學術對談

數位化時代網絡新聞的持續演變

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「綜合起來，這些現象都體現了社會情境持續可視化的趨勢，也包括新聞機構之間相互監視模仿的日益加強。而這也可能加劇新聞專業價值和市場價值之間的衝突，即是說，個體記者可能會更瞭解到什麼樣的新聞更走俏，但同時明白該些新聞並不符合傳統意義上的新聞價值，結果就是他們可能會經歷更多更強烈的衝突，到底該堅守傳統的價值，還是迎合他們所看到的市場期待與價值。無論如何，我們身處時代不同社會場域的可見性愈來愈高，這很有可能影響到我們如何理解網絡新聞和數位文化。」

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The Continual Transformation of Online News in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Professor Pablo J. Boczkowski shares in this Dialogue his insights and observations derived from more than a decade of research on the impact of digitization on the journalism landscape. He explains the continual relevance of the key concepts and findings from his earliest research to the contemporary media environment and at the same time introduces his most recent research findings and observations about the "news gap". Professor Boczkowski summarizes the main trends in the transformation of online news in the digital age, and he points out that the increasing visibility of various social fields constitutes a trend that can have tremendous implications on not only journalism but also on social change at large.

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柏保路‧博奇科夫斯基教授簡介

柏保路‧博奇科夫斯基(Pablo J. Boczkowski)現為美國西北大學(Northwestern University)傳播研究學系教授以及「媒介、技術與社會」課程主任。他在2001年於康奈爾大學科技研究學系取得博士學位。在執教於西北大學前,他曾受聘為麻省理工大學斯隆商學院組織研究的賽西爾與艾達格林職業發展助理教授(Cecil and Ida Green Career Development Assistant Professor)。

博奇科夫斯基教授的學術生涯主要致力於研究數位媒介對新聞行業的影響。他關於數位新聞的研究覆蓋北美,南美以及西歐多個國家。他的第一本專著《新聞數位化:線上報紙的創新》(麻省理工大學出版社,2004)贏得了2005年國際傳播學協會年度傑出書籍獎、2005年美國國家傳播學會批判與文化研究組傑出書籍獎,以及2004年國家傳播學會組織傳播組傑出書籍獎。他的第二本專著《運作中的新聞:資訊富裕時代的模仿行為》(芝加哥大學出版社,2010)獲得了2011年美國社會學學會傳播與資訊分部最佳書籍獎。

博奇科夫斯基教授也是20多篇期刊論文的作者。他的論文散見於眾多知名學術期刊,其中包括 *Communication Research*、*Human Communication Research*、*Communication Theory*、*Political Communication*、*New Media & Society*、*Information, Communication & Society*,和 *International Journal of Press/Politics*。Boczkowski 與其學生 Eugenia Mitchelstein 合作的另一本專著《新聞鴻溝:當資訊供求不平衡時》,以及與 Tarleton Gillespie 與 Kirsten Foot 共同編輯的論文集《媒介科技:傳播、物質性與社會文選》,將於2013年秋季由麻省理工大學出版社出版。目前,他正在著手研究並寫作一本暫名為《機構如何衰落:布宜諾斯艾利斯、芝加哥與巴黎報紙的末日》的著作。

PB: 柏保路‧博奇科夫斯基
FL: 李立峯

FL: 或許我們可以從你最早的著作談起。在《新聞數位化》(Digitizing

the News)一書裏，你勾勒了美國報業應對數位媒體挑戰的軌跡。
美國報業從上世紀八十年代開始探索新的可能性，九十年代中期
鎖定了在互聯網上發展，九十年代末期出現「hedging」的現象。[1]
我對「hedging」這個概念尤其感興趣：當不同新聞機構一起採取
行動時，整個新聞行業似乎開始協同進行風險管理以應對不確定
性和快速變化。可是新聞行業的hedging和其他社會經濟領域的
似乎有所不同。比如說，在金融領域，hedging經常涉及有意識的
策略性思考，這樣的思考往往基於對一些不同要素（比如不同種
類的投資產品）之間的關係的理解，所以人們知道甚麼行動能夠
應對甚麼風險。但新聞行業裏的hedging恰恰相反，似乎並不基
於任何系統性的知識。《新聞數位化》出版十年後的今天，你認為
hedging這概念在多大程度上或在何種意義上仍適用於當下狀況？

