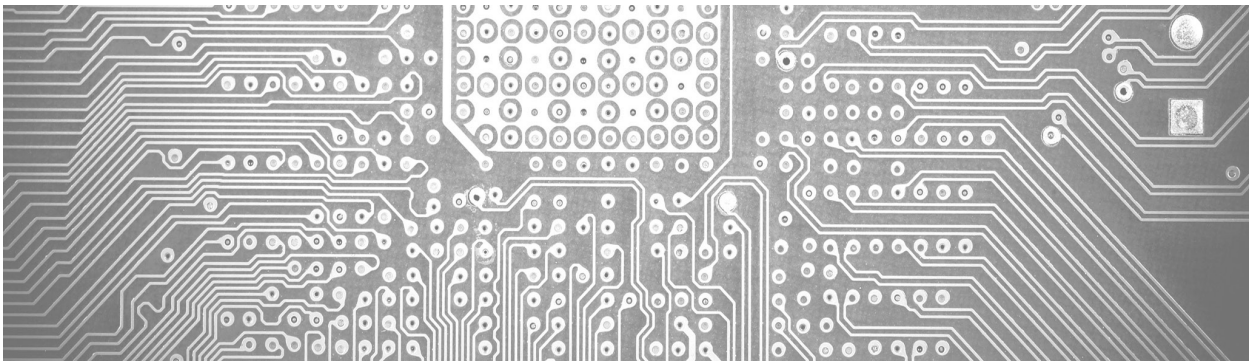


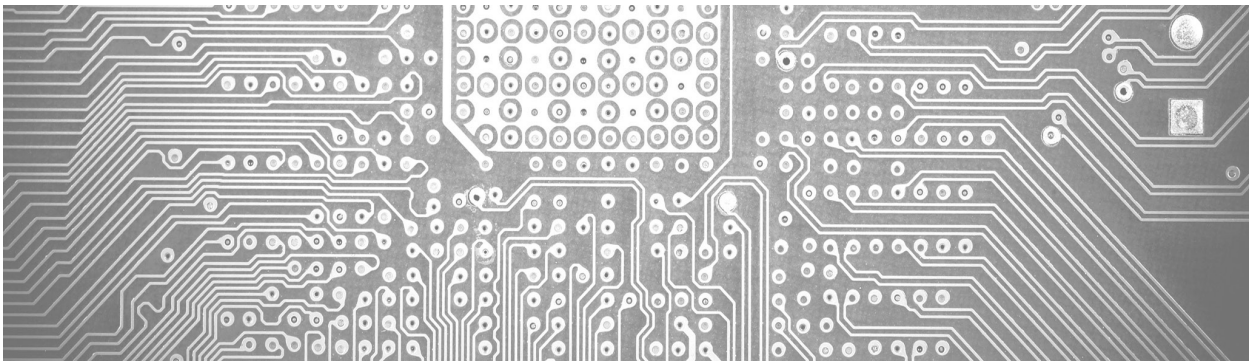
The SAGE Handbook of
Digital Journalism



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The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism



Edited by
Tamara Witschge, C.W. Anderson,
David Domingo and Alfred Hermida

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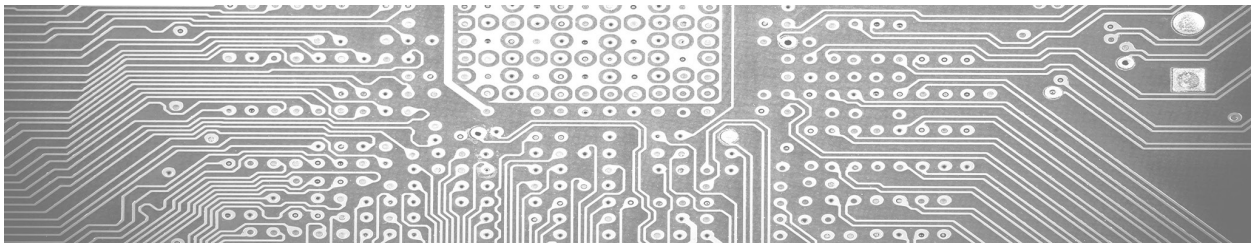
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Conceptualizations of Journalism

C.W. Anderson



This part explores the tension between older and newer theoretical approaches to framing the study of journalism. The chapters in this part share the premise that the world of news production and consumption is increasingly dispersed and hybrid (as contributors in Part I and II show), but present a diversity of perspectives about whether this complexity is best filtered through ‘old’ theory, ‘new’ theory, or some combination of the two. Perhaps as a result of this complexity and hybridity and the tensions they bring, the authors draw on a variety of metaphors in order to attempt to conceptualize (or reconceptualize) journalism.

The chapters in Part III fall into two sets. The first four chapters discuss overarching conceptualizations of journalism in the digital age, ranging from a discussion of normative theories to a consideration of the relationship between humans, technologies, and the news. The following six chapters

also consider different conceptualizations of newsmaking and journalistic practice, but do so using frameworks that in one way or another can be connected to space as a metaphor for the social organization of news production.

Daniel Kreiss and J. Scott Brennan (Chapter 20) open Part III with a forceful argument: by emphasizing the values of participation, deinstitutionalization, innovation, and entrepreneurialism, many normative theorists of digital news have abandoned an older, legacy set of guiding commitments of journalism. These earlier commitments included notions that institutions and bureaucracies carried within them democratic potentialities, and that innovation is as much an ideology as it is an argument of economic logic. In this chapter, Kreiss and Brennan take issue with the often uncritical deployment of new theoretical frameworks, not simply to pick fights, but to remind scholars that there is a

long history of normative claims with regard to journalism, and to point to the benefits of a clearer perspective on how these commitments have shifted over time.

