INTRODUCTION

The new terrain of mediated politics

James Morrison, Jen Birks and *Mike Berry*

From the institutional politics of national elections, policy and legislation to the protest politics of the street and social media, from the geopolitics of international cooperation to the rise of nationalist populism, political journalism has been at the forefront of reporting the most significant and dramatic stories of our time. But political reporters are also there beavering away dutifully (if unglamorously) at the most local, even hyper-local, levels: covering provincial elections, public inquiries and meetings of devolved assemblies; interrogating the spending plans and expense accounts of local councilors; and humanizing stories about small-scale but important issues that are 'political' in the broadest sense of the term, from pressures on schools, hospitals and care homes to cuts in social protection to overcrowded prisons.

This edited collection aims to reflect the scale and diversity of contemporary political coverage, and how it is evolving to meet the complex, multifarious challenges and opportunities presented by the collision of today's hyper-mediated news sphere with the ever more mediatized realm of politics itself. As the Donald Trumps and Boris Johnsons of this world sidestep legitimate scrutiny by harnessing the direct messaging channels offered by social media to bypass the inquisitorial interviews and gatekeeper-driven editorial processes of old, how does this shift the power balance between elite political actors and journalists? More importantly, where does it leave the 'everyday' political actors for whom access to clear, accurate and (ideally) non-partisan news and information is so vital, and on whose trust and allegiance the authority of those elites depends: their citizens and voters? And what of

the ever-increasing seepage of the political realm into our daily lives, through social media and the politics of podium and protest? To what extent has the power of conventional media outlets been usurped by that of new platforms, the revival of older ones, and the marriage of the two into what Chadwick (2017) calls a hybrid media system? Similarly, are memes supplanting placards, as speeches, slogans and images of mass gatherings and riots go viral on Twitter? In sum, to what extent has the pre-eminence of the 'primary and secondary definers' of old (Hall et al, 1978) – the elite media and political 'agenda-setters' of the analogue era (McCombs, 1997) – been upended by the democratization of online debate, and the growing profile of new forms of 'opinion leader' (Katz, 1987), not least the celebritized and/or youthful influencers of the YouTube and TikTok generation(s)?

These are just some of the bigger questions the chapters in this volume seek to answer. But equally important are the more fundamental, practical ways in which the multimedia revolution (to revive what now seems a passe phrase) has transformed the everyday professional norms and procedures of political news production. As has been well documented, the story of journalism in the first two decades of the 21st century is that of a process of more or less continuous 'digital disruption' (e.g. Lawrence et al, 2018), as first the emergence of the Internet then the advent of 'Web 2.0' (Pisani, 2006) and social media progressively challenged longstanding top-down processes of sourcing, reporting and commenting on the news by privileged 'news-makers' (Tumber & Webster, 2006).

Over time, 'audiences' have increasingly been able to engage as active participants – liking, sharing and commenting on published content, and, at times, publicly and persuasively contesting the authority of editors, journalists and the supposedly expert 'knowers' and 'claims-makers' on whom they depend (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). The 'we know best'

gatekeepers of old have had to learn to live with a new world of armchair ‘gatewatchers’ (Bruns, 2005), ‘produsers’ (Bruns, 2008) and, latterly, ‘fact-checkers’ (Birks, 2020). These more proactive social (and, at least, small-p political) actors have shown themselves willing to take on elite versions of reality by posting alternative accounts or explanations. They base these on asserted personal expertise and, at times, eyewitness testimony, video footage and other forms of user-generated content. Latterly, this includes correctives to disputed official lines based on more systematic, and increasingly professionalized, forms of verification.

This trend towards a more levelling, democratic and inclusive ‘political public sphere’ (Habermas et al, 1974) has not, of course, been without its downsides: witness the explosion of dubious, at times willfully inaccurate, ‘post-truth’ claims or ‘alternative facts’ (Barrera et al, 2020), more often than not politically motivated, which continues to spark concerns about the spread of ‘fake news’ (a topic to which this book repeatedly, and unavoidably, returns). At its most dynamic and pluralistic, however, the shifting power balance between audiences/citizens/voters and elite actors has led to media and political discourses embracing a far wider range of stories and voices than ever used to be the case – rocket-boosting the process by which ‘great issues of the day’ have historically been forced onto the public agenda through (in the words of Jurgen Habermas) the campaigning actions of the ‘civil-social periphery’ (1996: 381-2).

In the realm of political journalism especially, these new modes of engagement have provided platforms for minority voices and previously under-represented, even marginalized, groups. By opening up the public sphere to ideas and perspectives long ignored by mainstream media, they have widened the definition of what we *mean* by ‘political journalism’ – while (however incrementally) promoting the beginnings of genuine societal

change, through the construction and mobilization of powerful counter-hegemonic discourses and movements, often with global reach, ranging from Occupy to Extinction Rebellion to Black Lives Matter.