PB：我在《新聞數位化》裏提到的hedging，強調兩種既相關而又不一樣
的現象。一是新聞行業或行業利益的市場或競爭空間的分化；二
是在面對不確定的處境時，新聞行業向多元的方向發展，而非從
單一方向作出改變。因此，hedging概念的以上兩個面向，在今天
依然適用，但比起我在為《新聞數位化》做研究的時候，適用的方
式又有不同。我當時使用hedging這個概念，是為了闡明發生在上
世紀九十年代後半段的一些現象，但今天的環境已經大為不同
了。但就著上述提到的兩個面向，hedging對我們理解網絡新聞的
發展仍然很有幫助。

　　舉例而言，有人可以把整個關於新聞網站實行付費牆(pay-
wall)的爭論詮釋和比喻成為一場應不應該給農場加裝籬笆的討
論。也就是說，付費牆事實上構成了一種限制，因為付費意願的
不同，有些人跨越了這種限制，有些人沒有。在這種情況下實施
付費牆是否最佳的選擇？抑或最好的做法是使內容免費公開，以
便有大量的受眾能真正消費新聞，並參與到網站的發展之中？因
此，不論實施付費牆是好事還是壞事，現實中有些網站會採用付
費牆，而另一些網站則不會——在這個例子中，我們看到hedging
成為分化整個競爭場域的一種方式。

　　網絡新聞近十年內另一個主要趨勢是，在台式電腦之外，湧

現了不少全新的可用於獲取新聞的媒介設備，比如平板電腦、智能手機、手提電腦等。同時還出現了很多工具、不同的軟件和應用程序(apps)可供記者在新聞生產過程中使用。消費者相應地也可仰賴很多不同的應用程序來探索日益複雜和膨脹的新聞與資訊領域——從這個例子中，我們可以看到當面對不確定的、變化的環境時，hedging可以導致新聞業向多個方向去創新與尋求改變。

所以對於你的問題，我的基本答案是肯定的。我相信hedging的概念在對當下依然適用，只是方式不同了。而且比較重要的是，應該注意到hedging這個概念在《新聞數位化》所展開的兩個不同面向。

FL：在《新聞數位化》裏，你提出的另一個概念是「模仿的獨創性」(mimetic originality)。你討論了在美國報章的科技版中新鮮事物的創造如何轉變成同質化內容的生產。當然，擬態、同質化和模仿這些主題亦成為你第二本著作《工作中的新聞》(News at Work)中處理的核心議題。你討論了阿根廷的一些新聞室所採用的新技術以及操作方式如何增強了新聞機構之間的相互監視跟進，進而造成內容高度同質化。像這樣的模仿，以我的理解，似乎是以有限的幾個新聞機構把彼此看作主要競爭對手為前提的。也就是說，它們先要知道應監視誰，才能進行監督跟進。但是在更廣闊的網絡世界裏，很多其他東西不斷湧現，比如網上另類媒體，公民新聞，甚至是所謂新聞策展者(news curator)。[2] 你會如何把《工作中的新聞》裏所分析的業界動態扣連到數碼時代公共傳播結構重組這更大的背景中？

PB：你提到的那些轉變，主要和記者採用的監測新聞的新技術有關。這些新技術加強並深化了《工作中的新聞》中論及的趨勢，但並未改變趨勢的大方向。說到模仿的問題，我們會發現如今的狀況還是之前的延續。我在開始該研究時所發現的，主流新聞機構裏所出現的一些現象和從業人員在工作中的一些動態，其中包含的現象，以及我在《運作中的新聞》提出的發現，我覺得仍然適用於今天世界各地的主流新聞機構的從業者。仍然有一個很明顯的趨勢，就是他們依然在向競爭中的同行媒體模仿，卻較少向你所提

