Futures of Journalism
Technology-stimulated Evolution in the Audience-News Media Relationship

Edited by Ville J. E. Manninen
Mari K. Niemi · Anthony Ridge-Newman
“At a time of profound technological change and challenges to the business model of news, *Futures of Journalism* provides a much-needed nuanced appraisal of the challenges and opportunities ahead, based on cutting-edge research into topics ranging from artificial intelligence and immersive storytelling to trolls and clickbait. A key reading for anyone interested in where journalism is going next, it steers clear of simplistic explanations, instead offering a pragmatic and often hopeful analysis of transformations in the relationship between journalists and their audiences.”

—Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, *Cardiff University*

“This book opens up a fascinating window to the future(s) of journalism. It provides an overview of the evolution of audience-media relationship perceived from multiple angles. The book is a relevant read for journalism practitioners and scholars alike.”

—Tanja Aitamurto, Assistant Professor, *Department of Communication, University of Illinois, Chicago, USA*
Futures of Journalism

Technology-stimulated Evolution in the Audience-News Media Relationship
Understanding the audience-news media relationship has always been important to us in the industry. However, changes in the global media sphere make that relationship, and by extension this book, particularly timely. We are competing for the audience’s most precious asset—their time. That means that newsrooms may in the near future be competing with the likes of “Fortnite”, a digital game. Netflix is already stating that its competition comes more from Fortnite than HBO or Disney+. Presumably that influences how Netflix will be developed in the coming years. What Netflix does affects media houses globally, because media houses have their own video-on-demand (VOD) services. Other VOD players usually go in the same direction as Netflix. So what Fortnite does influences online journalism. Absurd, isn’t it?

The reason for that is that every company in the world shares a common platform: the mobile device. That’s why journalism is competing with time spent on, not just with other journalism organizations, but, for example, with Red Bull sports videos. This puts a strain on news media’s bottom lines, forcing them to seek supplements and alternatives to their business models. Add political polarization to all this and you
have got yourself a messiness that makes it really, really, interesting, and fascinating, to work in news media at this time of technological development. That development is reflected on all facets of journalism. Thanks to social media, we hear voices that were not heard just 15 years ago. We are witnessing an era in which many people are keen to make the world a better place. The definition of “better” varies in the sense that there is much dialogue in the public sphere about polarization and cultural wars in many of our societies across the world. The audience is no longer simply an audience. Especially among the younger generations, there’s a will to collaborate and interact. That’s what the advent of the internet taught us to do. Audience interaction features prominently in this volume, giving diverse consideration to how audiences can and should be co-opted in the journalistic process. It is, arguably, one of the biggest questions for the future of journalism.

Interaction does not only refer to commenting on social media posts. It is becoming an activity through which the work processes of news journalists are changing, thoroughly. So much so that our basic news stories are not simply for the people but also made with the people. The marriage between media and the audience is evolving quickly. Naturally, the work of news media professionals must change, too.

I feel that, in the end, trusted news brands will prevail. They might face small but growing pressure to publish audience views that match with the views of their subscribers. Public news outlets on the other hand could be blamed to be both too liberal and too conservative simultaneously. New technologies present new ways of learning about audiences and their preferences and offer new tools for establishing trust. Making the best use of these tools is important, but doing so in an ethically sustainable way is even more so.

Journalism is evolving rapidly, but there are also claims that it is not, insofar that its mindset is too much tied to traditional work processes and its traditional role as a gatekeeper. If news media is the watchdog that is supposed to hold those in power accountable, how will it be done in the future? As a networked and social media–driven world, are new forms of
power structures developing? New movements are born and nurtured on social media platforms and via its thousands of groups. If this is to be a new power structure, how should the classic watchdog, journalism, keep an eye on it? There will be a challenging but interesting decade ahead for news journalism.

This book should open readers’ eyes to the various changes in the world of news media likely to be witnessed in coming years.

Yle News Lab
Finnish Broadcasting Company
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Jukka Niva
In 2018, researchers from University of Vaasa and Åbo Akademi in Finland began discussing their fascination of how technological disruption was impacting on the media scene, journalism more specifically. It inspired a joint research project on the topic. In 2019, we received funding from the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation to undertake a novel research project, for which we are very grateful.

Editing a book is a fulfilling yet cumbersome task. The funding granted to our project made this book possible; therefore, we offer our deepest thanks to the foundation for its generous support.

Developing and executing this book has been a group effort. Dr. Ville Manninen was the point of contact between the publisher, the authors and the editors and shouldered much of the administrative responsibility. Dr. Anthony Ridge-Newman brought to the project insights, experience and advice and invested a significant amount of time. I am grateful to both of them for joining me on this journey. It would have been longer and rockier without the support.

We were delighted our publisher of choice, Palgrave Macmillan, agreed to publish our edited collection. Our engagement and collaboration with the Palgrave team has been expedient and effortless. Our sincere thanks to them for their patience and help.
We would not have completed this book without the efforts of its many contributors. Some chapters in this volume were written as part of the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation–funded project, and others came via other sources of funding. We offer our deep thanks to all our authors for giving their time, efforts and expertise, which made this book possible.

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Journalism is evolving rapidly, and as a result the future of journalism is remarkably unpredictable. It is especially so in terms of news media’s relationship with its audiences, and that relationship is constitutive of journalism and vital to news media. Without an audience, journalism is moot. Without audiences willing to trust in and pay for journalism, news media have neither legitimacy nor means to survive. The current process of reconfiguration in the audience–news media relationship has many roots: changes in the global economy, audience preferences and habits,
and perhaps also the natural evolution of journalism itself. However, we argue most of these changes can be traced back to the widespread diffusion of new technologies. Namely, digitalization, the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web, high-speed wireless data transfer, mobile devices, cloud computing and algorithms making use of these newly created wellsprings of data are the cornerstones upon which our current media system rests. This technological development has impacted how, on one hand, audiences navigate, access and interact with news media; and how news media monitors, understands, reaches and monetizes its audiences on the other.

Recent internationally comparative studies and forecasts give us insights on which new technologies are seen the most promising for journalism in the future. Not surprisingly, technologies related to artificial intelligence (AI) occupy top of the list (e.g. Newman, 2021; Morganti & Ranaivoson, 2019). An EU-level Mediaroad project identified the six most important digital technologies for media’s future, including AI technologies. Some of the top six are already strongly shaping the field, while others are still developing but hold a strong future promise: AI, immersive technologies, 5G, blockchains, Internet of Things and media convergence (Morganti & Ranaivoson, 2019). Equally, Reuters Institute’s forecast on the trends of journalism, media and technology in 2021, based on a survey among leaders in the field, identified AI applications as the single most relevant technology. As many as 69 per cent of respondents believed that AI applications would have the greatest impact on the field in coming years. Appropriately, AI also features in several chapters of this volume. The forecast also contributed to our understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic’s implications: 76 per cent of the respondents thought that it had intensified planning for further utilizing digital technologies in the field (Newman, 2021). Technological change in news media will likely only accelerate in the near future.

The direction of aforementioned change is ambiguous, as the evolutionary forces are often discordant, even antithetical. Advances in tracking technology, for example, push media companies to scramble for as much audience data as they can—all the while audiences are becoming more wary of surveillance by companies and governments alike. The way this tension is resolved will, in part, decide the future direction of