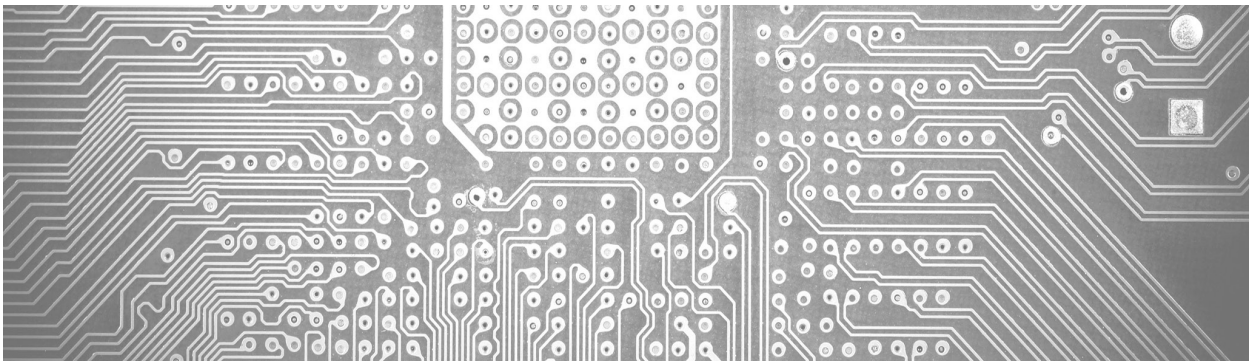


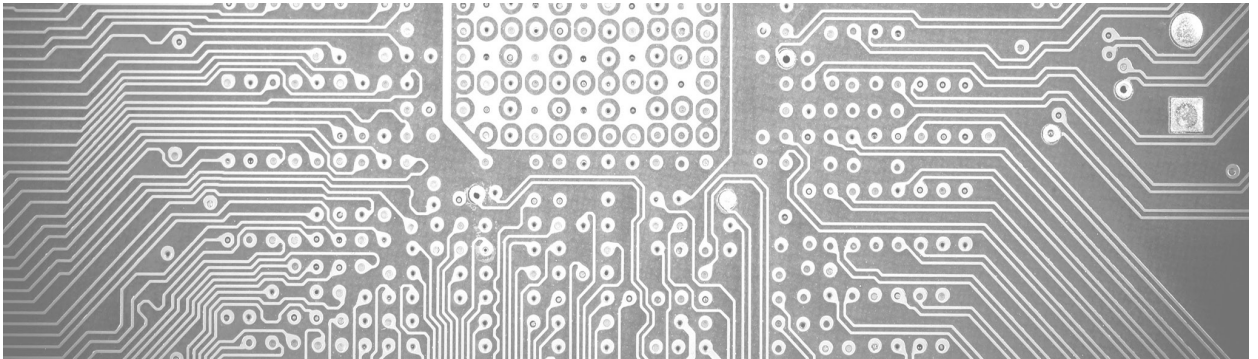
The SAGE Handbook of  
**Digital Journalism**



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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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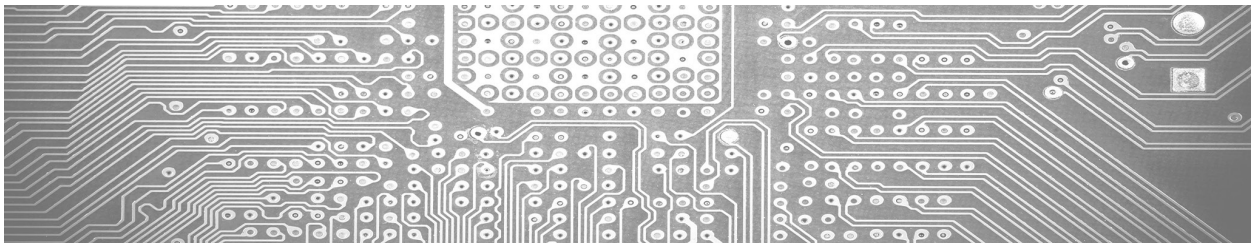
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# News Practices in the Digital Era

David Domingo



This part explores the diversity of actors engaging with news in the digital environment. Contributors provide a critical overview of the contemporary developments in journalism in such a way that shows the complexity of the research field. They propose areas that deserve further study and perspectives that may foster a better understanding of current trends. Each of the chapters in its own way challenges the assumption that specific types of news actor inevitably engage in specific news practices, and invites us to think outside the box of existing models of journalism.