及的那些新興管道模仿。

FL：這樣的話,主流媒體會否變得無關緊要?網路上的選擇更多樣,而主流媒體仍在互相監視跟進同行,不去吸收新管道的資訊,因而不斷地提供同質化的內容,這難道不會導致越來越多人不再重視主流新聞媒體?

PB：我不認為新聞機構將要變得無關緊要。我做的研究表明,媒體所提供的新聞同質性越高,受眾與媒體在情情上就越疏離,新聞消費也停留在一個更膚淺的層次。在這情況下,與其花大量時間投入到新聞產品中去,人們更多地只會簡單地溜覽內容,從標題或導語中了解新聞大意,然後就把注意力轉移到別的事情上去。這就是為什麼,在美國用戶粘性最高的新聞網站 CNN.COM 上,每個用戶每天的平均瀏覽時間只有一分鐘,就是說一個月只有半個小時。況且這只是個平均值,意味著有一小部分頻繁使用者花大量時間在該網站上,而更大部份的用戶每天花費在 CNN.COM 上閱讀新聞的時間連一分鐘都不夠。因此,理解人們看新聞的主要動機非常必要——其中一個重要的動機就是跟朋友、同事、鄰居、家人聊新聞話題。人們尋求資訊的目的在於,如果這些資訊是大家都知道的,那會有助於日常交談。總體上,日益商品化和同質化的新聞產品,導致受眾端情感投入下降。但新聞本身不見得變得無關緊要,而只是在某些層面上的重要性降低了,以及受眾以更表面膚淺的方式消費新聞產品。

FL：這些年來,你的著作很重視新聞現象所發生的社會文化場境。事實上,你的研究涉及到北美和拉丁美洲,最近則關注到西歐。雖然你的兩本主要著作都是以個別地區或國家為個案,但在他們背後似乎都存在著一個比較研究的視角,這在《工作中的新聞》一書中尤為明顯。可否分享一下,通過比較研究,你認為最有意義或者最具啟發性的發現與洞見是什麼?

PB：除了之前在《工作中的新聞》中對阿根廷媒體模仿和相互監視現象的研究,我最近和我在西北大學的博士生 Eugenia Mitchelstein 共同完成了一本名叫《新聞鴻溝》(News Gap) 的書,在今年秋季將由

麻省理大學工出版社出版。我們考察了三個地區，即北美，西歐和拉美七個國家裏的二十個主要新聞網站，焦點在新聞內容供應和需求之間的鴻溝(gap)。這本書深化了我的研究中的「比較觀」。就我過去十年裏所做的比較研究而言，世界上不同地區不同國家的主要媒體，似乎有一個明顯的融合趨勢，媒介受眾也是如此。至少，在我的研究中關注到的西方世界中如是，而我還沒有機會研究世界上其他地區的網絡新聞。

因為歷史、制度、社會結構和文化上的不同，不同國家的媒體的當然有不少重要的差異。但在同時，它們之間也有很多相似之處，比如所生產的新聞的類型，以及新聞被生產出來的過程。受眾的行為和興趣也有匯流的趨勢。有人可能會說，記者工作以及新聞產品呈現出融合狀態並不出人意料，因為記者都是在同樣的價值、理念和實踐體系中接受訓練和社會化，而且在不同的國家、媒介體系、歷史與文化中，新聞媒體都習慣於互相監視跟進。所以，對我來說，更顯著的發現是大眾口味的融合，換言之，是作為一種大眾文化現象的網絡新聞受眾的興趣和行為所呈現出的相似性。我覺得這是大眾口味全球化的一部分。因為可供選擇內容的多樣性所剩無多，我們所見的現象很可能是整個新聞供給融合的結果。這是我這十年來做比較媒體研究其中一個有趣的發現。

