contexts so that information in the news becomes fragmented and hard to assemble into a big picture. The fragmentation of information begins by emphasizing individual actors over the political contexts in which they operate. Fragmentation is then heightened by the use of dramatic formats that turn events into self-contained isolated happenings. The fragmentation of information is further exaggerated by the severe space limits nearly all media impose for fear of boring readers and viewers with too much information” (p. 42). The problem of fragmentation gets worse within the limits of space and time, which is experienced daily by working journalists.

As for the authority-disorder bias, Bennett writes: “Whether the world is returned to a safe, normal place, or whether the very idea of a normal world is called into question, the news is preoccupied with order, along with related questions of whether authorities are capable of establishing or restoring it. It is easy to see why these generic plot elements are so central to news: they are versatile and tireless themes that can be combined endlessly within personalized, dramatized, and fragmented news episodes. When the dramatic restoration of

normalcy is not a plausible frame for an event, the news may quickly challenge authority itself, perhaps by publicizing the latest scandal charge against a leader or by opening the news gates to one politician willing to attack another” (p. 43). This paragraph provides some room for reflection for journalists.

Bennett provides a long elaboration on this four-bias theory with examples. He describes that this kind of bias is part of American political information system, and that as a result citizens are discouraged from consuming political news. Bennett writes that whether people follow scandals and mayhem as guilty pleasures or with anger and disgust, the convenient claim by media executives, that this is really, what people want, misses at least two important points. First, many people are turning out political news and homing in on more personal information about health, sports, celebrities, fashion, travel, and lifestyles. Second, according to research by communication scholars Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, even the people who consume news often become discouraged about politics and public life by cynical, negative news.”

Chapter Three has the title “Citizens and the News: Public Opinion and Information Processing” (pp.73–106).

This chapter explains, among other things, how the American public was led, or rather “misled”, to believe the Bush administration’s war rhetoric against Iraq through the manipulation of media images. Bennett says that “it is difficult to shape public opinion and even harder to control it. Yet, those engaged in politics often put enormous energy into those challenges. For example, the staggering costs of winning the support of relatively small numbers of so-called swing voters in elections suggests that the battle for opinion is difficult, expensive, and seldom a sure thing. Citizens live in a noisy media environment in which politics is generally far down the priority list, behind entertainment, fashion, sports, weather, and shopping. Just getting the attention of distracted and often disinterested citizens requires strong measures

... usually involving highly dramatic and personal messages that are repeated time and again” (p.78).

With this background description, Bennett shows how the George W. Bush government “sold the Iraq War.” According to him, “Iraq War was sold to the American public based on the repeated and carefully crafted insinuations of a connection between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein, with the added consideration that Saddam was building weapons of mass destruction thrown in for good measure. Saddam was a figure who triggered strong negative considerations among most Americans. He had even been likened to Hitler by communications managers in drumming up support for the first Gulf War in 1991, a war waged to rescue the kingdom of Kuwait following Saddam’s invasion of it. But hostility toward Saddam, alone, did not shift opinion in support of another war. Drumming up support for the war required adding other considerations to the communication equation, such as associations with Osama bin Laden and weapons of mass destruction, along with menacing references to mushroom clouds by high-level officials”(p.79). Bennett’s analysis in this regard is that the repeated and sophisticated war messages spread by the American news media were accepted by the American public to stage a war against Iraq, even though the war rhetoric had flimsy evidence to start a war.

As it turned out later, connections with Osama bin Laden and weapons of mass destruction, the so-called casus belli (reason of war), were groundless. However, a war against Iraq was already carried out and Saddam was ousted and killed. And a new situation and a new political order set in after the war in Iraq. It appears that Bennett thinks the Bush administration led an unjust war with little solid reasons. Bennett describes the fact that ordinary citizens do not have enough attention to closely watch and analyze an overwhelming amount of news flow (a case study of “national attention deficit disorder” is shown in this connection, pp.84~86) and that this could be one of the

reasons why the people are led or misled to believe in what the Bush government said.

Chapter Four entitled “How Politicians Make the News” discusses how politicians make powerful agenda to force journalists to pick up (pp.107–150).

