

Journalistic Practices: A Comparative Approach to the Social Function of News Media

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Studies of journalism often assume a normative approach to study political functions of the media as a “fourth estate” in democratic societies. As the crisis in newspaper publishing is spreading in the United States and elsewhere, many critics warn against the dangers of this development for an “informed public”. Yet the crisis of journalism is at the same time heralding an “age of the amateur”. The struggle between professional journalism and peer-to-peer publications warrants a new interpretative framework that can accommodate a multitude of (proto-)journalistic expressions without giving priority to either form. This new framework is outlined in the concept of journalistic practices, understood as the way in which news are collected, filtered and presented in a variety of formats for other's attention.

The project will highlight significant changes in journalistic practices between the 1830's and the present. The analysis of historical sources will emphasize the function of news and its implied audiences. By comparing new and older media forms, the current crisis of newspaper (journalism) will be put in perspective – both in its historic parallels and its unique dimension. Decisive changes in journalistic practices considered here will include the commercial revolution of the penny press, the emergence of large-scale advertising and journalistic professionalism, the issue of “objectivity” and journalists' public role, as well as the effect of moving images and interactivity on news formats.