FL：你指出了世界範圍內的流行口味有趨同的趨勢。但能否闡述一下你研究中所發現的區域差異呢？

PB：區域之間的差異是有一些的，但更多的差異體現在不同國家對於網絡新聞的供給與需求的不同。詳細的內容可以從我們在《傳播研究》(*Communication Research*) 發表的論文那裏了解。[3] 我們首先研究了西歐國家，包括英國、德國和西班牙的網絡新聞內容的供需，然後與拉丁美洲國家，包括阿根廷、巴西和墨西哥的相應資料作對比，我們發現大西洋兩岸的網絡新聞記者對公共事務新聞有著頗為相似的偏好。同時消費者的偏好也高度相似。的確，國家之間有差異，但總的來說，不同地區有著相同的發展趨勢。

FL：所以我們可否這樣說，基於你的研究發現，比起其中的差異分化，不同國家之間的網絡新聞的融合趨同更為顯著？

PB：簡單回答的話，是的。詳細來說，正如我在《傳播研究》的那篇論文裏所說的，而我可以在這裏引述：「對不同國家在網絡新聞網站主頁的比較研究，得出了兩個重要結果。首先，在所有的網站中，記者偏愛公共事務新聞遠遠高過消費者，即使排除了地理和意識形態差異之後也是如此。這告訴我們，記者和消費者對新聞主題有不同偏好是一個趨同的現象。第二，與這種趨同現象相伴，不同地區的記者之間和不同地區的消費者之間首選公共事務新聞的比例卻很相似。這兩個發現告訴我們，記者與消費者的分化本身構成了一種共同的趨勢，即在西歐和拉美，我們同時看到了記者和消費者之間在對新聞主題的偏好上出現了鴻溝。」

FL：你在這裏所提到的新聞題材上的分化，也是你的新書《新聞鴻溝》中的一個核心發現。雖然新聞網站有相當高比例的頭條新聞是關於政治、國際關係和經濟事務，但用戶卻呈現出對體育、犯罪和娛樂新聞的偏好。在我看來，這個鴻溝本身似乎不是新事物。它基本上就是專業記者追求的嚴肅新聞和一般讀者喜聞樂見的八卦新聞之間的分歧。新鮮的地方可能在於，在互聯網上，「新聞鴻溝」因為各種「測量」和「數位統計」的出現，諸如點擊數、瀏覽量、贊的次數、分享次數等等，而變得一覽無遺。另外，傳統的收視率和發行量通常描述的是新聞產品整體，如銷量是一份報紙的銷量，收視率是一個電視節目的收視率，但像互聯網世界裏的「贊」和「分享」，卻是以每個具體的新聞故事為單位的。總之，你可否對互聯網領域中「新聞鴻溝」的本質、特性和影響做更多介紹和闡釋？

PB：你說的很對。正如我們在書中指出，記者認為有價值的新聞與消費者認為有趣的新聞，這其中的差異可能由來已久。但是，過去很少有研究系統地分析這種差異存在與否及其程度的大小。這本書嘗試研究了影響這個差異存在與否以及其程度大小的諸多因素。我們在書裏強調，主流新聞媒體機構很可能長期縱容了這種差異，因為他們在各自的市場裏都擁有很好的市場地位。如果想

想美國的報業情況，很多報紙在當地一家獨大。美國百分之九十七的媒體市場都只有一張報紙。所以當你是一個經濟體中唯一的或僅有的兩三個競爭者之一時，你會擁有非常穩定的市場地位；而如果你又是依靠廣告收入的新聞媒體，那就意味著廣告商不得不找你去推廣他們的產品服務。因此，你完全可以向公眾提供那些你認為他們真正需要的資訊，而無視公眾內心真正所想。因為你知道廣告商不得不找你。

