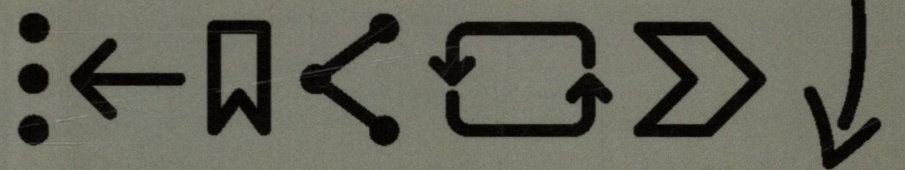


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the news

in a post-

industrial

Stephen Coleman
Nancy Thumim
Chris Birchall
Julie Firmstone
Giles Moss
Katy Parry
Judith Stamper
Jay G. Blumler

How does news circulate in a major post-industrial city?
And how in turn are identities and differences formed
and mediated through this circulation? This seminal work
is the first to offer an empirical examination into, and trace
a city's pattern of, news circulation.

Encompassing a comprehensive range of practices
involved in producing, circulating and consuming 'news'
and recognizing the various ways in which individuals and
groups may find out, follow and discuss local issues and
events, The Mediated City critiques thinking that takes
the centrality of certain news media as an unquestioned
starting point. By doing so, it opens up a discussion: do
we know what news is? What types of media constitute it?
And why does it matter?

'Probably the best study of local news I have ever read. The
Mediated City is a fascinating investigation of one week in
the news ecology of Leeds. Socially embedded, politically
astute, economically concerned and policy aware – this is
a sophisticated study ...'

Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths, University of London

'Drawing on a nuanced conception of what cities are and
why they matter, The Mediated City takes seriously the
idea that urban communication has shifted drastically in
the digital age, but goes far beyond the usual polarized
lamentations or celebrations of internet-era journalism.
This is an important book.'

Chris Anderson, author of Rebuilding the News

'Develops an original and powerful ecological approach
to deliver a rich and nuanced analysis that will interest
citizens, journalists and scholars alike.'

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Reuters Institute for the Study
of Journalism, University of Oxford

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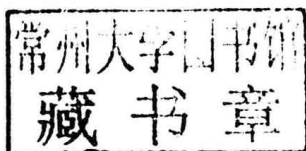
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THE MEDIATED CITY

THE NEWS IN A POST-INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT

*Stephen Coleman, Nancy Thumim,
Chris Birchall, Julie Firmstone, Giles Moss,
Katy Parry, Judith Stamper and Jay G. Blumler*



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London

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The Mediated City

We dedicate this book to the people of Leeds: a population that is never without stories to tell, hear and circulate.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Birchall is a lecturer in digital media at the School of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds. He has a background in computer science and extensive experience in professional digital media production, and his current research interests include the relationship between digital technologies, interpersonal communication and citizenship.

Jay G. Blumler is an emeritus professor of public communication at the University of Leeds and emeritus professor of journalism at the University of Maryland. A past president and fellow of the International Communication Association, he designed the survey instrument for the Leeds News Ecology research.

Stephen Coleman is professor of political communication in the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds. His most recent book is *How Voters Feel* (2013). Recent co-edited collections include *Can the Media Serve Democracy? Essays in honour of Jay G. Blumler* (2015), *Handbook of Digital Politics* (2015) and *Deliberation and Democracy: Innovative processes and institutions* (2015).

Julie Firmstone is associate professor at the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds. Her research investigates a range of issues in the fields of sociology of news, political communications and audience research. Researching the role of the news media and digital forms of communication in engaging citizens in democracy at a local level is one her main research themes.

Giles Moss is lecturer in media policy in the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds. He is co-author of *Understanding Copyright: Intellectual property in the digital age* (2015) and co-editor of *Can the Media Serve Democracy? Essays in honour of Jay G. Blumler* (2015).

Katy Parry is a lecturer in media and communication at the University of Leeds. She is co-author of *Political Culture and Media Genre: Beyond the news* (2012) with Kay Richardson and John Corner. Along with Stephen Coleman and Giles Moss, she co-edited a Festschrift, *Can the Media Serve Democracy? Essays in honour of Jay G. Blumler* (2015).

Judith Stamper is associate professor of broadcast journalism at the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds. She is a former BBC television journalist for *The Money Programme*, *Newsnight* and BBC Yorkshire's evening news programme *Look North*.

Nancy Thumim is a lecturer in media and communication at the University of Leeds. Her book *Self-Representation and Digital Culture* was published in 2012.