This chapter could be the nucleus of this book in that politicians try to control news media to their advantage and in that it describes various ways of managing news. This chapter in part appears to be showing some of political public relations skills. However, considering that the political power can have more leverage than journalistic power, the skills of news management could be a special kind of public relations. For example, Bennett shows how the global warming phenomenon turned into a partisan news story in a special case study. (pp. 109–112) The main point of this case study seems to be that a natural phenomenon was treated as a political argument by news media by the media’s stance to maintain a mechanistic balance of pro and con arguments put forward by political parties. Bennett’s stance is that in this case maintaining journalistic balance can itself become a problematic journalism bias. Is his argument not intriguing?

In the section “The Politics of Illusion”(pp.112–113), Bennett shows why he contends that news is “the politics of illusion”. While stating that “it is hardly surprising that the news is filled with strategically constructed versions of events”, Bennett contends that “indeed, the mark of skill in the political trade is the ability to make the public version of a situation convincing, no matter how actual circumstances may be bent or simplified in the process.” Bennett cites former secretary of state Dean Acheson as saying that “the task of public officers seeking support for their policies is to make their points <clearer than truth>” (p.112).

Bennett further supports his foregoing contention with the following statement. “Much has changed about the news in recent years, but one important pattern holds: most political news still originates from government officials themselves. In many ways, officials seem an obvious and appropriate source of information about politics, which, after all,

often involves activities of government. However, letting officials set the news agenda is not just giving them greater voice in what publics think about and how they think about it, it also enables them to deploy the strategic communication technologies that shape the very realities ... the issues, situations, and images of citizen involvement ... that are portrayed in the news itself” (p.113).

With this, Bennett shows how officials dominate political news by citing major American newspapers’ heavy dependence on official sources, and shows how officials construct news realities, and then how journalists attempt to combat the impression that they are being manipulated (p.113). Bennett discusses message shaping and framing as part of skills of strategic political communication and then shows the basics of news management such as prepackaged news stories, video news releases, strategic polls, controlling events, staging pseudo-events and so on. Bennett then shows news management styles of Ronald Reagan, George Herbert Walker Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. He describes cases of “care and feeding” of journalists and “intimidation” of journalists as part of management of press relations. Bennett shows an example where even the venerable *New York Times* recalled its young enterprising foreign correspondent from El Salvador under the government’s intimidation (pp.121–144).

Chapter Five entitled “How Journalists Report the News” (pp.151–183) shows how the journalistic norms, routines, and practices ‘unexpectedly and contrariwise’ (Seol’s words) shackle American news media’s coverage of political news and creates structural bias.

Bennett writes that “the communication offices of government and political interests may set the tone and boundaries of hard news so effectively that spin from established sources may be reported to balance a story even when there is little evidence to support it.” He notes, “The quest for balance can be so ritualized that news organizations may impose it even when investigative reporters reveal situations that seem to have the evidence clearly stacked on

one side.” He cites one example experienced by Ken Silverstein, an investigative reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. Silverstein did a solid piece of investigative reporting on Republican efforts to use influence in St. Louis to disqualify African American voters in the 2004 presidential election. He found that the Republican abuses in Missouri might have been significant enough to affect the outcome of the election, while alleged transgressions by the Democrats were minor. Despite this finding, his editors chose to run a more “balanced” story about the parties charging each other with dirty practices. In Silverstein’s view, creating artificial balance out of political spin rather than reporting the actual independent findings was anything but balanced (pp.151–152).

Bennett, while noting the commendable professional standards of independence, diversity, and objectivity practiced by American journalism, writes that these professional norms have backfired. He contends that American journalism may have become trapped within an unworkable set of professional standards, with the result that the more objective or fair reporters try to be, the more official bias they introduce into the news. He cites a five-nation study of political journalists by Thomas Patterson (1992, *Irony of a Free Press*) that produced a startling finding that “although the American press is arguably the most free or politically independent in the world, U.S. journalists display the least diversity in their decisions about whom to interview for different hypothetical stories and in what visuals they chose for stories” (pp.155–156).

Bennett provides a case study entitled “Top Ten Reasons the Press Took a Pass on the Iraq War” (pp.157–162). This case study appears to be a post-mortem analysis describing how the American news media could not deter the war plan by the American government and finally became a supporter of the Iraq War, which Bennett holds an unjust and avoidable war. The ten reasons were 1) September 11 attacks 2) Master scripting and directing by Karl Rove 3) Beyond spin: outright intimidation on the press 4) The press was

embedded with the military 5) Telling the story that promises maximum drama and most likely plot advancement 6) Democrats did not oppose war strongly 7) Credible progressive think tanks were absent 8) The press constructed a spectator public 9) Press were ethnocentric 10) The Fox TV's effect was strong.

