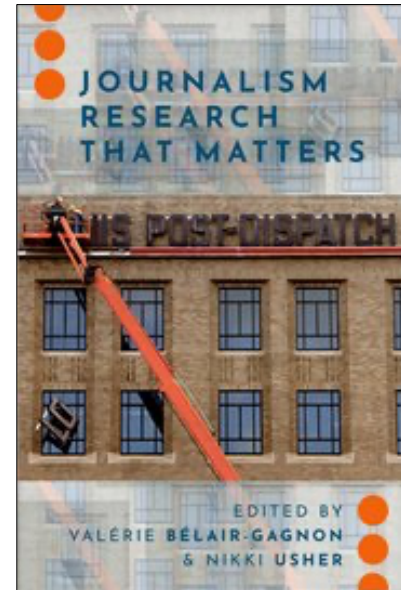


Valérie Bélair-Gagnon and Nikki Usher (Eds.), **Journalism Research That Matters**, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 272 pp., \$99.00 (hardcover), \$29.95 (paperback).

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The book **Journalism Research That Matters**, edited by Valérie Bélair-Gagnon and Nikki Usher, responds to present-day circumstances, challenges, and threats defining the practice of journalism, the business of news media, and the academic task of teaching journalism. As the editors state in the introduction, it is “a confusing time,” one marked by “information disorder” (p. 1). In response, the authors in this collection set out to provide an orienting framework for journalism inquiry and bring insight from the often-remote world of scholarship into practice, to ultimately improve journalism. As such, from the outset, a definition of professional journalism is included to guide the reader—“journalism created to reach mass audiences that follows a fairly standard set of norms, ethics, and practices that structure newsgathering and news production” (p. 3).



The volume is addressed to journalism scholars, practitioners, and those in the business of journalism in general. It is an invaluable and indispensable manual for communicators more broadly—public relations practitioners and instructors, for example, who are training those that will engage with journalists. Edited by sociologist and journalism scholar Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, of the University of Minnesota, and Nikki Usher, journalism and political communication scholar at the University of San Diego and a senior fellow of the Center for Liberty and Journalism, the book gathers a diverse collection of authors who are passionate about bringing journalism research into practice. Most of the contributors are affiliated with academic institutions, and some with press organizations. The collection of studies and perspectives came together as a result of a Minnesota Journalism Center workshop on engaged journalism studies in 2019.

The book is well edited and makes for a smooth and engaging read. The case studies or sites of analysis throughout the volume offer inspiration and food for thought across readers' areas of research, teaching, and storytelling focus. Most chapters, when not grounded in experience, begin with solid grounding in scholarship before moving to the examination of experience in the classroom, of relevant research, or of significant questions to explore at the intersection of journalism research and practice.

Four sections organize the material in the book. The first assesses “The Research-Practice Gap” and includes five chapters that identify the main challenges in translating research into journalistic practice, and provide solutions in response. For example, regarding key public-facing research centers, chapter 2 suggests the need to include more transparency and peer-reviewed research to be included in journalism, which today is a “moving target,” in Jesse Holcomb’s words (p. 33), while chapter 3 offers the concept of

mediators of scholarly work into plain language, “knowledge brokers” in Matthew S. Weber’s words. Social media receives attention in chapter 4 in particular, which analyzes the diminished attention that Facebook posts about academic research receive, as compared with other industry developments. International journalism is tackled head-on in chapter 5, in which author Lindsay Palmer calls for more critique of ethnocentrism in international news coverage, for attention to inequities in journalistic labor across national boundaries, and for direct engagement with freelance and local storytellers and not just with well-known brand newsmakers. This chapter also brings postcolonial studies into conversation with journalism studies, a welcome addition to the volume’s focus.

The second section, “Answering the Crisis in Journalism: Key Research Areas,” offers a collection of new research questions and insights with another five chapters, ranging from news literacy (chapter 6), to the psychology of news consumption as related to engagement and inequities (chapter 7), and to new journalistic business models. The latter is evident in chapter 8, which showcases newsroom collaborations instead of competition, and is particularly useful for under-resourced news organizations. The next two chapters tackle the business of news: in a digital context in Damon Kiesow’s chapter 9, which is focused on a personal journey that highlights human-centered design, and from the perspective of studying journalistic business in chapter 10, authored by Usher and Mark Poepsel.

