Jamieson / Cappella

Echo Chamber

Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment

Rupert Murdoch's multibillion-dollar purchase of the Wall Street Journal in 2007 was but one more chapter in an untold story: the rise of an integrated conservative media machine that all began with Rush Limbaugh in the 1980s. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph Cappella--two of the nation's foremost experts on politics and communications--here offer a searching analysis of the conservative media establishment, from talk radio to Fox News to the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal. Indeed, Echo Chamber is the first serious account of how the conservative media arose, what it consists of, and how it operates. Surprisingly, President Obama's election has only enhanced the influence of Limbaugh. As an unofficial leader of the Republican Party, he has issued marching orders to the rest of the conservative media bent on challenging President Obama's agenda. To show how this influential segment of the media works, the authors examine the uproar that followed when Senator Trent Lott seemed to endorse Strom Thurmond's segregationist past. Limbaugh called the remarks "utterly indefensible," but added that a "double standard" was in play. That signaled a broad counterattack by the conservative media establishment, charging the mainstream media with hypocrisy (yet using its reports when convenient), creating a set of facts--or allegations--for partisans to draw upon, and fostering an in-group identity. Jamieson and Cappella find that Limbaugh, Fox News, and the Wall Street Journal opinion pages create a self-protective enclave for conservatives, shielding them from other information sources, and promoting strongly negative associations with political opponents. Limbaugh in particular, they write, fuses the roles of party leader and opinion leader in a fashion reminiscent of the nineteenth century's partisan newspaper editors.

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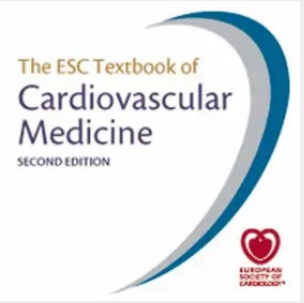

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