Bennett describes that American journalist are constantly under pressures to standardize and act and agree as a pack, that is, not digress from the main flow of information spun by the government. Bennett says that this is the paradox of organizational routines in the US journalism. This comment of Bennett's is really interesting.

Chapter Six is entitled “Inside the Profession: Objectivity and the Political Authority Bias”.

The chapter provides an in-depth look inside the American journalism's practices and reveals structural problems that have lurked for years, to the dismay of journalism researchers who have regarded the deep-rooted practices to be commonsensical (pp.184~216). In the section “The Paradox of Objective Reporting”, Bennett bluntly declares that this chapter confronts the paradox of journalism by showing that the news is biased not in spite of, but precisely because of, the professional journalism standards intended to prevent bias. This could be a direct contradiction of the widespread journalism theories. His argument goes: “The central idea of this chapter is that the professional practices embodying journalism norms of independence and objectivity also create conditions that systematically favor the reporting of official perspectives. At the same time, the postures of independence and objectivity created by the use of these professional practices give the impression that the resulting news is the best available representation of reality. In short, professional journalism standards introduce a distorted political perspective into the news yet legitimize that perspective as broad and realistic” (p.187). What a surprising and paradoxical contention!

In the section “The Curious Origins of Objective Journalism”, Seol finds more

shocking descriptions. Why is it “curious origins”? Follow his argument. “It is tempting to think that modern journalism practices derive logically from the norm of objective journalism. However, there is considerable evidence that the practices preceded the norm. The first modern journalism practices can be traced to mid-19th-century economic and social conditions surrounding the rise of mass-market news. According to David Mindich's historical analysis, various components of objective journalism emerged at very different points in time and often under odd circumstances. For example, the <inverted pyramid> style may have originated with a nonjournalist, secretary of war Edwin Stanton, who wrote a series of important communiqués about the Civil War” (pp.190~191).

Bennett writes, “By 1848, a group of newspapers made the first great step toward standardized news by forming the Associated Press (AP). Pooling reporters and selling the same story to hundreds, and eventually thousands, of subscribing newspapers meant that the news had become a profitable mass-market commodity. Of course, the broad marketability meant that it had to be stripped of its overt political messages so that it would be appealing to news organizations of all political persuasions. An early prototype of objective reporting was born. Moreover, the need to send short messages through an overloaded mail system was followed by the transmission of national news over telegraph wires that also dictated a simplified, standardized reporting format. The *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why* of an event could be transmitted economically and reconstructed and embellished easily on the other end” (pp.190~191). This might be how and when objective writing originated.

“As the market for mass media grew, the demand for reporters grew along with it. Whereas writing a persuasive political essay required skill in argumentation and political analysis, it was far easier to compose stories, which are the basic media for communicating about everyday events. The use of stories also guaranteed that the news would be intelligible to the growing mass-market audience” (p.191).

Bennett explains that with the practice preceding, adding values to the practices followed. This is the process in which practices became respectable journalistic norms. With the lapse of time, easy access to journalism was controlled and this heightened the profession of journalism.

In this chapter, Seol does not find some descriptions of “political authority bias”. However, Bennett already dealt with this issue in foregoing chapters. That is to say, journalists prefer to cite political authorities and journalists of even venerable news media heavily depend on official sources, thus resulting in the lack of voices emanating from the grassroots. The grounds for Bennett’s critique of the traditional objectivity practices appear to be that American journalism easily buys into the spin from officials, because spin-doctors working for officials are very good at providing news materials to suit journalism’s demand, thus making journalists pick up spin-doctors’ materials.

Chapter Seven entitled “The Political Economy of News” looks at news content from the economic point of view, which treats news only as a means of making profits rather than as public information conducive to democratic processes (pp.217–255).

Bennett writes that even though viewership and readership decrease, corporate news media continue to produce light news. He notes that journalists across the US are forced to recognize that “lite” news and features turned newspapers and television stations into highly profitable businesses. The story here is not that audiences demand lite news. In most markets, TV news audiences and newspaper readership is shrinking, particularly in the audience demographics that advertisers pay more to reach: people under 35 (p. 217).

