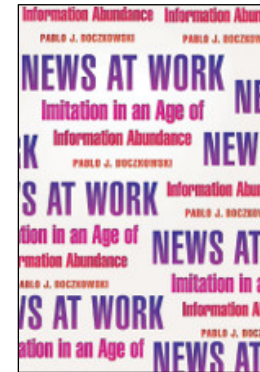


Pablo J. Boczkowski, **News at Work: Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance**, University of Chicago Press, 2010, 252 pp., \$75.00 (hardcover), \$20.03 (paperback).

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A newspaper that gave readers exactly what they were interested in would likely contain an abundance of stories on sports, celebrity, and crime instead of the public affairs news that journalists seem most interested in producing and promoting, according to Pablo Boczkowski's analysis in his new book, *News at Work*. This tension between news producer and news consumer was highlighted by Herbert Bayard Swope, the first recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for reporting, when he said that newspapers should “[g]ive the public what it wants to have and part of what it ought to have whether it wants it or not” (Leroux, 1998). It is this conflict that underlies *News at Work*, which explores the divide between those who produce the news and those who consume it in a deeper and more thorough way than most research to date.



There are several ways in which *News at Work*, which begins with the observation that digital age consumers get much of their news at work and not at home, sets itself apart from other scholarship in the field. This book is multi-method in its use of ethnographies (of multiple newsrooms), interviews (with journalists and news consumers), and content analyses and multi-approach in that it studies online and print news sources and both the news consumer and the news producer. Though Boczkowski's research is based on the media in Argentina, he makes a compelling case that his conclusions are relevant across national boundaries and can be applied to other countries' media systems.

The divide between news producer and news consumer is certainly not a new one. In 1979, Gans was surprised that the journalists he studied “had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feedback from it,” instead assuming that their audience resembled themselves (p. 230). Many studies have been done since on the journalists (for a recent ethnography, see Klinenberg, 2005) and the audience, as well as the audience's trust of the media. Surveys on the sad state of media credibility abound, with some finding that journalism is suffering a “crisis of legitimacy” (Starr, 2009), characterized by declining trust in news media, especially online news, even as trust becomes more important because of the abundance of information available (Doherty, 2005; Picone, 2007). But, Boczkowski points out, research to date has studied only one side of the media trust equation at a time—either the news producers or the news consumers—and in so doing has never created a comprehensive picture of the news environment. Boczkowski's examination of the changes in news production, content, and consumption brought by the digital age offers the reader a greater, more nuanced understanding of journalism's shift to a new medium and the subsequent challenges it now faces. The changes he points to are the result of technological advances and are quite different from the changes described in his first

book, *Digitizing the News: Innovation on Online Newspapers* (2004), which explained the work processes of online newsrooms at the beginning of the digital transformation.

The state of news described in his new book is persuasive and is backed up with an abundance of data that Boczkowski collected in his study of three Argentinean publications—two newspapers with related Web sites and one news Web site. Site metrics allow journalists to know more about their audience than they have in the past, and this foretells the changes Boczkowski investigates. The shift to online news content has transformed the patterns of news consumption: Most people now consume news at work instead of at home. This fact spurred a change in the news-production cycle, in which shorter hard-news stories with little original reporting and few sources started to be published continuously throughout the day. This, in turn, spurred a sharp divide between the organizational processes of hard-news and soft-news producers, with the former expected to produce a steady stream of news stories throughout the day. This change has resulted in more available news, but it also allows for greater monitoring of the competition by news producers who can watch other publications' Web sites get updated throughout the day. This more intense surveillance, in turn, has led to more imitation of hard news across different publications. The journalists told Boczkowski that because they feared they would miss a story that their competition was covering, they covered the same stories. The faster pace, too, means less work with sources, which can lend diversity and original content to news stories. Hard news thus became generic, which in turn has led to homogeneity of news content.

Boczkowski goes on to present the results of a detailed content analysis to show the homogeneity of news in terms of headlines, placement, article length, and photos, both online and in print. He studied news content for many years and describes a clear trend in which news stories have grown more similar with the advent of the Internet. He finds a higher degree of homogeneity of coverage in online news, and this homogeneity grows even more pronounced as the day goes on and sites monitor one another. Print publications, however, were more homogenous in terms of presentation, as the same stories were featured most prominently and in the same ways. This points to the opportunity technology affords Web sites to vary how they present material. Boczkowski emphasizes that the content overlap he finds is about hard news, pointing again to the strengthening divide between hard and soft news in an online environment.

The speed in which news sites are updated has changed the way news is consumed. Boczkowski interviewed 50 people about their news consumption and focused on three conceptual dimensions of that consumption: sequence and dynamics; spatial and temporal; and sociability. He found that people generally visited news sites early in the day and spent some time reading the entire home page and finding other articles of interest. Later visits to the news sites were meant to look for updates. When and how much people read depended on the pace of their work and on whether it was acceptable at individual places of employment to read news. People read the news to keep up on current events and to find articles that would be interesting to share. The discussion of news content, however, happens primarily offline; Boczkowski found that readers were generally uninterested in taking advantage of news sites' interactivity features. The news may be consumed online, but the use of that content is definitively offline. Additionally, because the audience Boczkowski studied in Argentina identified news consumption with the

place where most of that consumption occurred—work—they were even less likely to consume online news at home or on the weekend.

The changes described in Boczkowski's book are a product of the use of technology, but he also points to a paradox the technology presents: Tracking software has allowed journalists to be more aware than ever of consumers' news preferences tilting toward nonpublic affairs stories, but journalists refuse to use that knowledge to change their production patterns. "These consumer preferences are not news to seasoned journalists. The novelty resides in the reduced ability to ignore them in their everyday work practices" (p. 146). Yet journalists continue to ignore this conflict between what they offer and what their audience is interested in reading. Boczkowski compared the top stories of the day (the journalists' choices), and the top 10 most clicked stories of the day (the consumers' choices) across different news sites and found more convergence in the journalists' choices than in the audience's choices. That led Boczkowski to question whether the news media is losing its agenda-setting potential if it cannot even tell the public which stories to care about.

In *News at Work*, Boczkowski points to many differences in the content and the process of print newspapers and their online counterparts as he describes the changes that have occurred in the world of news. Looking to the future, the author seems confident that user-generated content is not the answer and journalism can adapt to the changing technological climate. He leaves the reader with the question of whether that adaptation will happen. The research for this book was done in Argentina, and similar studies should be undertaken in other countries to verify whether these claims hold true in other media systems. Boczkowski's work points to many ways in which digital changes have had massive effects on the way news is produced and consumed and on the content itself, while making it clear that those changes are related in concrete ways. His work is a call to action for scholars who study the media to do a more comprehensive job studying news consumers, news producers, and content, and to do so using a broader variety of methods.

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