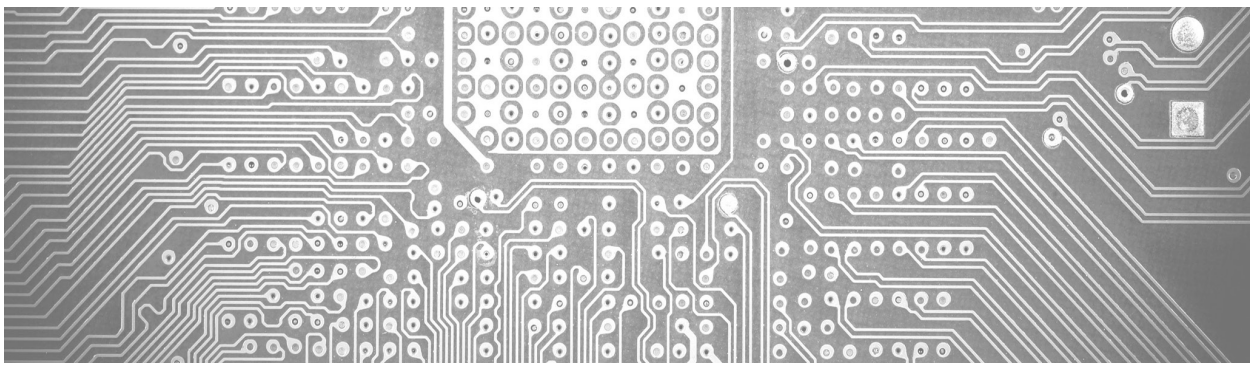
The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism



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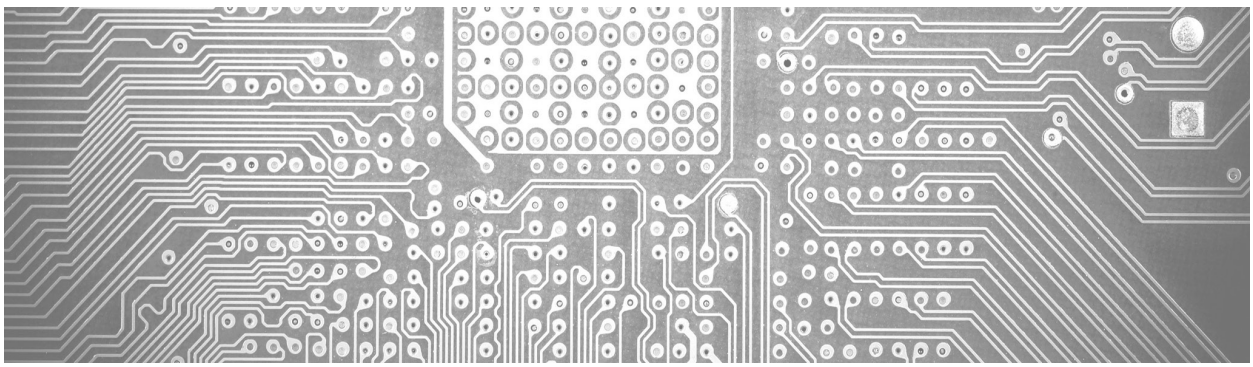

Edited by
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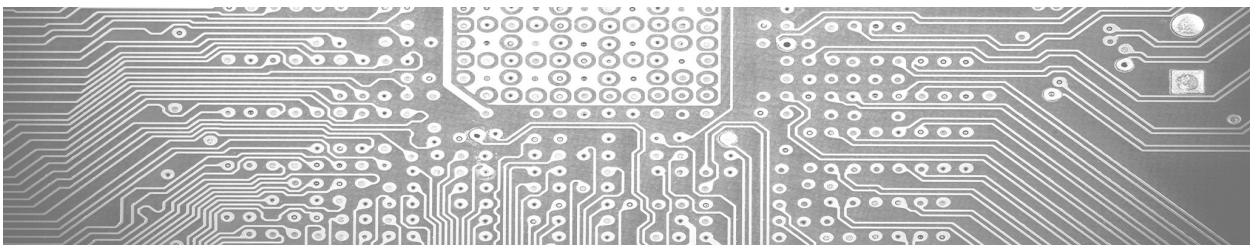
PART I

Changing Contexts

Alfred Hermida



Given that digital journalism is a terrain in flux, this part aims to contribute towards mapping out its contours, seeking to identify and distinguish novel directions from well-trodden routes. Charting the complexities of the context for news and information is an essential first step towards understanding digital journalism. The range of chapters in this part consider, assess and question the conditions in which journalism's place in society is evolving and mutating.

