

## New Zealand news media has become more Americanised

1 How we consume news has changed. Many have accepted the change from printed, TV and radio news, unaware that what they are seeing online is often biased and tailored to a certain point of view. This change in the media has impacted New Zealand as much of the news that we see on our devices and social media accounts is coming from overseas, including a lot of American content. Americanisation is “the action of making a person or thing American in character or nationality”<sup>i</sup>. New Zealand’s size and isolated location makes it the perfect target for cultural assimilation, threatening the authenticity and popularity of mainstream New Zealand news platforms as people resort to articles shared on social media to inform them on the latest “news”. The shift from local content delivered by ‘old’ mediums like newspapers, radio and TV to global digital content might leave New Zealand struggling to retain authentic Kiwi culture. 2

3 It can be argued that New Zealand has always been exposed to cultural assimilation. In the early 1960’s New Zealand news on television “consisted entirely of overseas film”<sup>2</sup> proving that our early media was dominated by the more important news of other countries. 1961 saw British television news screening on Sundays before it was shortly replaced by a more national, relevant newsreel. British culture has always heavily influenced New Zealand as we are a member of the British Commonwealth and our head of state is still the British monarch. As technology evolved in the 1960’s and ‘70’s, New Zealanders started to experience a wider range of international voices in the media<sup>ii</sup>. The televised coverage of the Vietnam War provided a beginning to New Zealand’s relationship with US media, from which our interest in American media grew exponentially.<sup>iii</sup> However, until the 1980’s NZ press and radio were almost entirely owned by New Zealanders. A shift in government policy in the 1980s led to ownership of our printed media moving into foreign ownership. Rupert Murdoch’s NewsCorp acquired 40% of New Zealand’s largest media company<sup>iv</sup> with shareholdings increasing over time. By 1999 North American based conglomerates had significant holdings in most of New Zealand’s media companies. This could explain New Zealand’s identity crisis as American content and an American perspective has slowly infiltrated what we see in newspapers and on TV. 4

American media has now changed our nightly news routine into an extension of “proliferation of Americana... reality programmes and idol searches”<sup>6</sup> making it “no accident that the ebullient personalities of TV3 are finding a growing audience among young urbanites”<sup>7</sup>. So now, instead of people like Jack Tame being regarded solely as a news presenter, they are now our national ‘influencers’ bragging almost 30,000 followers on social media. The news itself has also changed, mimicking the American practice of 24-hour news with TVNZ updating their website every hour from 6:00am-11:00pm every day. The rise of social media apps in recent years has also affected the content that our news presents to us. These sites make somewhat unimportant news more visible which eventually gains the attention of journalists working for mainstream news channels in New Zealand. We are now less concerned with what is going on in our own country, with “news” of sporting achievements, celebrity updates and civil action in the United States making its way into our daily news broadcasts. 4

5 Many younger generations have embraced this change and accept it as normal, whilst older generations who have been aware of the development and changes to New Zealand media are less accepting of the state of our mainstream outlets now, compared to what they used to be. Case study on one adult’s experience has been omitted.

5 Overall, it is evident that New Zealand news media is not what it used to be. Social media may be a recent cause over how our habits have changed. “Almost all Americans (88%) recognise that social media companies have at least some control over the mix of news people see” (Pew Research Centre). Algorithms determine what and when we see content, when using social media apps, using a search engine or reading online news content. These algorithms create “the personalized, curated news, information and learning feeds we consume several times a day have all been through a process of collaborative filtering”<sup>v</sup>. Even if we wanted to consume different information, we are all working against a system (designed in America) to control what we read and watch online. 6 This includes our exposure to news. However, it is not just online content that has become Americanised. Even our television channels hardly feature New Zealand produced shows, movies and content compared to Dr Phil, The Ellen Show and Oprah which always feature on daytime television. We may not realise it, but social media may be the culprit behind this reduction in authentic New Zealand culture. If we become more aware of how our engagement with media is being controlled and its negative consequences, we may be able to go back to the previous national focus that was brought to us through a few main New Zealand news television channels, rather than Facebook constantly telling us about Donald Trump’s latest scandals. 7