The third part of the book, “Journalism Research’s Hidden Challenges,” tackles explicit challenges in practice-oriented research, with four chapters that draw from experience around distinct case studies. Chapter 11 draws from a public affairs reporting course that connected students with local communities that are underserved by local media. Jan Lauren Boyles’ chapter 12 describes journalism training experiments, in which data literacy and digital learning improve K-12 journalism education. Chapter 13 (whose author Brian Ekdale’s bio is missing from the list of contributors) poignantly suggests a tighter support network between North and South journalists and academics, to avoid deepening inequities in knowledge production that has favored, and has been oriented toward, the Global North. Chapter 14, written by race and journalism scholar Danielle K. Kilgo, offers a nuanced yet chilling perspective of the relationship between academia and journalism, between scholars’ moral responsibility to contribute to practice and the reality of (slow) change. In her own experience, when she provided local journalists with scholarly data on racialized frames and negative portrayals of racial struggle and crime in local news, her access to the newsroom was discontinued.

The final section, “Journalism Practice Matters,” includes three chapters and a conclusion by Matt Carlson, to close the book with some attention to responses from the industry. Professional journalists offer their perspectives on the topics covered in the book, recalling historical practices of collaboration between journalists and academics and the importance of clear collaboration goals (chapter 15), while chapter 17, written by ProPublica’s (and Twitter’s) Derek Willis, offers on-point questions that journalists want or need answers to about their industry and audiences, and which scholarship can help answer. In between, chapter 16, by Jennifer Moore (whose bio is also regrettably missing from the contributor list), is a call and reminder for what journalism educators should be doing (already?)—and that is preparing students entering this field to understand the point of journalism research. Moore draws from an inspiring example of participatory and engaged journalism and community storytelling. The concluding chapter reflects on the notion of “engagement” and its relativity (instead of universalism) in a complex web of interactions between publics, routines, macro forces, interactions, inactions, and so forth. The editors’ eye for practical suggestions for

journalism scholars does not go unnoticed in the context of the very literature we are surrounded with and that most of us are creating. Despite the compelling argument the book closes with, however, and particularly because this last section is so necessary, it is also strikingly disconnected from the last two chapters of its precedent section; in other words, keener attention to the need to bridge research and practice on the issues of (global or local) equity, of how to more richly engage with diversity, and of how to boost inclusion in journalism are absent in these final words of the volume.

A main strength of the book is the breadth of angles from which the relationship between journalism research and practice is approached. The editors set up the book with an eye out for honesty—to truly engage with the discrepancy between academic writing and the purpose and practice of journalism, to face head-on academic imposter syndrome, to tackle the realism of research-driven solutions to journalistic challenges—and the chapters deliver on this promise.

Another strength of the edited collection is the wealth of questions it gathers, which can serve as wonderful prompts to any meaningful conversation in a newsroom or in a scholarly environment, and importantly, it can lead to meaningful work—reporting- or research-oriented. For instance, the ever-present question about the purpose and goals of the journalism scholar is a theme in several if not all of the chapters. Moore's chapter 16 asks about what collaborations can occur to disrupt long-held routines and conventions. Willis points to key areas that deserve more insight—for instance, the impact of what is being published and the sheer volume of content (and knowledge?) created, and the effect of such pace and volume on career paths. Stephanie Edgerly's chapter 7 concludes with "BIG questions" (in her emphasis), which include how to convey transparency about journalistic values to the public, how to increase news value for younger and lower-educated audiences, and how to avoid news fatigue. Holcomb's chapter 2 asks how to measure or count information using traditional research constructs when we live "in an ecosystem where every business, agency, organization, government, association, and in fact, individual contributes to the public information in any given community" (p. 34).

Readers of this journal and scholars of journalism and communication will benefit from the broad focus of this edited volume. Its richness is practically inspiring—pedagogically, toward new scholarship, and in news reporting and storytelling. The book is necessary for those academics and professionals who seek to understand, explain, and further their own relationship with journalistic research and practice. Follow-up collections will surely thrive in its wake.