Bennett notes that “the past two decades have witnessed fewer stories about politics and policy and what governments and businesses are doing and more softer fare about celebrities in rehab, shootings, accidents, and mayhem. The simple reason is that serious news costs more to report because it often requires the time and initiative of experienced journalists who

know who to call, what to ask, and where to follow leads. Soft news often requires no reporters at all, save perhaps sending a camera crew to shoot fires, floods, accidents, and other disasters that can be scripted back at the studio. ... Saving the costs of reporters, remote news bureaus, and other aspects of quality journalism produced such a boost in the profits that many news organizations were bought up solely for their investment potential in the media mergers of the 1990s and early 2000s. Profits of 23 percent a year were not uncommon, and soon became demanded by distant corporate owners.”(pp.217~218) This paragraph shows why the vicious circle continues: lite news —> low cost —> higher profit —> news organizations become targets for mergers by big businesses.

There exist debates for and against media monopoly among media scholars. However, Bennett seems to be against the conglomeration of media business. Bennett describes five information trends resulting from media monopoly such as

- 1) Less public service
- 2) Internal corporate news censorship and self-advertising as news
- 3) More infotainment and soft news
- 4) Generic news rather than specialized news
- 5) Branding of news as a kind of image product.

Chapter Eight entitled “All the News That Fits Democracy: Solutions for Citizens, Politicians, and Journalists” (pp.256–290) tries to show some solutions to the current media malaise in America.

It appears that Bennett favors some kind of information control in the media in the public interest, given his argument that “the American government regulates the quality of air, food, and water much more actively than it regulates the quality of political information. There is probably more truth in product advertising than in political advertising” (p. 264). Bennett’s consideration of regulation of qualities in journalism sounds like revolutionary, given that he lives in American, which is known for its free press.

Bennett clearly shows the myth of a free press in America. He writes, “The myth of a free press and a free people and its guiding principle of objective reporting would seem to provide different but compelling benefits for different groups. However, there is an irony here: the groups at the top of the power structure gain the material advantages of power and control, while the groups at the bottom trade real power (because in reality the myth works to limit their political involvement) for psychological reassurances. Thus, the broader the support is for the idea of fair or objective journalism, the more firmly established the inequalities of power become” (p. 268). Is this not a phenomenon very paradoxical but very realistic?

While elucidating all the structural problems, Bennett makes some suggestions to iron out the current distorted situation. He makes three proposals for citizens, journalists, and politicians. First, his proposals for citizens are:

- 1) Recognize stereotypes and plot formulas in stories.
- 2) Look for information that does not fit the plot.
- 3) Seek additional sources of information to check partisan claims.
- 4) Recognize spin and news control in action.
- 5) Learn to become self-critical.
- 6) Find other sources of perspective such as political comedy.

Second, his proposals for journalists are:

- 1) Use personalization and dramatization creatively.
- 2) Introduce more of the journalist’s own background knowledge into stories.
- 3) Resist the standard plot formulas.
- 4) Define political situations in terms that appeal to ordinary people.
- 5) Remember to explain why the story matters.

Third, his proposals for politicians and government are:

- 1) Limit the flow of money to politicians.
- 2) Develop better formats for candidate debates and for coverage of legislation.

3) Control media monopoly.

4) Provide more funding (and a more creative mandate) for public broadcasting.

5) Strengthen public service requirements for cable and broadcast license holders (pp.270–282). While mentioning “citizen input ... from interactive news to desktop democracy”, Bennett makes proposals about corporate social responsibility to be carried out by news organizations. He emphasizes, “Balancing democracy and corporate social responsibility is a place to start” (p. 288).

III. Conclusion and Discussion

This book is a kind of provocation to journalism researchers in that the book deals with the weaknesses of American journalism. As known, America is a country, which is widely known for its freedom of the press. However, even in this country, the sharp-eyed scholar like W. Lance Bennett finds out structural problems rooted deeply in the established system of American journalism. Frequently, political scientists note that American politics is polarized. Probably there has been too much media criticism of the American president such as Donald Trump throughout his presidency. We can see a clear polarization in the American journalism for and against President Trump. The same holds true in South Korea surrounding President Moon. This may not be applied to Uzbekistan’s journalism and politics.

However, despite large amounts of criticism of the president in the U.S. media, as Bennett points out, there is not much investigative reporting. Bennett explains the reasons in this book: largely because of commercial reasons. This book is an excellent work in that the author revealed the structural weaknesses in American journalism in connection with the American politics. This book is a direct contradiction of the widespread myth of press freedom and American democracy. Readers of the book will find out the problems of American journalism within the democratic politics of America. It is a real irony. Sometimes the irony is the reality in the world we live in.

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