### How have American views become integrated into what we are given and see in New Zealand?

As Americanisation impacts us, New Zealanders will begin to accept the views and values from these people we see via social media as normal and begin to integrate them into their own lives. An obvious example of this is the way that mainstream news platforms such as TVNZ are beginning to post less relevant and reliable content in an attempt to push out more content, specifically on their website. We as New Zealanders are beginning to accept this as we are now used to it, Instagram and TikTok is filled with this 'news' on celebrities lives so now the mainstream news is too. This is a change coming from America and might unfortunately increase over time as quantity over quality becomes the main concern for these mainstream news platforms as people obsessively seek more news. Increased access to devices combined with significant global news events leads to us doomscrolling, searching for new content all the time. It can be argued that this is harmless, we are not being forced to read these articles so why is it such a negative impact on New Zealand media? If we see more of this unimportant content on our news websites then it may begin to shroud relevant local media and stop us being up to date with current affairs in our own country. If our mainstream news sites become more pop culture focused, it absorbs our unique Kiwi identity and might have a long-term impact on our own culture and values.

New Zealand news is mimicking the American style of sensationalised news with news outlets such as Stuff and the New Zealand Herald regularly posting on Facebook and other social media platforms, often sparking debate about irrelevancy in the comments of their posts. If many people solely rely on social media to get their news (just like how "more than half of US adults get news from social media often or sometimes (55%)...and about three in ten Americans now get news on social media often (28%)")<sup>10</sup> then the only news that they will be getting are these irrelevant stories that are produced to generate popularity through the amount of 'clicks' they are getting. These stories are not only irrelevant but often portray some negative messages as the writers attempt to gain a higher audience by deliberately developing controversial content or viewpoints. We are currently seeing this in the "freedom" vs "mandate" arguments emerging about vaccination in news stories and in social media threads. The crossover from journalism to opinion-'ism' is blurred and many people do not know how to separate the difference between factual journalism with opinion pieces.

### How can we see this change in other aspects of New Zealand society?

One of the most significant changes that will continue to occur over time as Americanised social media dominates New Zealand news, exposing us to faster updated, less relevant content, is that the trust that New Zealanders have in these outlets will decrease. Auckland University of Technology's Journalism, Media and Democracy research centre published a report earlier this year revealing that "53 percent of the 1200 Kiwis surveyed agreed that they can trust news 'most of the time' compared to 40 percent in the UK, 38 percent in Australia and 32 percent in the USA"<sup>11</sup> (RNZ). These figures become significant when looking at them in comparison with the "27 percent of New Zealanders who [reported that they] trust news found via search engines and 16 percent trusting news in social media"<sup>12</sup>. America is not only changing the type of content we see in our news but the way that we are receiving it as a new wave of Americanisation comes in the form of getting news via social media. It would be unfortunate for New Zealand media to lose its positive reputation. This would have larger ramifications as losing trust in the media would equate to many questioning who is truly in control of what is being told to the public (such as the Government versus big American corporations).

Social media allowing Americanisation to become more apparent here in New Zealand may only be the gateway for other changes to come. Changes to the news that is featured on our national platforms means an increased amount of content from the United States could become integrated here and engrained into our mindsets, without us even noticing. When commenting on examples of Americanisation in New Zealand, Tapu Misa states that "[New Zealand's] social indicators lie closer to the US than to other countries. We've gone from being a proudly egalitarian society to one that accepts widening income disparities similar to those in the US"<sup>13</sup>. News coming from America has the potential to wrongfully educate people here in New Zealand about the treatment of people from lower social classes or minority groups, bringing a very negative aspect of American culture into New Zealand.

News consumers in New Zealand need to question the source of their news media more closely. We physically cannot change what social media presents to us in the form of 'news' but it is vital for New Zealanders to recognise that the American influence can change society in much more damaging ways than many of us realise, if we allow it. Using our power as media consumers, we can influence the long-term effects of the current acceptance of the Americanisation of our news, by supporting independent, NZ owned media outlets.

*Bibliography and footnotes omitted.*