For all these positive outcomes of post-Web 2.0 upheaval, however, there have been significant adjustment issues. Early predictions that the affordances of the Internet would embolden us all to widen our horizons by engaging with divergent ideas and opinions have been repeatedly confounded by research suggesting that most of us have narrowed our parameters, by gravitating to online comfort zones, echo-chambers and 'filter bubbles' that (seen through a political lens) merely reflect and reinforce our existing worldviews (e.g. (Bruns, 2019). While there is nothing new about 'selective exposure' (see Iyengar et al, 2008), today we can personalize our news diets (often unintentionally) with a swipe of a smartphone screen or momentary Google search, as algorithms tailor our daily diets of news and information to our past and predictive selections. This development is particularly problematic for professional political journalists (particularly those working in legacy media), as they struggle to maintain and/or reassert their status as reliable and accurate truth-tellers, in the face of valid criticisms of their past failings and a growing disconnect between newer audiences and newsgathering practices which (to many) feel outmoded, unengaging and, at times, untrustworthy – a crisis of legitimacy addressed by several of our contributors.

The nature of political news coverage has also increasingly been dumbed down, tabloidized and/or 'celebrified' (Wheeler, 2013), with narrower, more commercial news agendas and personality-based political narratives too often trumping meaningful reporting of complex issues, as news providers pursue a mission to 'engage and enrage' that prioritizes pageviews over the public interest (Morrison, 2020). Where more difficult topics are addressed,

coverage is frequently tarnished by divisive and stigmatizing language and imagery, while the public discourse it generates on social media and other online forums can descend into petty point-scoring, incivility and (at times) vitriolic abuse. The new opportunities available for counter-discursive and minority voices to gain a hearing online have also been accompanied by a rise in well-funded 'hyper-partisan' and populist platforms and analytics-driven aggregating sites, giving rise to questions about the provenance and authenticity of much of what is presented as fact (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). All of which takes us back to the thorny problem of 'fake news' (McNair, 2017): a digital reincarnation of doublespeak, misinformation and/or propaganda which, when combined with already mounting cynicism about both journalism and politics, threatens to further erode trust in our Fourth Estate.

This collection of papers by some of the world's leading academics working in the fields of political communication and media studies examines how the forces and factors described above are transforming the values and practices of political journalism; the nature, variety and news-seeking behaviors of audiences; the breadth, substance and tenor of public debate; the relationship between journalists, their sources and their publics; and the status of citizens themselves, including the way that they are variously addressed as subjects, voters, consumers and media-political actors in their own right. Featuring contributions from a mix of leading international scholars and emerging academic researchers, it introduces a wide range of theoretical insights and methodological approaches – adopting a purview which sets its sights well beyond the 'Western world', to explore the media systems across north, south and eastern Europe, South-east Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In exploring the key concepts and concerns that are presently preoccupying experts in this dynamic multidisciplinary field, the book draws on a mix of primary and secondary academic research – including empirical chapters based on everything from interviews, ethnography and discourse analysis to

quantitative statistical methods.

Speaking truth to power: the history and evolution of ‘fake news’

Part one of this book tackles the most prominent current concern about the world in which political journalism operates: that we have entered a ‘post-truth’ era characterized by the proliferation of ‘fake news’. While this term initially came to prominence to describe deceptive stories without any basis in fact, often published on imitations of newspaper websites, it was subsequently repurposed (notably by President Trump) as a criticism of professional political journalism, in an effort to capitalize on mounting distrust of mainstream media and a wider decline in deference to authorities. The term ‘fake news’ has since been more widely weaponized, including by mainstream political actors, to challenge the ways in which disputed (and, in many cases, demonstrably false) truth-claims have been mobilized to promote the agendas of both Left and Right – often by the very alternative media outlets that have been championed as platforms for valid counter-hegemonic viewpoints, even as harbingers of ‘the truth’, by critics of the establishment confirmation biases of liberal elites.

But how genuinely ‘new’, let alone native to or uniquely symptomatic of the digital age, are any of these arguments? Was there ever an era in which political journalism – and political discourse more broadly – was based on claims and assertions that could be regarded as overwhelmingly ‘true’ or ‘real’? This introductory section casts a longitudinal eye over the many ways in which truth has been negotiated and contested by political journalists through time – teasing out key historical trends that would go on to set the scene for the often febrile debates about the validity, authenticity and trustworthiness of political truth-claims today.

Unlike the rest of the book, the section is rather ‘western-centric’: adopting a purview which draws particularly heavily on the evolution of normative journalistic traditions in the United Kingdom, United States and mainland Europe. This is, in part, a reflection of the earlier emergence of formalized ‘political journalism’ in these contexts than elsewhere, but also the fact that these countries were relatively early adopters of the academic study of media and communication (and that of political communication more specifically). However, while the specific case studies on which these early chapters focus may have a disproportionate western bias, they introduce a range of broad and important themes that are explored against a much more international, and at times global, canvas throughout the rest of the book.