過去十數年發生的事情，是媒體市場的競爭變得更為激烈，更多的競爭對手進入市場，而現在有了互聯網，地理的邊界變得無足輕重。廣告商也擁有更多選擇去接近他們想接觸的客戶群。因此，即便我們面對的還是同樣大小、構成相同的鴻溝，當我們從低競爭走向高競爭的環境時，它的含義也會發生巨大改變。你所說的非常正確，正如我們同樣地在書中所強調的一樣，因為新聞的熱度可以從單個報導的級別進行測量，這個鴻溝已經變得非常直觀了。

我們的重要發現是，網絡新聞的內容的供給與需求出現了巨大的鴻溝。在我們研究的三個地區七個國家二十多個網站中，這個差異的強度在百分比上可以達到兩位數。這個差異可以說是當下新聞環境的一個常態，在眾多位於不同國家、媒介制度文化價值形態各異的網站中都有出現。我們還發現這種鴻溝可能因著不同的因素而有所增減，例如在政府危機或國家選舉這些重要政治事件發生時，由於人們對政治新聞的興趣增加，新聞從業員和受眾間的鴻溝會縮小。我們還分析了不同敘述模式的影響，我們發現敘述模式對鴻溝的影響不及內容偏好的影響大。這是我們的一些研究結果。

FL：市場競爭這點非常重要，我想由此引出另一個問題。今天，觀察者通常會認同的一個說法是，由於互聯網和多頻道電視等，我們擁有越來越多的媒體管道和媒介機構。例如在政治傳播學領域，最近幾年「選擇性使用」(selective exposure)這個概念再度激發起研究者的興趣。這背後的前提是，隨著傳播管道的激增，越來越多的媒體又一次變得黨派化，因為在傳播管道不斷增加的時代，

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　　瞄準市場上的特定受眾群體，對媒體而言是更加明智的做法。換
　　句話說，發生改變的不僅僅是市場競爭的程度，而且是市場競爭
　　的模式。你對這點有什麼樣的觀察和看法？

PB：針對媒介環境變化的問題，我想強調的是兩個我認為對於理解網
　　絡新聞尤其重要的轉變。第一，過去媒介產業通常只是在他們自
　　己相對較小的市場中相互競爭，比如電視和電視競爭，報紙同報
　　紙競爭，雜誌同雜誌競爭，諸如此類。但過去三十年發生了所謂
　　的媒介數位化。媒介產業越發為更大的資訊產業的一個部分，因
　　而新聞媒介必須與來自不同市場的競爭者博弈。現在我們有了微
　　軟，有了谷歌，他們都成為潛在的市場競爭者。如果這些互聯網
　　企業開始搞新聞網站，我們必須知道競爭者已經不僅僅是媒介機
　　構或媒介公司本身了，如今的競爭已經被放大到更廣的資訊產業
　　中去了。以上是第一點。而第二點，我們還需要意識到，現時互
　　聯網上的市場遊戲中，主要贏家其實都不是傳統的新聞媒介機
　　構。主要贏家可能有谷歌，臉書，eBay，亞馬遜等等。他們都不
　　是傳統意義上的媒體公司。所以相對而言，傳統媒體機構和媒體
　　產業的市場份額就被削減了。如果我們想理解網絡新聞的現在和
　　可能的未來，考慮到這一點也很重要。

FL：我之前跟你提及，是次學術對談將刊登在有關中國社會中的數位
　　媒體和新聞業的專刊之中。在這一期裏，復旦大學的周葆華教授
　　提出了一個基於高夫曼 (Erving Goffman) 的理論的框架，並以其
　　來解釋新媒體科技如何使新聞產制的過程對公眾而言更加可見。
　　用高夫曼的說法，就是「後台」的逐漸暴露。有時候，新聞產制過
　　程的透明化會給傳媒權威帶來挑戰；但也有可能，策略性地使新
　　聞產制過程透明化，反而可加強記者的新聞權威。在中國大陸，
　　將新聞產制的過程曝光更可能是一種避免或對抗國家控制的方
　　法。且不管這篇文章的細節，我好奇的是，你認為這論點在你的
　　研究場境中是否有效？數位新聞現象中是否有上述的狀況呢？

