Book review: Journalism in the Digital Age: Theory and Practice for Broadcast, Print and Online Media, & Reporting in a Multimedia World

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The Australian
inundated with new publications each year re-writing the same formula. Modern texts become skeleton versions of the best quotes and most up-to-date references. Yet Understanding Journalism could easily be chosen by university instructors for its brevity, ease of language and overall utility.

In the end, UJ is a skillfully edited modern update that is useful for beginners to test their strengths in journalism. Useful Journalism books promote the act of reporting over texts and Burns does not shy away from this fact. UJ follows the well established guidelines for ethical and sound journalism. What separates this book from others, is that Burns encourages through well-written words and insightful examples to take to the streets and still read her book. UJ held my attention while providing a framework in which to build a career and is highly recommended.

HERBERT, John (2000)

ALYSEN, Barbara; SEDORKIN, Gail & OAKHAM, Mandy (2003)

Reviewed by Padma Iyer

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Journalism, like many vocational courses, is prone to the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum: does practice precede theory or does theory pre-exist for changes in practice? Historically, perhaps it could be argued that the bird that laid the egg out of which the chicken ultimately emerged wasn’t a species of fowl as we now know it at all, thus making it convenient for us to view journalistic theory as an evolutionary process which has dramatically transformed the original impulse. Without going too far back in time, and without sacrificing the relevance of a sharp focus on contemporary media, it could be observed that the mutually accommodating adaptability of theory and practice continues its relentless pace, leaving neither the practitioner nor the teacher any wiser as to who is the primary agent of change.

It is quite likely the influence that creates the circumstances for change is the greatest when it is exerted by a practitioner-
turned-fulltime-theoretician. Such a person is ideally positioned to find the correlatives between practice and theory, and to strive for a degree of compatibility between the two, particularly when the media is undergoing vast changes inflicted not merely by political and socio-economic environments but also by multi-faceted technological innovation.

The proliferation of the media, the fragmentation of the market, and the migration of readers towards multimedia content are challenges facing content producers and marketers alike. One of the ways in which these challenges in production and marketing are met is through a constant rewriting of media theory. Practice enforces the inclusion of new media narratives in the academic discourse. Reports are written which explain the 5Ws and How of the new media. New theoretical frameworks evolve as books incorporate the findings and experiences of practitioners.

The good news for students of journalism in the age of digital media has been the speed with which theory has captured the experiential component of new media. In many ways, the new books go further, and present a comprehensive and unified outlook towards the new media, thus leading to a hands-on approach which is consistent with global development in the profession.

The authors raise the bar for media professionals who remain, for reasons associated with the market in which they work, comparatively untouched by the latest technological advances. In this sense, they are prescriptive. As compendiums of current theories of knowledge, they present an up-to-date snapshot of journalism that those at the cutting edge of technology will identify with. In this sense, they are descriptive. The two books under review, written by experienced trainers and teachers who draw from a vast pool of contemporary practice, achieve their relevance through this dual approach.

*Journalism in the Digital Age* focuses on useful skills for the modern journalist, whether in print, radio, television or Internet. It finds useful solutions to the issues arising from the convergence of media and underscores the need for journalists to take stock of differences as well as commonalities across the media. It presents, in the format of a course, a summary of points that journalists working in every kind of media have to remember in their pursuit of stories.

Unlike books written by experienced journalists, which tend to be based on an evanescent spectrum of personal contexts, *Journalism in the Digital Age* has an all-inclusive approach. It spans across geographical and cultural divisions, aiming to be a handbook for journalists and aspiring journalists everywhere. The author, a trainer and journalist, adopts the role of a guide whose
primary task is to enhance the skills of a novice. Through a series of dot-point lists, many skills-based issues are clarified. Among these are report and feature writing techniques for print media, interview techniques for print, radio and television, dos and don’ts of public affairs reporting, investigative reporting and specialist reporting. It is to the author’s credit that he has tackled the vast scope of the book with ease, focusing on the actionable aspects of teaching.

Reporting in a Multimedia World chooses distinctly Australian material for a well-defined local audience. Squarely aimed at Australian students, it illuminates practical issues with experiential wisdom gleaned through interviews with media professionals. Illustrated with photographs, examples and box stories, the book adopts an easy-to-read journalistic style of presentation, making the concepts accessible and up-to-date. The authors show a clear pathway to professional skills that need to be developed and nurtured in budding journalists. Theoretical and practical aspects of journalism are perfectly matched in the book, making it an invaluable resource for students and teachers alike.

Media Fortunes, Changing Times: ASEAN States in Transition,
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. ISBN. 252 pp.

Reviewed by Sankaran Ramanathan
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Are ASEAN states in transition? If so, how many of the 10 states are? Are there changing times that the presumed transition brings, and if there are, have media fortunes been affected? If so, how have they been affected?

If we were to gauge on the basis of political uncertainty, Indonesia, Laos and Cambodia qualify as being states under transition. If we were to broaden the definition to include countries whose economies are under transition (from developing to developed economy status), we could then add the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand to the list. We could add Malaysia to this list, arguing that the economy has taken a slide since 1997 and that the transition of political power is imminent. We can then accept the contention that eight out of the 10 ASEAN member countries are in transition.

According to the book’s editor, “transition” does not just refer to changes in general (p.xiii). For some countries, it is the transition