Brian Cathcart’s opening chapter offers us something of a crash course in the evolution of the Burkian imaginary of the British ‘Fourth Estate’ – from the earnest DIY scribblings of polemical 17th century pamphleteers through the drawn-out and stilted aggregation of parliamentary proceedings in the earliest national newspapers to the slow emergence of professionalized norms of political newsgathering, journalistic objectivity and (notional) impartiality. His critically reflective but respectful overview of the slow-burn professionalization of political reporting and commentary is counterpointed by the stark reality of partisan bias in the first decades of the 20th century, as unmasked in **David Deacon and Dominic Wring’s** analysis of the ingrained hostility to socialism which has continued to characterize the British national press to this day in Chapter 2.

In the third chapter, **Erik Neveu** also approaches the issue of bias among political journalists (and news organizations), but from both a wider European and more conceptual perspective – arguing that the perpetuation of group-think, insider logics and partisan loyalties within the field is, in one sense, an inevitable result of the ‘embedded’ context in which such

practitioners operate (a criticism all too often also levelled at journalists specializing in sport, business and the arts). Happily, he offers some potential solutions for future practice, based on the lessons of the past – arguing that some of the 'most innovative political reporting' has been generated by those from outside the politics 'newsbeat' itself, from citizen journalists covering protests using mobile phones and social media to general reporters who have extended the definition of 'the political' beyond the narrow confines of party politicking to the eminently *politicizable* issues that affect people's 'ordinary lives', such as health, education and jobs. Moreover, in a heartening defense of the virtues of in-depth academic inquiry, he argues that political journalism, particularly that of the more investigative kind, has much to learn from the inductive empirical approaches adopted by social science researchers.

Such lateral, innovative and mold-breaking approaches to political journalism seem even more welcome when set against the picture of hyper-celebritized, performative politics painted by **John Corner** in Chapter 4 – a pattern of carefully choreographed behavior and branding which has become increasingly prevalent across the globe in recent decades. While drawing our attention back to Trump and Johnson, Corner explores how these latter-day one-man political brands draw on a long tradition of calculated image-making that seeks to fuse (and confuse) the 'relationship between personality, policy and language'.

We close this section, mercifully, with another ray of hope, as **Jen Birks** explores the evolution of one of the most positive recent trends in political journalism. This is the increasing role and importance of the various (more and less professional) forms of journalistic 'fact-checking': a practice which both draws and, importantly, *builds* on honorable housekeeping traditions, particularly common in US newsrooms, of double-

checking the quotes and information on which news reports are based. Where this new iteration of the verification process can claim to improve on that which came before is in the often dedicated attention it pays to fact-checking competing claims from multiple sources – encompassing both political and media actors – and empowering audiences to 'make better judgements' based not only on simple affirmations of the truth of this statistic or that, but the reasoned and evidence-based 'interpretation' it can provide 'of the ways in which the facts are used appropriately or misleadingly in arguments'.

Political Journalism and Media Systems: Political Economy and Journalistic Professionalism

The freedom, agency and professional ethics of political journalism are variously constrained and enabled by the political systems within which they function. Comparisons between democratic and authoritarian systems have come a long way since the empirically thin, ideological conceptualizations of Siebert at al. (1956) from the midst of the Cold War. Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's (2004) study of North America and Western Europe established the framework by which we can understand the nuanced variation within 'the west', which has since been developed and tested by other scholars not only in the west (see Hallin and Mancini 2017 for a detailed review) but beyond (e.g. Voltmer 2012).

The original framework set out four dimensions of media systems: the breadth and maturity of the media market; the extent to which there was internal pluralism (impartiality and balance) or external pluralism (party-press parallelism); the level of journalistic autonomy and professionalism; and the role of the state in terms of regulation and subsidy (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Examining data across the 18 countries included in the study, they proposed

three distinct models, only one of which accorded with the dominant liberal pluralist ideal defined in the US and found only in the 'North Atlantic' region of North America, Ireland and, to an extent, the UK.

Even within the UK, however, there are variations in media systems, reflecting the distinct political and economic contexts of the four nations following devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland two decades ago. **Marina Dekavalla's** chapter on Scottish political journalism (Chapter 6) explores two countervailing trends: on one hand, she documents a resurgence in popular political engagement following the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence; on the other hand, the economic pressures of falling advertising revenues and increasingly fierce competition with tartanized editions of the national press throw the future of an independent Scottish media into doubt.

At the local level, as **Julie Firmstone and Rebecca Whittingham** attest in their following chapter, these economic pressures are already decimating local media provision. Whilst the local press have adapted to digital distribution and made local journalists more responsive to reader feedback, they are also judged on readership metrics that privilege sensationalist clickbait over public interest reporting. Reporters on local newspapers are also increasingly centralized in offices geographically remote from the communities they serve, and their work often involves tailoring generic stories to the locality rather than fostering a sense of shared identity by covering local events.