The first three chapters outline trends that are at the core of digital news practices: the dispersion and hybridization of journalistic activities, some very visible and challenging to professional media, others much more invisible but nonetheless important for understanding how news is produced, distributed, and used. Adrienne Russell (Chapter 10)

highlights the dispersion of journalistic practices amongst an increasingly diverse set of actors and technologies, symbolized by their ‘networked’ nature. She maps out the possibilities that the horizontal logic of the internet has opened for news production, distribution, and usage, and traces the initiatives – most of them not led by professional journalists – that are challenging the hegemony of industrial journalism: from activist coverage of events to leaks of secret official information.

James Hamilton (Chapter 11) addresses the hybridization of news production practices, content formats and journalistic identities. Hamilton makes a strong case for overcoming oppositional categorizations of journalistic practices like ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’. He proposes to approach an analysis of practices by acknowledging their contextual specificity, and by focusing on the constant borrowing of genres, technological tools, and marketing strategies.

The contribution by Renee Barnes (Chapter 12) completes this overview of current trends by highlighting the invisibility of certain news practices, especially amongst news users that do not engage into active participation as content producers. She offers a sobering counterbalance to the evidences of dispersion and hybridity presented in the first two chapters: she reminds us that most citizens do not actively participate in news production or commenting. She advocates for considering that this so-called 'silent majority' also performs news practices that are worth researching.

The second section of this part on practices problematizes the evolution of professional journalism and its boundaries. Steve Paulussen (Chapter 13) places the newsroom center stage, before the other chapters start to move beyond its porous walls. The focus in this case is on how newsrooms deal with technological innovations, and Paulussen shows how studies to date point to a story of fierce resistance to change. He asks for this to be kept in mind when analyzing emerging practices: institutionalized configurations have a great deal of inertia.

Henrik Örnebring and Raul Ferrer Conill (Chapter 14) show that media companies seem more eager to embrace technological and organizational change if it makes it easier for them to cope with the economic and productive uncertainties they face. The chapter presents the benefits and risks of the decentralization of professional newswork through a multilayered network of freelances, news agencies, and specialized news companies. The tendency towards outsourcing newswork that they address highlights the diminishing weight of the newsroom as an object of study.

The phenomenon of outsourcing is contributing to the consolidation of a pool of semi-professionals around media companies and citizen-journalism platforms, and these active contributors usually linger in a limbo characterized by little or no pay despite their replication of many professional news practices. Their motivations and contradictory identities

are explored by Jérémie Nicey (Chapter 15). He proposes to call them 'informants' rather than 'amateurs', as these semi-professionals aim to become regular contributors of news-worthy material.

The next section of this part is constituted by chapters that propose to revisit, and re-think, the role of three key actors in the news sphere: sources, activists, and witnesses. This part makes clear that the hybridity of their practices does not necessarily entail that these actors substitute, ignore, or compete with professional journalists. The chapters offer a nuanced portrayal of the complexity of the relationship between these actors and the news.

First, Matt Carlson (Chapter 16) demonstrates how, in the era of social media, the institutions and organizations that were regular sources for journalists are now aware that they can construct and distribute their own messages directly to their publics. This reduced dependence on news for publicity undermines the power journalists have over their sources. Paradoxically, sources they still seek interactions with news media and perceive them as worthwhile. The chapter clearly shows, therefore, how practices and roles multiply and vary in different circumstances.

Yana Breindl (Chapter 17) shows a similar trend amongst activists, who develop a symbiotic relationship with journalists in spite of their mutual distrust. Reporters continue to need their expertise, while activists need the legitimacy of news coverage to reach a wider public than those unconditional supporters who are already engaged with the cause. The multilateral communication dynamics between activists, politicians, citizens, and journalists emerging from this situation underline the complexity of news production when we look beyond the newsroom.

Similar tensions are explored in the next chapter, by Stuart Allan (Chapter 18). He highlights how photojournalism is evolving in a digital age, paying particular attention to the role of ordinary citizens in the visual

reportage of breaking news during crisis situations. For varied reasons, these so-called 'accidental photojournalists' feel compelled to bear witness. Allan explores how and why professional newsrooms relate to these accounts produced by citizens, pondering the ethical and ontological implications that the dispersion of news producers has for journalism.

As an epilogue to the inventory of the diversity of news practices, the contribution by Andy Williams and Dave Harte (Chapter 19) highlights the connectedness of the different actors. It focuses on the specific media environment of hyperlocal news. The authors portray the heterogeneous profiles and motivations of the creators, as well as the often bittersweet evolution of these journalistic

projects. This chapter shows how important it is to analyse the relationship between the emerging and developing practices of community news production and their immediate social and economic contexts.

Overall, this section provides an overview of the many tensions that cut across actors involved in the production, distribution, and usage of news. The dispersion of actors and the hybridization of practices blur the identities of the different actors involved, and the definitions of journalism and news are increasingly contested in the digital era. Chapters in this part identify the most important tensions in contemporary journalism: between participation and control, between innovation and stability, and between decentralization and legitimacy.