Remaking the news: essays on the future of journalism scholarship in the digital age

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The book, Remaking the News, edited by Boczkowski and Anderson responds to the question ‘what does remaking the news in digital age mean?’ This question was posed originally in a 2015 academic conference and the book reproduces some of the presentations from that time in essay form. The editors have arranged the included essays into clearly defined sections, some of which trace themes in existing scholarship on online journalism for the reader and others serve to introduce possible directions in future research.

The first section addresses important theoretical and methodological issues that exist in the study of online journalism. In their contribution, Boczkowski and Mitchelstein, for example, review the concepts and methodologies often reproduced in studies. From this review, they suggest that the approach adopted in much work does not allow for a cross-fertilisation between the field of journalism studies and related disciplines and areas of study. Interactions between these disciplines would open greater opportunities for conceptual and methodological developments, they argue. Continuing the review of approaches adopted here, the chapter by Rodney Benson suggests significant amounts of studies of journalism suffer from what he calls ‘new descriptivism’. Consequently, he contends that the field of research would benefit from adopting a process of systematic differentiation when moving forward to chart the digital media landscape. The need for good explanatory frameworks to underpin robust journalism research is a point that is reflected by the thoughts of Victor Pickard. Pickard’s chapter argues specifically that despite important developments in the field, scholarship has failed to address adequately those important (i) normative, (ii) policy-oriented and (iii) economic questions about the future of journalism. Maintaining a focus on aspects that are lacking within the field, but changing the direction from what has been discussed previously, Anderson argues for the use of more explanatory approaches in digital journalism research. He suggests specifically the importance of adopting genealogical ethnographies as these uncover journalistic ideas or epistemologies at play. In application, such approaches can usefully challenge prevalent assumptions that digital developments will play a similar role to those that have gone before. In sum, these chapters offer the reader a thorough and valuable introduction to the field of journalism studies and some of its issues and underlying problems.

Following from the insights developed in its first part, the second section of this book introduces possible ways to rethink concepts in the study of journalism. For example, Nielsen’s chapter discusses the importance of the digital news as forms of knowledge and professional knowledge used within the organisation of news work and production of news content. When researchers approach digital journalism, in particular, he suggests, they should differentiate in their analysis between knowledge of news about relations and the acquaintance with news as impressions. Lewis and Zamith adopt a different approach in the next chapter. Employing an analytic method developed first within art criticism to their subject matter, the authors seek to use this to reconceptualise the interrelationship between journalism and technology. Revealed through this specific theoretical lens are the specific relationships between collective actors and activities and technological actants. Similarly, revealing is the chapter by Annany on the Whitespace Press that considers ‘silence’ as an under-researched journalistic value. Silence, it is claimed, allows the researcher to recognise the difference between the freedom of speech
and the freedom to speak up and helps in addition to better understand audiences and their efforts to avoid media in certain situations. Finally, in this section, Papacharissi stresses the importance of socio-cultural and economic factors for explaining the uptake of technology in news organisations. This chapter reminds us that technologies are chosen purposely to serve journalistic ends.

The third section of the book addresses specific occupational cultures and practices. The first two chapters discuss opportunities for the combined reflection on journalistic practices by practitioners and academics (Stroud) and the ethical concerns with the use of data (Hindman respectively). What follows explores the financial underpinnings and societal role of journalism. Focusing on entrepreneurial journalism, Singer emphasises the concepts of normative boundaries, economic imperatives and journalistic roles and the key concept-related issues for scholars. In a summary essay that completes this section, Neuman stresses the need to recognise the changing perceptions of news institutions and journalists which in turn underpin the process of re-making the nature of news.

The final section of the book discusses ‘under-examined themes’ in digital journalism. This begins with Robinson’s examination of journalistic authority in relation to structural institutionalised power relationships among sources, journalists and audiences. Much as has been argued before, Robinson suggests the need to draw on other disciplines to help to open discussions about journalistic authority and wider notions of power. A theme of relating journalism research to other disciplines is also reflected in Schudson’s commentary and his critical analysis of many authors’ description of journalism studies as ‘a field’. Work by Prenger and Deuze that follows focuses on the history of innovation and entrepreneurialism in journalism. After reviewing previous scholarship, they renew a call for the study of patterns and phases in the development of journalism in addition to a need to explore those factors that induce change. Finally, Wahl-Jorgensen discusses the absence of ‘failure’ in the study of journalism and Delli Carpini uses the last chapter to reflect critically on the often-used claim of ‘crisis’ to explain the state of journalism.

In conclusion, this book provides an important resource to understand key concepts and theoretical and methodological developments in the study of digital journalism. As well ordered and linked together, the book sections offer illustrations of significant work and include the thoughts of important authors in the field. The complexity of the chapters appears to vary on occasion. Still, the included commentary sections work well in the book to bring together and explain its various contributions. Thus, this book will be of direct interest and value to those who wish to study online journalism or those who simply wish to understand how journalism will develop in the future.

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