A second model identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) was the Democratic Corporatist model found in Scandinavian and other North European countries. These systems are marked by strong state intervention to ensure diversity in the market and deliver public service broadcasting; and combine external pluralism with high journalistic professionalism, though

Hallin and Mancini expected economic pressures to reduce the distinctiveness of this region. In Chapter 8, **Sigurd Allern** finds that the internal pluralism of the Liberal model is now more common than press-party parallelism, but instead there is an increasing trend of interpretive journalism, as also explored in Jen Birks' chapter in Part I, and finds little evidence for convergence toward a US-dominated Liberal model. There is also an unusually optimistic outlook for the continued importance of professional political journalism, which Allern argues remains dominant in the region, despite the digital challengers.

Hallin and Mancini's (2004) third model is 'Polarized Pluralism', which they identified in Southern European countries with a recent history of fascism and authoritarian political systems. The partisanship of the press largely operates through clientalistic relationships – of appointments and patronage, and expectations of loyalty. Similar mechanisms can also be identified in Eastern Europe. Under Viktor Orbán, Hungary is sliding down the RSF media freedom index, and in Chapter 10, **Péter Bajomi-Lázár** explores the latest transformations to its media system in response to the Russification or Putinization of the political system, placing this in a historical context of previous external influences. Whilst there is a long and tenacious history of clientelism, Bajomi-Lázár argues that journalistic professionalism nonetheless briefly flourished in a period of post-1989 external pluralism, only to be replaced by a ruthlessly one-party clientelism by Orbán's Fidesz party.

Of course, in applying media systems theory beyond the western world, the dimensions require some adjustment. Voltmer (2012) argues that Hallin and Mancini's dimensions are still valid for liberal, hybrid and transitional democracies in Eastern Europe and the global south, but need to be expanded in terms of their scope and kind. The most obvious distinction is in the range of state intervention, with direct control of state media and

oppressive censorship laws differing greatly from public service broadcasting and transparent regulation. In recent years, Russia has transitioned from a relatively liberal democratic political system that emerged post-Glasnost, to a hybrid system sometimes described as a managed democracy or competitive authoritarianism, and with a media system that **Elena Vartanova** describes in Chapter 7 as 'statist-commercial'. She argues that this is not only an inheritance of the Soviet instrumentalization of the media, but goes back further to Tsarist Imperial Russia, and is part of an ongoing conflict between two ideological traditions: Slavophilism and Westernism. However, the affordances of commercial digital media have facilitated some political pluralism and facilitated the rise of opposition figures' support.

In South-east Asia, digital media has also been a critical factor, and in Malaysia has seen historic, albeit perhaps short-lived, changes in the political environment. In Chapter 11, **Niki Cheong** argues that Malaysia's undefeated ruling coalition, secure in their control of mainstream news media, allowed the internet freer rein in return for inward investment. Once online news-sites, bloggers and social media became troublesome to the regime the state apparatus was mobilized, to intimidate and prosecute opponents. Cheong argues that the government uses rhetoric of 'fake news' and opposition 'disinformation' as legitimation for censorship laws and a smokescreen for their own propaganda and spin via organized teams of 'cybertroopers'. Whilst the ruling coalition lost the 14th general election in 2018, Malaysia's media and political systems remain largely intact.

Finally, a timely chapter by **Tina Burrett** examines the five-year period in which Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy shared power in Myanmar with the military until the coup in February 2021. Drawing on interviews with journalists, she finds that the Nobel Prize-winning leader not only frustrated expectations by failing to condemn military

atrocities against the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine, but also failed to protect the journalists who tried to report them, and even used the same repressive media and security laws against them. Burrett finds that underlying this is that pronounced ethnic and religious divides are entrenched society, demonstrating the significant impact of a country's history and culture in perpetuating political and media systems.

Pluralism, partisanship, populism – trends in the politics journalists report

In part three of the book, we turn out attention to addressing the trends towards greater political polarization and fragmentation in the gathering and delivery of political news. Western (especially European) media has long exhibited external pluralism (for example, diversity in the range of partisan positions taken by newspapers within an overall press market), rather than the internal pluralism associated with norms of 'impartiality' and 'balance': put simply, the range of voices and perspectives aired within the pages of an individual paper. But one of the most marked trends in the nature of latter-day political journalism – driven, in part, by the shift to predominantly online patterns of news consumption – has been the hyper-fragmentation of audiences into wildly disparate, often polarized, echo-chambers and filter bubbles. Such radically partisan sites range from *Breitbart*, 'paper of record' of the US alt-Right, to self-proclaimed left-wing UK-based 'alternative media organizations' such as *The Canary* and *Novara Media*.

The chapters in this section also explore the increasing threats posed to meaningful democratic deliberation by populist rhetoric, the personalization of politics, the routinization of sensationalist scandal, and the proliferation (even in mainstream and legacy media) of combative but trivial 'horse-race' politics (Kuhn & Neveu, 2003) and 'Punch and Judy'

leadership-focused narratives.