PB：我還未讀你提到的論文，但根據你的描述，我對於那個結論並不
　　感到驚訝。我認為這個結果反映了網絡新聞甚至是數位新聞文化
　　當中的一個更有普遍性的傾向或模式。這個模式關涉到社會場域

或社會情景的可視化，以及什麼樣的行動者會參與到這情景中來。在《工作中的新聞》這本書裏，我們發現，由於今天的記者們比以往更加了解不同新聞室的同行的所作所為，因此彼此間的監視和模仿有所增加。另一方面，如我在《工作中的新聞》提到的，通過運用Chartbeat、Google Analytics、In House等工具去監察網站流量，如今的線上新聞記者較從前更清楚他們的受眾以及公眾的動態。我們再想想新聞產制的透明化，大眾對新聞生產過程越來越多的了解，他們可以透過Timecast或其他途徑去知道最受歡迎、最多人回應、最流行的新聞故事，諸如此類……綜合起來，這些現象都體現了社會情境持續可視化的趨勢，也包括新聞機構之間相互監視模仿的日益加強。而這也可能加劇新聞專業價值和市場價值之間的衝突，即是說，個體記者可能會更了解到什麼樣的新聞更走俏，但同時明白該些新聞並不符合傳統意義上的新聞價值，結果就是他們可能會經歷更多更強烈的衝突，到底該堅守傳統的價值，還是迎合他們所看到的市場期待與價值。無論如何，我們身處時代不同社會場域的可見性愈來愈高，這很有可能影響到我們如何理解網絡新聞和數位文化。

FL：綜合您超過十年的研究，還有您所讀到的該領域的其他論述，您如何總結數位化是否以及如何影響新聞的本質？

PB：也許我想談的不只是數位化對新聞業的影響，而是近年來網絡新聞的大趨勢。第一個趨勢是，大眾對記者而言更加可見，同時記者對大眾也更加可見。第二個趨勢是新聞產制和新聞消費在時間速率上都有提升。還有的就是不同類型的新聞，不同的內容以及不同的新聞消費模式之間的時間差異越來越大。第三個趨勢，消費者獲得新聞產品的方式在時間和空間上大大拓展，而這會影響到新聞的產制與流通。新聞變得無所不在，新聞消費同樣無所不在，這都關涉到新聞產制方面的一些有趣的變化。最後一個趨勢，如前所述，是多種多樣資訊工具的湧現。不只桌上電腦，更有手提電腦、平板電腦、智慧手機等工具——這些工具之間都是高度連通的。此外，還有用於生產和接收資訊的工具的大增長，那些可供我們選擇的不同媒介以及互動性應用程序。90年代中期

網絡新聞發軔之初，我們根本沒有想到這些東西。這是一個特別巨大的轉變。所以從這四個大趨勢中，我們看到一些重要的發展，其中包含了一些與20年前相比很不同的狀況。

FL：您所提到的四個趨勢很好地總結了新聞行業在數位化時代的主要轉變。我很有興趣知道，您在最新著作於秋季出版之後有什麼計劃呢？或者有沒有一些已經開展了的新研究項目？

PB：在過去幾年，我一直都和其他幾位研究者探究紙質報業的式微，並以此為視窗來探究體制如何末落這問題。在這個研究裏，我們比較了三個城市，他們位於不同國家和區域，而且在規模上很有可比性。他們分別是美國的芝加哥，法國的巴黎和阿根廷的布宜諾斯艾利斯。我們的比較邏輯是，兩個城市位於發達的國家，即美國和法國，但他們的媒介制度、結構、歷史背景以及大眾口味的分佈都很不同；而另一個研究對象則是發展中國家阿根廷。我們希望能夠對比兩個發達國家的新聞行業，然後再同另一個發展中國家進行比較。