CONTENTS

Figures and tables | viii Acknowledgements | ix
About the contributors | x

Introduction: a new news ecology 1

1 Making sense of/in the city 16

2 A week in news 34

3 How citizens receive the news 66

4 How people make sense of the city 89

5 The mainstream providers of local news 109

6 Citizen news-makers and news practices 144

7 ‘Down there in Chapeltown’. 164

8 Mediating democratic accountability: the case of
the care home closures. 182

9 Local news: a different story 206

Appendices | 228
References | 238
Index | 247

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

2.1 Television: prominent story topic. 45

2.2 Radio: prominent story topic 46

2.3 *Yorkshire Evening Post*: prominent story topics 59

3.1 The number of survey respondents stating that they
access a news channel either every day, or never 70

3.2 Sources of further information about something of
interest happening in Leeds 73

3.3 Reasons for accessing local news media 76

3.4 Features of Leeds life covered by local news media 77

3.5 Opinions of national versus local news media 80

Tables

2.1 Geographic focus for television items 38

2.2 Geographic focus for radio news items 40

2.3 Good/bad news 42

2.4 Television: number/proportion of news items including
direct quotations from each actor type 48

2.5 Radio: number/proportion of news items including
direct quotations from each actor type 49

2.6 Television and radio: political story type. 52

2.7 Print media: number of news items by geographic focus 57

INTRODUCTION: A NEW NEWS ECOLOGY

In recent years, and particularly since the emergence of the internet and social media networks, there has been much debate about the future of local news. This debate has been dominated by two contrasting narratives. One is a story of decline and degradation, characterized by a failing business model, massive job losses within local media organizations, a diminished quality of investigative journalism, increasing dependence upon unscrutinized sources, and a dangerous blurring of lines between authoritative, credible news and the ad hoc observations of lay reporters. The other is a story of vibrant reinvention, powered by communication technologies that make possible the networked diffusion of pluralistic accounts, reports and perspectives that move beyond the limitations set by mediating elites and open up localities to a new mode of speaking to and for themselves. The narrative of decline focuses upon loss and deficit, pointing to a crisis of trustworthy channels of public knowledge. The narrative of reinvention emphasizes democratic potential, seeing the emergence of diverse and cross-cutting flows of autonomous, vernacular expression and insight, as a new means by which local experience can be articulated, shared and negotiated.

It is not our aim in this book to subscribe to, or seek to refute, either of these popular narratives. Both are grounded in some truth. In some countries or regions, one narrative seems to possess more explanatory force and relevance than the other, but in no context do either of these accounts do enough to problematize their object of study, which is news itself. It is as if 'news' were a taken-for-granted, known entity; an ontological phenomenon so obvious that it need only be discussed in terms of its enhancement or demise. The displacement of mainstream media by citizen-generated journalism augments the civic quality of 'news', claim the digital enthusiasts. The decline of old media arrangements leads to a news deficit, lament the traditionalists. In neither case do observers question what it is that is flourishing or languishing. The pictures of news to which such accounts give rise are always incomplete, for they exclude a range

of communicative practices involved in the making and reception of what might count as news. Researchers who study news have tended to be remarkably confident that they know what it is and how it comes about. The aim of our study has been to resist such certainties and to regard our object of study as a much less stable feature of contemporary culture than it has sometimes been taken for.

This book arises out of research collaboration between a group of scholars who set out to monitor and explain the mediation of news within a major British city. We seek to demonstrate in the chapters that follow how news is a feature of local culture and culture is, in part at least, a product of the stories that circulate within local news. Both the stories that a city tells itself and the practices whereby such stories circulate constitute a dynamic definition of local news.

We are not only interested in understanding local media, but processes of local mediation. As Silverstone (1999: 13) argued, mediation involves ‘producers and consumers of media in a more or less continuous activity of engagement and disengagement, with meanings that have their source or their focus in those mediated texts, but which extend through, and are measured against, experience in a multitude of different ways’. The pulsating experiential texture of the city is both source and product of mediation. The playing out of that dialectic is the central theme of this book.

The account we offer here is not, we hope, peculiar to one British city. We are well aware of the dangers of generalizing insensitively on the limited basis of UK or US studies, but we are also reasonably confident that what we have to say about our city tells a story about the conditions, changes and challenges of making and receiving local news in many post-industrial, socially fragmented contexts.

We begin our study by acknowledging that cities are conglomerations of people who can neither know nor ignore one another. The circulation of local news is one of the ways by which relations of enduring coexistence are maintained. Both the normative importance of such shared urban narratives (Dewey 1927; Stamm 1985; Kaniss 1991; McLeod et al. 1999; Oliver and Myers 1999; Friedland 2001; Couldry and Markham 2006; Kovach and Rosensteil 2006), and their empirical forms (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001; Shah et al., 2001; Paek et al. 2005; Heider et al. 2005; Franklin 2006, 2013; Anderson 2010; Costera Meijer 2013; Dickens et al. 2015), have been the subject of scholarship for almost a century.