Leading the charge here is **Michael Higgins'** typological exploration of the multifarious 'new populisms' that characterize much of today's elite political scene, and the challenges journalists face in striving to understand and interrogate them. Returning us to a discussion of some of the themes introduced in our introductory section – notably the construction of traditional media outlets as elitist 'enemies of the people' and purveyors of 'fake news' – Higgins' analysis wrestles with the way journalistic attention can (often unwittingly) amplify populist rhetorics and the messages they project. Central to the chapter is a preoccupation with the 'discourses of masculinity' mobilized by strong-man culture warriors such as Trump – a figure whose baleful legacy inevitably haunts this book, despite his recent fall from power.

While Higgins makes extensive reference to the role of social media, it is in **Delia Dumitrica's** subsequent chapter that this much-debated deliberative domain is tackled head on, as she addresses the question of the extent to which it can justifiably be held culpable for the 'recent visibility of populism'. But this chapter's most important contribution is the debate it opens up around the increasingly normative application of the term 'populism' – in the news media, academia and the world of politics itself – and she concludes by offering some sage advice as to how we might move beyond using it as a 'self-explanatory' descriptor, to instead recognize 'populist communication' not as a *cause* of the degradation of political debate (and of politics) but a 'symptom'. Only by doing so, she argues, can we move towards identifying and, ultimately, treating the underlying '"disease"'.

We move from wide-ranging considerations of the nature and range of contemporary forms

of populism, and the forces promoting it, to an in-depth case study in the chapter by **Jason Roberts and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen**. Here the discursive strategies of *Breitbart* are anatomized in all their multidimensional detail. The authors propose a 'three-Vs' typology to distinguish between the multiple discursive strategies mobilized on Steve Bannon's Trumpist website: those of 'victory' (over political opponents), 'victimhood' (framed as the erosion of hallowed conservative values) and 'vilification' (again, of those opposed to its alt-Right ideology).

Veering our focus eastwards, **Tina Burrett's** chapter addresses similar themes through a textual analysis of Russian news reports of the poisonings (a decade apart) of Alexander Litvinenko and Sergei Skripal. Applying a similar definition of hyper-partisanship to Roberts and Wahl-Jorgensen (and others in this volume), she demonstrates how state-directed legacy media can be as guilty of this as any new-fangled 'alternative news' outlet.

On a more hopeful note, **Herman Wasserman** offers us a window into the increasingly professionalized journalistic practices and flourishing forms of pluralism being adopted in Uganda and across other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Among the intriguing trends he notes is the growth of forms of political journalism that challenge long-established norms in 'the Global North', including what might loosely be termed journalistic activism, such as the 'mediated resistance' of 'rumor, humor and gossip' that was 'circulated orally and through mobile phone networks' in the context during the years of political crisis in Zimbabwe.

In **Paul Rowinski's** following chapter we swing back to Europe – and, specifically, to the recent resurgence of Italian populism in the person of Matteo Salvini, Eurosceptic leader of the Northern League. The chapter interrogates the essence of Salvini's particular brand of

culture-war rhetoric through a micro-analysis of a now-notorious speech in which he conflated his condemnation of the Pope with a demonizing tirade against 'illegal immigrants': twin evils he sought to position as the sources of Italy's economic and political woes.

Public engagement in political journalism: Audience reception, interaction and participation

In the fourth part of this volume, we shift focus to think about the audience for news and politics. One of the most striking features of the contemporary media environment is how the internet and social media is reconfiguring audiences and their relationships to news organizations. At one level this involves audiences being presented with the opportunity to interact with a much wider and more fluid set of news sources. We have come a long way from the pre-internet era where the press and broadcasting duopoly dominated the dissemination of public information. In the modern media ecosystem audiences can access a plethora of news sources of varying qualities when and where they want. The degree to which this has diminished the power of traditional news organization or rather shifted power to the tech giants is an area of huge controversy. There are also serious questions about whether this fragmentation of audiences is driving political polarization and dissolving the sense of shared reality and experience than binds democracies together. The American political scientist Benedict Anderson (1991) famously defined the nation as an 'imagined community' with the mass media acting as kind of social glue which bound different groups together in a sense of shared purpose. But what happens when the media no longer acts to bring groups together but instead is purposely weaponized to drive division and even violence?

Another theme that runs through this section involves the increase in audience activity and the wide-ranging implications that this has for politics and journalism. Consumers of news and politics are no longer merely passive vessels waiting to have information served up to them. Most are now also routinely distributing and commenting on the information produced by professional journalists. Even at the most banal level of merely sharing news this is revolutionizing the way that the public access information and forcing news organization to constantly adapt so as to not find themselves being left behind in the modern attention economy. However, the contemporary dominance of social media and algorithmic logic is also forcing journalists and media organizations to adopt and integrate the logic of social media into all aspects of their operations. Finally, this section is also concerned with how the modern media ecosystem represents and conceptualizes citizens – both publicly and through various form of more opaque data capture. These developments as we will see have far reaching implications for freedom, democracy and the economic sustainability of media systems.

