



Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practice

MEGAN KNIGHT & CLARE COOK

Sage Publications 2013

Reviewed by Jude Mathurine

BOOK REVIEW

Social media for journalists unpacked

When asked what titles new media teachers and practitioners should have on their shelves, I would volunteer *Multimedia Journalism* by Andy Bull, *Flash Journalism* by Mindy McAdams, *MediaActive* by Dan Gillmor, *Journalism Next* by Mark Briggs and Jonathan Gray et al's essential *Data Journalism Handbook*. However, many books focused on emerging media phenomena and practices fail to relate debates, models and concepts in media and communication theory to the application of new media, digital tools, trends and case studies – and vice versa. These shortcomings often make texts less accessible to lay actors on the one hand and academics on the other.

Megan Knight (a former head of the Rhodes University Journalism and Media Studies, New Media Lab) and Clare Cook's *Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practice* (Sage) bucks this trend with a book to help students and practitioners understand how potential for new arrangements between the media and the people “formerly known as the audience” disrupts journalism in a multiplatform media environment.

The title carefully unpacks how social media applications support and disrupt traditional journalism functions of research, writing, editing and distribution and weighs in on social media's influence on issues of media accountability, regulation and revenue generation. The result is a book that connects the dots between concepts, theory and practice. While the book's title suggests that its focus is social media and networks, the text offers a lens to understand many changes taking place in traditional journalism and the wider media ecology.

Author Megan Knight says the book attempts to explore the underlying structures and systems of new forms of social interaction, and of journalism, and through those reach an understanding of the fundamental nature of these new forms of journalism.

“Throughout the book we have approached the subject...as a new way of doing journalism, and although these tools will come and go...the changes in the boundaries and relationships between audiences, producers and advertisers will only embed themselves deeper into the practice of journalism,” she said.

The core lesson of the book is that social media is not a fad, neither is it a simple function that can be

devolved to unpaid interns tasked to manage Facebook pages. As Cook and Knight write: “The journalists’ modern day toolkit is not about using everything all the time or shouting at everyone every minute. It is about adapting to the culture of social media and selecting the right tool at the right time for the right audience.”

Cook and Knight validate social media as an essential complement to contemporary journalism whether for agenda setting, sentiment analysis, research, brand building, reputation management, revenue generation or user engagement. Social media demands critical competence in a range of interconnected knowledge areas.

Social Media for Journalists is not a how-to book that will date with the next update to Facebook or Twitter. A focus on particular practices and phenomena such as crowdsourcing, social curation, citizen journalism, data journalism, data discovery, social media ethics and regulation, revenue generation (rather than specific tools and platforms like Wordpress, Wikipedia or Pinterest) promises to give the book more enduring utility.

Cook and Knight marry contemporary quantitative and qualitative research, interviews, examples, case studies and personal learning from own experimentation and experience as journalists and media educators (both are senior lecturers at the University of Central Lancashire School of Journalism and Digital Communication) to discuss the evolving principles and techniques of social media production. While of benefit to teachers of new media specifically, and journalism in general, contents of the book will also resonate with students, online editors and even PR practitioners.

The book does have a little room for improvement however. The publishers’ use of social media and an interactive website to support the book would be welcome. Future editions of the book should also look to improve quality of reproduction of visualisations like graphics and charts. Finally, a section on analytics to inform professional social media use and social media campaigns needs to be included. Nonetheless, *Social Media for Journalists* may become a mainstay in general journalism programmes, as well as specialist programmes in digital and networked journalism.

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