The first three chapters in this part consider the relationship of journalism to fundamental questions of power in a digital media environment and how to study these shifts. The shared theme in these chapters is how power in its many forms is being reconfigured, reinforced or reinvented through digital media. Beate Josephi (Chapter 1) opens the volume by considering the assumed role of journalism in the functioning of a democratic society. The chapter considers how digital technologies that enable greater public involvement in the media – and potentially a greater democratisation of the journalistic process – have caused tensions between professionalism and participation in journalism. At the core is how institutional journalism, which sees itself as a pillar of democracy, aligns itself alongside the multiperspectival potential of digital journalism.

Taylor Owen picks up on the theme of contested authority in Chapter 2, considering how new forms of digital media power are challenging institutional journalism. The chapter charts the emergence of non-institutional actors such as Wikileaks and native local news operations such as Kigali, together with the rise of decentralised witnesses and reporting from conflict zones such as Syria. Such developments challenge the foreign-correspondent model of international reporting and the power of institutional media to decide what is news. They point to the need

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for greater understanding over how far and in what contexts these factors represent a shift in power.

Issues of voice, power and representation are taken up by Eugenia Siapera in her chapter on ethnic minorities (Chapter 3). It considers problematic approaches of studying minority ethnic groups as single entities, often based on top-down conceptualisations of ethnic audiences. In common with Owen, Siapera addresses questions of digital media power as minorities take on the role of producers of content, facilitating counter-flows of information, mobilisation and bridging.

The next three chapters investigate how some of the foundations of journalism have been challenged, weakened and, to some extent, fundamentally undermined. This part addresses the business of the news, journalism ethics and the relationship with audiences. For many in the industry, there is no more pressing question than how to fund the high fixed costs associated with the professional gathering, production and delivery of the news. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Chapter 4) thoroughly unpacks how digital media has undermined key elements of the business models that have been the financial beating heart of journalism. The paradox at the core of the business challenge is that what is good for the audience – more news from more sources in more ways than ever before – is at odds with the financial health of the news industry. The chapter points to a reduced role for for-profit journalism in a hybrid media environment shared with new actors, from entertainment media to PR to audience material.

The reverberations of digital media are similarly shaking long-held norms and values. In his chapter on journalism ethics, Stephen Ward (Chapter 5) moves beyond asserting approaches that have defined professional journalism for the past century. The chapter does not attempt to save traditional journalism ethics but instead to revitalise ethics to take account of the impact of digital media. The chapter advances a new inclusive, interpretive and global vision for digital media ethics that can form the basis of responsible communication by professional journalists and other actors operating in the digital media space.

The challenge from these new actors to the jurisdiction claimed by journalists over the gathering, production and dissemination of the news is addressed in my chapter on social media (Chapter 6). It assesses the interplay between digital technologies known collectively as social media and professional journalism. It points out how social media have become spaces outside of institutional media for publics to consume, share, scrutinise and suspect the work of professional journalists. The chapter highlights how journalism takes place outside of the logic of news institutions, yet is shaped and reshaped by established and resilient values of professional media, with social media as an emergent hybrid and contested arena for sense-making.

The last part builds on the previous chapters by taking an in-depth look at the impact of a networked and collaborative media environment on journalism. Sharon Meraz and Zizi Papacharissi delve into the concepts of networked gatekeeping and networked framing to highlight how actors, ideas and issues surface through participatory social architectures (Chapter 7). They indicate how the gatekeeping and framing functions of journalists are rearticulated with participatory social architectures, shaping who gets to speak, how information is filtered, delivered and to whom. The result is a dynamic and fluid remediation of news storytelling.

The place of the journalist in such a shared and hybrid media space is taken up by Steen Steensen (Chapter 8). His chapter focuses on the context of social media and how it interacts with the publicness of journalism. Specifically, it takes a historical look at how journalists are balancing private and professional roles, arguing that the turn towards a greater 'intimization' of journalism and the work of the journalist due to social media represents continuity as much as change.

Among the challenges of journalists has been the growing prominence of more personalised and emotional forms of news storytelling. But as Karin Wahl-Jorgensen explains in Chapter 9, the role of emotion in the news is not as novel as it might seem at first glance. Instead, she traces the growing prominence of emotional expression in journalism due to the development of citizen media and social media. The chapter traces journalism's shift towards more personalised and less objective storytelling as new spaces have opened up for emotional expression.

However, as with other trends identified in the chapters in this part, such changes have been both embraced and resisted by journalists. As the terrain for journalism is reconfigured so is the environment in which journalists are operating. The world of digital journalism is simultaneously startling, unsettling and stimulating. The chapters in this part are designed to serve as a launch pad for the Handbook, setting out the context for further discussion, analysis and interpretation into the old and new norms, practices, actors, theories and concepts vying for attention in the field of journalism.