In his opening chapter **Mike Berry** explores audience knowledge and understanding of the subject that typically dominates political discourse and election campaigns – the economy. He reviews both the traditional ‘top-down’ literature that examines public knowledge of key statistical indicators as well as ‘bottom-up’ research on lay theories of the economy, that has burgeoned since the Great Financial Crisis. Berry finds that whilst knowledge is heavily stratified by demographic factors, some ways of seeing cut across all social groups- most importantly the tendency to see the economy as akin to a fixed container or household budget. Berry then considers how these patterns of audience belief affected the reception of media messages about the Great Financial Crisis and the turn to austerity. He finds that public

misapprehensions about the economy left the public extremely vulnerable to misinformation and propaganda. The chapter closes by offering some suggestions about how reporting in this area could be improved.

The issue of media power and reception also runs through **Jacob Nelson's** chapter on partisan selective exposure. As Nelson notes the proliferation of media choice created by the internet and social media has raised concerns about whether people are increasingly isolating themselves in an information environment which confirms their own political prejudices. This fear of partisan selective exposure underpins concerns over 'echo chambers', 'filter bubbles' and the rise of 'fake news'. But how much solid evidence is there to actually support these anxieties? Nelson reviews the literature on this question and finds that most people are not restricting themselves to a diet of highly partisan outlets. Instead, most people tend to draw on a small number of familiar mainstream news organizations. Nelson suggests that such misplaced concerns can lead stakeholders and academics to misdiagnose the challenges that journalism currently faces and calls for more audience focused research to identify genuine problems.

The next chapter, by **Andrew Ross**, **Christian Vaccari** and **Andrew Chadwick**, examines how digital media has changed the representation of public opinion and considers the wide-ranging ramifications of this shift. In the period before the internet era the public were primarily exposed to opinion cues through the reporting of polling, or vox pops. However, in the social media era people are increasingly exposed to online manifestations of opinion through likes, shares and comments. These online opinion cues are then picked up by professional news organizations, thus amplifying their reach. As Ross, Vaccari and Chadwick note, research

suggests that such cues can have powerful effects on public opinion, since they provide people with a sense of the majority consensus on political and social issues. However, due to the prevalence of orchestrated online disinformation campaigns using bots and sock puppets, there is a real danger that news audiences and journalists are becoming more vulnerable to manipulation from fake opinion cues.

The implications of social media news-sharing for news organizations and journalists are also a key theme of the next three contributions to this section**.** **Alex Bruns**' chapter on the evolution of 'Gatewatching and News Curation' shows how the rise of social media has deepened public engagement with news. Whereas the first wave of 'gate watching' was largely pursued by citizen journalists, bloggers and those with specialized knowledge, the arrival of social media has now broadened and democratized the process. As Bruns demonstrates, this is reconfiguring journalism as reporters increasingly seek to collaborative with audiences in the practice of news curation. It also changing the structures of news organizations as they are becoming increasingly pressured to produce 'viral' content.

If social media has intensified the degree to which audiences monitor and shape the activities of journalists and news organizations, the obverse is also true: it has forced reporters and media companies to focus on how they assemble and manage different audiences. How this is accomplished is the subject of the chapter from **Marcel Broersma**. In it, Broersma focuses on how, through various repertoires of practices, journalists and organizations assemble brand, issue and beat publics. Creating brand publics – which consist of social media followings attached to reporters or news organizations – requires different strategies to managing more ephemeral publics structured around particular issues, stories or events. Beat publics are online

extensions of the offline social relations that cluster around specific news beats. As Broersma notes, simultaneously managing all three publics can be highly challenging since there are inevitable tensions between the kinds of personal discursive strategies that can successfully build and cement large audiences and the necessity to maintain a detached and professional persona. Ultimately, he argues, the need to cater to these three publics has created both opportunities and dangers for journalists which are forcing them to walk an increasingly precarious tightrope.

The double-edged nature of social media for journalists and news organizations is also a major focus of the chapter on the rise of 'viral journalism' from **Anna Denisova.** In it, Denisova first examines the various ways that viral journalism has been defined before situating it within the context of the contemporary social media ecosystem and attention economy. As she notes, the pressures to create shareable content with high potential to go viral is forcing news organizations to deliver their stories using a variety of packages and formats - including interactive graphs, gifs, looped videos, cartoons and quote cards. Denisova reviews a series of recent case studies of viral journalism which illustrate both the potential benefits and pitfalls of this new phenomenon.

