

On Writing in Communication and Media Studies

Introduction to the Forum

PABLO J. BOCZKOWSKI
Northwestern University, USA

MICHAEL X. DELLI CARPINI
University of Pennsylvania, USA

Friendship and drinks. This is how it all started. For over a decade, we have followed the tradition of getting together to chat about work, family, and life over drinks at the annual conferences of the International Communication Association. During the 2017 conference, at a bar in the Gaslamp district of San Diego, the conversation drifted to writing. MIT Press had just published *Remaking the News: Essays on the Future of Scholarship in the Digital Age*, coedited by Boczkowski and Chris Anderson, featuring a postscript by Delli Carpini. Boczkowski shared his observation that one of the issues that had surprised him the most about the process of coediting that volume was the joy that several of the contributors appeared to have experienced, especially in comparison to the typical writing of manuscripts for journal submission. That led to a series of speculations about why this might be the case, the role that changing expectations regarding the volume and outlets for publication might have played, and where the increasing public engagement of communication and media studies scholars might fit into this state of affairs. One of us suggested that it would be interesting and fun to write something about this, and the other enthusiastically agreed. We did not discuss what kind of text we were going to try to write, for which type of publication, or within which time frame. We just began writing.

The process proceeded in fits and starts, with long periods marked by no writing at all. Boczkowski was in the midst of undertaking a large research project, and Delli Carpini was in the final stages of his 16-year tenure as dean. Then, during our annual ICA encounter in Washington, D.C., this year, at yet another bar, we decided that the time was right to bring the writing process to a close. We worked on the text during the summer, trading emails and phone calls, still without a clear sense of where it could be published—or, even, if it was going to be a publishable piece at all. We were only motivated by the interest in putting our thoughts on paper and by the enjoyment of working together. When the text was finalized, we reached out to Larry Gross and inquired whether it might be of interest to the *International Journal of Communication*. With his trademark generosity, Larry not only offered this text a home but also asked whether we might be interested in it being published within a forum that would feature commentaries by colleagues. We were thrilled by the offer, since the text is not only the outgrowth of multiyear conversations but also aimed at fostering conversations across the field of communication and media studies.

We cannot emphasize enough the centrality of the conversational dimension in this writing project. We are animated by a desire to make conversations about writing more explicit. As scholars, we spend a significant portion of our time writing yet devote very little of this time to collectively reflect about writing as a practice. A similar pattern applies to our role as teachers and mentors of graduate students and junior colleagues. Thus, the essay examines ongoing changes in the craft and its institutional context, in part by exploring the rich diversity of genre conventions and practices embodied in different types of texts, from journal articles to edited volumes, and from book monographs to tweets. The text is also conversational in its intent. We have not aimed to write the definite, final word on this subject—something which, of course, we could not accomplish even if we tried—but a series of reflections that we hope will invite further conversations with and without us: by electronic mail, on social media, in the workplace, during academic conferences, and so on. The forum format, we believe, provides an ideal start to what we hope will be a fruitful and—why not—enjoyable series of conversations.

When it came time to suggest possible scholars who could write commentaries, we opted for not including graduate students and untenured colleagues in light of the remarks we make about potential implications for hiring and promotion. Thus, we proposed to the editor a group of six colleagues with significant diversity in terms of stage in career development, theoretical and methodological orientation, areas of interest, and identity and cultural positionalities. We are both honored and humbled that all six of them accepted the invitation to provide comments and took time out of their busy schedules to engage with the text in a highly thoughtful and constructive fashion. Each of them raised a number of important points that have already enriched our essay and our thinking. We cannot do justice in summarizing their contributions, but suffice to say that the breadth of issues that they addressed is an encouraging sign of the potential vitality of the conversations that might emerge, from Silvio Waisbord's injunction not to forget the institutional context to Ingrid Bachmann's articulation of this point in the context of Global South and gender dynamics; from Susan Douglas's dissection of the differences in social scientific and humanistic writing practices to Deen Freelon's proposals to revisit how we think about citation metrics; and from Brooke Foucault Welles's advice to conceive of writing within the peer networks that nourish not only our scholarly output but also the social life that makes it possible to Noshir Contractor's not-so-modest proposal to take things even further and imagine academic futures that are both more collaborative and creative.

We are extremely grateful to the editor for the opportunity of bringing these emerging conversations to colleagues beyond our networks, and to the commentators for getting the ball rolling. The publication process has been a joy, and we could not think of a better start of what we hope will be a series of interlocking, productive, and stimulating dialogues.

Reference

- Boczkowski, P., Anderson, C. W., Pickard, V., Mitchelstein, E., Benson, R., Dutton, W. H., . . . Delli Carpini, M. X. (Eds.). (2018). *Remaking the news: Essays on the future of journalism scholarship in the digital age (inside technology)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.