In their contribution on audiences, masses, and publics, Laura Ahva and Heikki Heikkilä (Chapter 21) draw inspiration from research on the culture of audiences as well as notions of symbolic interactionism developed by scholars affiliated with the ‘Chicago School’ of sociology in the early twentieth century. Digitization has transformed user practices, they note, but it would be a mistake to collapse all user categories into a single homogeneous body even if the lines between different types of media consumption have been blurred. Continuing to retain distinctions between the ‘mass’, the ‘audience’, and the ‘public’ is important, Ahva and Heikkilä argue, for scholars if they are to make normative claims about media use and impact in the digital age.

Rather than explicitly drawing on older bodies of theory to understand digital journalism, Bart Cammaerts and Nick Couldry (Chapter 22) apply media practice theory to the act of sharing news and journalism with others. The chapter adds to our knowledge of an under-explored journalistic concept, and also demonstrates the way we think this Handbook can be *used*. ‘Sharing’, be it on social media or elsewhere, is a commonly invoked behavior that scholars might wish to study in more depth than they have thus far. By tying this activity into the larger concept of media practices, this provides a useful theoretical hook through which to relate sharing to other, perhaps older ways of using and interacting with media.

Seth Lewis and Oscar Westlund (Chapter 23) continue to push theorizing about journalism in more radical directions, claiming that the emerging universe of digital media production requires scholars to consider the operations of technological *actants*, human *actors* and *audiences*, and the *activities* that bind these actors, actants, and audiences together – a perspective which draws on recent work in Science and Technology Studies (STS). With

the concept of ‘actant’, Lewis and Westlund provide a perspective that integrates, but does not privilege, technology in the analysis of digital news production – a perspective which can help scholars grapple with the role of technology in news production.

The next six chapters in Part III draw on a variety of spatial metaphors through which to understand news. Chris Peters’ contribution (Chapter 24) begins this spatial turn, again considering the audience but less from the perspective of practice (as in Couldry and Cammaerts) and more from the point of view of the spaces and places in which news audiences operate. After discussing spatio-temporality as a theoretical construct and reviewing the current environment of digital news consumption, Peters contends that practices will unfold differently depending on where they occur – a theoretical insight particularly useful in our era of dispersed habits.

In their chapters, David Ryfe and Tim Vos draw on theoretical frameworks that are already established in Journalism Studies in their call for how to theorize the digital media landscape. Ryfe (Chapter 25) not only analyzes journalism as a series of institutions that overlap, in important ways, with other social institutions, but also makes a provocative argument about the close ties between journalistic transformation and changes in other important institutions of modern society such as politics and the market. These institutions, from which journalism partially draws its legitimacy in a relational fashion, he argues, have changed less than we think and thus constrain the overall transformation of journalism itself. Ryfe makes an explicit and thought-provoking claim that the modern West has decidedly *not* entered a new era of journalism, and that for such a transformation to occur, both the culture of journalistic professionalism and the larger political environment in which that journalism operates would have to change as well.

Vos (Chapter 26) complicates the notion of the ‘journalistic field’, drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Rodney Benson but

also on the work of Kurt Lewin, who makes explicit some of the underlying indebtedness to physics in the ‘field’ metaphor. Vos concludes his chapter by demonstrating the way that the concept of field can help us understand journalistic coverage of major current events.

David Domingo and Victor Wiard (Chapter 27) discuss the epistemological and ontological principles of actor-network theory (ANT), demonstrate how these concepts can be fruitfully applied to the study of news, and review the growing body of empirical work that has used ANT to study journalism. While ANT is somewhat controversial in the social sciences, Domingo and Wiard show how the theory offers an important means for grappling with the increasingly complex and hybridized nature of journalism and news production today.

In my own contribution (Chapter 28), I discuss the two different ways journalism scholars have understood the metaphor of the ‘news ecosystem’. According to one perspective, scholars discuss news as an ‘ecology’: that is, a dynamic and living organic system in which different aspects of that system (blogs, television stations, newspapers, social media, and so on) contribute to the overall health of the whole system. A second perspective owes more to the ANT discussed by Domingo and Wiard in the previous chapter, and conceptualizes a tangled skein of journalistic diffusion in which messages travel out across the news network and transform as they move. These different ideas of the news ecosystem, while related, each invoke different theoretical assumptions. In the chapter I show how they each tend to privilege different programs of empirical research. Such conceptual clarity could help researchers to better outline what their research into news ecosystems should bring.

In the last chapter in this part, Anu Kantola (Chapter 29), draws on the theoretical work of Zygmunt Bauman and his notion of ‘liquid modernity’ to suggest that this is the best metaphor for understanding journalism today – contrasting the relative structure and stability of news institutions and fields emphasized by Ryfe and Vos a few chapters earlier. The liquid nature of news has implications for both the profession of journalism (a profession, Kantola argues, that finally seemed to have reached some degree of stability and institutional power by the middle of the twentieth century) as well as the organization of journalistic work.

Each of these final three chapters addresses journalism in terms that are less bounded and more fluid than the chapters earlier in the part. They each contend, in different ways, that theoretical perspectives on journalism and the news would be better served by a ‘network’ sensibility than they would by a perspective emphasizing bounded spheres such as fields and institutions. Together, these chapters show that there is no consensus about the ‘best’ theory for studying digital journalism, or the most fruitful way of conceptualizing journalism. Individually, each of these chapters is tremendously compelling, and advances a set of unique and original theoretical insights useful for scholars grappling with the complex nature of journalism today. But readers who read them together will notice that the chapters do not necessarily neatly complement each other. They will find that some of the arguments and perspectives put forward in the chapters are incompatible with one another. This, for us, is one of the main strengths of this part. Taken together, these contributions point to the vibrancy of the Journalism Studies field as a whole and the theoretical variety present in it.