The issues raised by virality are also part of the backdrop to the chapter from **Tina Askanius** and **Sophie Bjork-James** which closes this section. In it they examine the challenges posed to journalism by the rise of the extreme right. Askanius and Bjork-James highlight the example of the Danish far-right extremist, Rasmus Paludan, whose rise to public attention was driven by his Youtube video channel and the way that the platform's recommendation algorithm classified his videos as 'hot right now' increasing their prominence in the feeds of children and

young people. Drawing on interviews with both Swedish and US journalists, they explore how journalism manages the tensions between maintaining a commitment to free speech and avoiding radicalizing its audiences. As Askanius and Bjork-James note, this is especially challenging in a media environment that is under tremendous economic stress and in which the pressure to chase clicks is considerable. They close the chapter by offering some concrete suggestions for how journalists can produce reportage on the extreme right that fulfils their democratic responsibility to their audiences while avoiding amplifying and legitimizing such movements.

Political agenda-setting, media effects and voting behavior

At the center of most discussions about the role of media and political journalism is the question of influence and how the information environment affects what the public thinks and knows. In the period before the advent of the internet most research focused on trying to establish – both empirically and theoretically – how media impacted knowledge, beliefs and behavior. From agenda setting to framing to the intense controversies over the relationship between viewing television violence and aggressive behavior, much of the concern over media was predicated on beliefs about 'effects'. However, the contemporary media ecosystem has made the task of identifying effects much more challenging as in addition to television and newspapers, researchers now have to factor in the impact of a range of digital sources. The chapters in this section attempt to grapple with these shifts and think about they impact audiences, journalists and political movements.

The first three chapters of this section focus on how the digital age has forced scholars to reappraise and reconfigure some of the most influential theories in communication and media studies. In the opening chapter **Darren Lilleker** and **Shelley Thompson** explore how the digital age has transformed traditional notions of gate-keeping. The chapter takes a normative approach in suggesting that the surge in misinformation and disinformation - driven in significant part by the confluence of populist politicians and social media - has placed a heavy responsibility on journalists to re-assert their role as information gate-keepers and public educators. Lilleker and Thompson argue this must involve journalists taking a more reflexive and active role in deciding what is news, who is a credible source and what is actually true.

The question of how we should reevaluate theories of media effects in the digital era is the subject of the next chapter in this section. In it, **Adam Shehata.** reassesses the value of three classic media theories: agenda-setting, framing and cultivation theory in light of the major changes in the media environment over the previous two decades. These shifts. he suggests, should lead us not to abandon such theories entirely but instead be to more attuned to the conditionalities of media effects particularly in relation to content selection processes. Shehata concludes by urging that future research concentrates how on the interactions of ideological rationalization, personal experiences, social networks and mediated communication in the process of long-term attitude formation. The third chapter in this section from **Jason Martin** looks specifically at how agenda-setting theory is being updated for the digital media environment. The chapter focuses in particular on how social contacts, partisan news sites and online disinformation contribute to agenda setting. As Martin notes, the interactions between these key variables can now be more readily mapped through exploration of big data and new methodologies such as semantic network analysis.

Ultimately, he concludes these theoretical and methodological innovations will facilitate a deepening of our understanding of ‘agenda setting in a networked world’.

If the previous three chapters of this section have concentrated on how shifts in the media ecosystem have impacted on how researchers conceptualize the relationship between journalism and audiences, the next two chapters focus on how political actors – primarily at the margins – have adapted their strategies and messaging to take advantage of the affordances offered by social media, **Andreu Casero-Ripollés** examines new strategies used by digital activists, ‘connective parties’ and right-wing extremists to shift the traditional power dynamins between political sources and professional journalists. As Casero-Ripollés demonstrates one aspect of this involves using social media in an attempt to influence the public agenda. However, it also borrows the tactics of populism by striving to increase polarization in order to undermine the legitimacy of mainstream political journalism. He concludes that political journalism is going to have find ways to adapt to avoid further erosion to its standing in the public sphere. The issue of delegitimation is also the subject of **Andrew Ross**’s chapter on internet memes - but this time in the context of American political campaigning. Ross provides an analysis of how political partisans weaponized memes on social media during the 2020 US Presidential Election in an attempt to discredit Joe Biden, As Ross demonstrates political memes have the power to quickly and effectively present a negative message by tapping into familiar images – such as stills from well-known movies - which have a broad and immediate cultural resonance. Furthermore, the fact the creation and initial posting of memes tends to be anonymous helps to reduce barriers to expression whilst also removing any requirement to be truthful.

The issue of political legitimacy and how it is expressly gendered is the subject of the next chapter in this section from **Emily Harmer**. Harmer, drawing on a wide international literature, demonstrates how men tend to dominate political news whilst are women often reported using damaging stereotypes – particularly if they are seen to violate gender norms. This problem has been accentuated by the turn to a more personalized form of politics over the last three decades where women find themselves often framed primarily in terms of their appearance or age - rather than their political skills, However, Harmer argues this gendering of politics can also create problems for men, citing the examples of Ed Miliband, Jimmy Carter and Howard Dean all of whom were either feminized or reported negatively for not living up to a traditional masculine stereotype.

