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shifted across 45 years and how news coverage of the war on terror changed post-9/11 through 2006. These investigations demonstrate the complicated relationships of prior media attention, news events, policymaker attention, public concern, diversity of policy discussion, and agenda congestion in predicting the media agenda.

This combination of comprehensive explanation of possible predictors, pioneering methodology, time-series analytical technique, and breadth of coverage explored highlight the value of this groundbreaking research. Ultimately, the findings support the book's thesis of an alarm/patrol hybrid model of news generation that helps explain and predict why some policy issues are more successful at influencing the news agenda, public opinion, and policymakers than others.

Furthermore, latter chapters advance the discussion by exploring possible explanations of the dynamic interactions of these key predictors in influencing media skew and coverage explosion. Boydston also takes care to investigate whether these findings may be generalized beyond the *Times*, and finds support for the argument that the institutional mechanisms that influence media skew and explosiveness crosscut news outlets from broadsheet to blogger. A key assertion in this section is that the news echo chamber and constriction of the media agenda are more likely to predict broadcast and online media explosions than investigative journalism.

Although heavily dependent on analyzing newspaper front pages, Boydston takes great care to explain the conditionality of the findings and makes sound arguments throughout the text for the broader applicability of this research approach. However, more attention and depth of empirical analysis of audiovisual-dependent media such as broadcast and online news and the incorporation of the complicating factors of social media would have helped strengthen that case. The book's explanations for applying media explosion theory to non-print media are relatively limited to data based on digital archive searches; therefore, any conclusions are naturally hampered by a static text-based approach to these news outlets that does not account for accompanying audio or video cues nor shifts in the flow of news and the media agenda since the proliferation of social networking sites since 2008.

Nevertheless, Boydston's research provides fresh insight into the role of the media as a political institution, especially in the book's treatment of news attention as a dynamic concept for analyzing coverage over time. As a result, this book holds significance for scholars interested in journalism, media, public policy, political science, and the societal effects of news coverage. Ultimately, Boydston provides important analysis that helps concisely explain how familiar and perpetual cycles of current events and news coverage shape democratic governance.

Pablo J Boczkowski and Eugenia Mitchelstein

The news gap: When the information preferences of the media and the public diverge
Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013. 320 pp. ISBN 9780262019835

Reviewed by: Chris Peters, *University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

Boczkowski and Mitchelstein's *The News Gap* offers an extensive insight into one of journalism and democracy's great conundrums: are the interests of the general public in

line with the 'public interest'? Its aim is to investigate the preferences of news audiences – at the risk of giving away the ending, they tend to favour the 'unhealthy food' of sports, entertainment and crime over 'healthier' public-affairs content – via a large-scale empirical study of consumption at 20 online news sites in seven countries. What makes their contribution unique is that they then compare this with the story selection made by these same news outlets, offering a detailed empirical assessment of the long-assumed 'gap' between what journalists and the public deem 'newsworthy'.

The book opens in a fictional bakery. 'Legend has it that the founders decided, when they opened the bakery, that in addition to making money they wanted to contribute to the well-being of their customers' (p. 1). While business was good, the fact that 'healthier' products made with whole-wheat flour were less popular and went unsold wasn't an issue. However, the industry changed, compelling our well-intentioned bakers to reconsider this stance. It is an apt metaphor for the Lippmann/Dewey debates, and the book forces us to ask what we should expect from journalism and how it serves the body politic in a digital era. This is not just an intellectual but a democratic dilemma, as the authors rightly remind us. In the past, 'media bundled different kinds of news into a product that wasn't easily disassembled [which] made incidental exposure to public-affairs stories a routine aspect of news consumption' (p. 12). This is no longer the case. *The News Gap* accounts for opposing ideological orientations of news outlets, divergent media systems and different storytelling formats. However, its results all point in the same direction – except for the period immediately preceding elections, when interest in public affairs increases, there is a sizable 'news gap' and its magnitude is worrisome. This supply–demand gap (Chapter 1) for public-affairs content matters when the market power of news organizations is decreasing and audiences who wish to avoid political coverage can enact this choice with greater ease.

Chapter 2 fleshes out these claims, confronting us with an array of empirical findings that indicate the public prefers public-affairs journalism far less than the journalists who serve it. The gap ranges

from 9 to 30 percentage points, with an average of 18 percentage points across all sites ... the gap increased when we removed stories that overlapped the 'most newsworthy' and 'most read' lists ... [suggesting] if they were more sheltered from knowing what the other group wants, journalism and consumers would diverge even more in their thematic choices for news. (p. 45)

This gap persists irrespective of ideology or global region. The key exception to this trend is highlighted in Chapter 3, which looks at 'The difference politics makes', using case studies of the 2008 US Presidential Elections and 2008 Argentinean political crisis. This chapter demonstrates that the 'dynamic character of the news choices during periods of heightened political activity results in reduction or disappearance of the thematic gap' (p. 83). Chapter 4 ('How storytelling matters') explores different ways to present news (straight, feature, commentary, blogs, user-generated content) finding that

despite recurring suggestion from industry observers and scholars to journalists and media managers to innovate in aspects of the narrative and design of news articles and include user-generated content as a critical component of the information supply, consumers prefer non-public-affairs topics regardless of the format. (p. 88)

Chapter 5 goes ‘beyond the click’ to investigate audience preferences for emailing and commenting on stories. Consumers ‘tend to email useful or bizarre non-public-affairs stories written in feature style, and ... tend to comment on high-profile, controversial public affairs subjects presented as opinion or as straight news’ (p. 135). The final chapter contextualizes the book’s findings in light of key debates about the ongoing viability and democratic remit of journalism. It addresses challenging questions such as: What is the agenda setting power of media in a fragmented landscape? Is contemporary citizenship enacted through media with a ‘monitorial’ function? And can novel storytelling formats change the content preferences of news audiences? A coda extends the analysis of the US situation around elections in 2010 and 2012 (with a 14-day comparison for 2011) while an extensive appendix offers detailed data summaries.

Boczkowski, Mitchelstein and their host of research assistants should be loudly applauded for the breadth of this endeavour. However, *The News Gap* does trumpet its findings on occasion at the expense of a more modest appraisal sensitive to key assumptions inherent in their research design. For instance, while clicks indicate minimal curiosity about a topic (enough to click upon it), surely the depth of engagement with an article also matters when it comes to how people experience and learn about public affairs through news media? Some of the authors’ own results actually speak to this possibility: ‘Across all sites the most commented on articles have a higher proportion of public-affairs news than those deemed most newsworthy by journalists [ranging from 10–26 percent more]’ (p. 119). This noteworthy disparity – which runs counter to the asserted gap – leads one to wonder if ‘clicking’ should really be made as synonymous with ‘preference’ or ‘interest’ as the authors make it. This is to say nothing of attention, engagement or the uses one makes from information (in manifest or latent form) after encountering it. Similarly, while the age of Boczkowski and Mitchelstein’s data (most is from 2007 to 2009) does not hinder their arguments, five years in the current landscape carries enough change to make one wonder how transformations like the rise of social media and smartphones, or greater familiarity with interactive features, might impact how public information is shared and spread.

Yet these critiques are not significant shortcomings. Instead, they speak to the book’s strength in truly advancing scholarship and offering inspiration for questions that require further investigation. In this regard, *The News Gap* provides a clear illustration just how valuable detailed empirical research can be to ground contemplative debates on the future of journalism. It offers a welcome provocation for scholars and journalists alike to interrogate our core assumptions of journalism’s public role and to come up with better and more innovative questions, arguments and solutions if we wish to safeguard its function as an essential societal institution.