This section concludes with a discussion of one of the most significant developments in recent British electoral history – the televised leaders' debates. **Richard Danbury** asks what purpose the audience serves in these gladiatorial contests and how they should behave? To address the first part of this question Danbury draws on Coleman's distinction between Spectacle – 'an event which is designed to deliver drama and dazzle' - and Reflection – 'an opportunity for an increase in the flow of relevant political information'. To address the second part of the question Danbury suggests focusing on the difference between Process and Outcome analyses of Democracy. These distinctions, he argues can also provide a fruitful way of think about audiences and political journalism more generally.

Political controversies: single issue politics, grassroots advocacy and campaigning in the news

In this final part of the book, we turn to alternative journalism, protest, and single-issue politics, to explore how controversies are debated, contested and reported. Professional journalism doesn't have a great track record in reporting protest as a form of legitimate political communication, though research suggests that the 'protest paradigm' of marginalization and misrepresentation is being steadily challenged if not entirely overthrown (Gitlin 1980, Cottle and Lester 2001, Boyle et al 2012).

Starting with alternative journalism, **Daniel H. Mutibwa** surveys the origins, development, and transformation of counter-cultural, anti-establishment, and subversive publications in Europe and the US over a period of more than 60 years. These largely self-funded labors of love were initially often founded and run by amateur journalists as non-hierarchical collectives; reader submissions were published alongside commissioned work from emerging writers. However, over time the utopianism of these projects gave way to pragmatism, and those that survived generally did so by professionalizing and commercializing, but also branching out into investigative journalism alongside the activism and satire.

Picking up on the satirical bent, **Allaina Kilby** examines two US late night comedy programs over the course of the Trump administration. She interrogates how they dealt with a president widely regarded as beyond parody, and in particular how they attempted to overcome the association of satire with political apathy, and to engage their liberal publics with political advocacy. Whilst Kilby argues that the ability to drive change can only come from a more sustained commitment than satirical TV can offer, the solution-oriented innovations have sustained the relevance of the genre.

Another area of journalism that aims to reach out beyond the policy-wonk bubble of formal

politics is the TV panel discussion program. In Chapter 36, **James Morrison** analyzes one such show on the BBC, the UK's main public service broadcaster, and finds that it comes up short on its professed aims to address the issues of practical everyday concern for the British electorate, and to reach out beyond the usual elite commentariat for contributors. Most disappointingly the topics under discussion were more driven by political parties and less by public concerns during the 2019 election campaign, although the range of commentators was more diverse than appears to otherwise be the case, including some grassroots campaigners.

Of course, political activists don't generally wait to be asked by journalists for their opinion, but seek actively demand public and media attention on the street. Turning to the media coverage of political protest, then, **Anastasia Veneti, Paul Reilly and Darren G. Lilleker's** contribution to the developing field of visual politics addresses photojournalists' negotiation of space in Greek anti-austerity protests. Their interviews reveal a conscious awareness of the political impact of documenting the event from either the vantage point and perspective of the protesters or police, but also have to negotiate the hostility and suspicions of both sides.

The space of flows is as important as the space of places (Castells 2015), as evidenced in the next chapter, by **Fiona McKay**. Her case study of 'period poverty' activism shows the agenda-setting role that grassroots campaigners can play when they act across the hybrid media system (Chadwick 2017) of legacy and digital media. The campaign again the 'tampon tax' – menstrual products being taxed as a 'luxury' item rather than a necessity – saw flows of discourse and framing between feminist and anti-austerity social movements, politicians and journalists in Scotland's devolved political public sphere, even drawing in corporate support from a pharmaceutical retail chain. Twitter not only brought the various actors into conversation with one another, and connected them to a global movement on

menstrual equity, but provided a platform for research into the prevalence of the problem.

However, whilst social media may be successful at amplifying a focused campaign, when it comes to more entrenched political ideologies, **Simon Gwyn Roberts** demonstrates that the legacy news media's definitional power over the long term is not to be underestimated. In this instance the ideology is Euroscepticism. Roberts' careful unpacking of the evolution of Eurosceptic narratives demonstrates how 'the framing' of a media imaginary dubbed simply 'Europe' has seen the creeping adoption of ever more 'geographically "distancing" language' since the early 1950s. He argues that this form of discursive othering deserves to take as much of the blame as any latter-day populist campaigner, such as Nigel Farage, for shaping the EU-averse attitudes that helped deliver the Leave vote.

Finally, **Stuart Price** examines the Huelga General Feminista (Women's Strike), or 8M feminist movement in Spain. In contrast to Euroscepticism, this movement gathered strength and support *in defiance of* the dominant right-wing news media, which initially ignored them and then – to avoid being against equal rights – caricatured their politics in order to criticize them in contrast to a 'moderate' alternative, in a tactic redolent of those recounted by Gitlin (1980) in relation to New Left protests against the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, the campaign received an inadvertent boost from the sensationalist framing of a rape case and the outrage it provoked.

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