我們將報紙看做城市生態不可或缺的一部分，這也是我們對城市進行比較的初衷。我們主要採用了民族誌方法，也輔之以一些量化研究。你可以想像，這是一個很龐大的項目，三個城市、三種語言。希望在幾年內我們能把研究成果寫成一本書。

我們也會在期刊上發表研究發現。與此同時，我也有一些其他進行中的項目。比如我們會繼續研究《新聞鴻溝》中的一些命題。我們手上仍有一些未收錄於書中的數據，我們會在今年晚些時候尋求發表。此外，我還一些研究工作，不一定與新聞相關，而是自己的其它興趣，例如傳播研究與科技研究的關係這種類型的問題。

FL：我們非常期待你的新作。非常感謝你與讀者分享你的觀察和洞見。

柏保路．博奇科夫斯基著作選

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註釋

1　Hedge一詞在英文中有兩個基本意思，第一是矮小的樹籬或障礙物，第二是一種平衡風險的手段，亦即所謂「對沖」。《新聞數位化》一書應用hedging這詞時同時包涵了這兩種意思，所以難以將該概念譯為中文。

2　新聞策展者指向一種新興的新聞網站，它們不自己製作新聞，而是在網上搜集重要的新聞和評論，然後作出具獨特風格的整理和展示，亦可能在過程中加上自己的觀點。這種網站及其工作者把自己比喻為博物館中的策展者。在美國，*Huffington Post*是新聞策展者的主要範例，在香港則有「主場新聞」網站。

3　該文章的資料見於對談所附的著作選中。

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Academic Dialogue with **PABLO J. BOCZKOWSKI**

The Continual Transformation of Online News in the Digital Age

PB: Pablo J. BOCZKOWSKI
FL: Francis L. F. LEE

FL: **Let's begin with your early works. In *Digitizing the News*, you described a historical trajectory through which American newspapers dealt with the challenge of digital media. American newspapers first explored various possibilities in the 1980s. They settled on the World Wide Web around the mid-1990s, and then engaged in "hedging" from the late 1990s onward. The notion of hedging, for me, is particularly interesting. The concept suggests that, when the actions of different news organizations are taken together, it is as if the news industry is engaging in risk management in the face of uncertainty and rapid change. Yet there seems to be a difference between hedging by the news industry and hedging in other social and economic fields. In the financial world, for example, hedging often involves conscious strategic thinking based on an understanding of how different things, such as types of investment products, are related to each other, and hence what actions can be used to hedge against what types of risks. The hedging by the news industry, in contrast, does not seem to be based on any systematic knowledge. In any case, a decade after *Digitizing the News*, to what extent and in what sense is the notion of hedging still applicable to the contemporary scene?**

PB: The way I conceived of hedging in *Digitizing the News* highlights two different yet interrelated phenomena. The first one is about demarcation of the market, of the space or the territory in which the news industry, or sector of the industry, aims to compete. The second one is about the idea that, confronted with an uncertain situation or an uncertain context, the news industry moved in multiple directions, not just in one direction. So the notion of hedging, understood in terms of these two dimensions, is still applicable today, but in

different ways than was the case when I did the research for *Digitizing the News*. There I used the notion of hedging to shed light on the phenomena taking place in the second half of the 1990s; the context today has changed quite significantly. But in both cases, regarding the two dimensions of hedging, the ideas are still helpful for us to make sense of what is going on regarding online news.

For instance, one could interpret the whole debate about the implementation of paywalls in news sites as one expression of whether to place hedges around the farm, so to speak, or not. That is, whether it is best to implement the paywall, that is by de facto a limit, so that some people are entitled to cross this limit and some are not, depending on their willingness to pay or not. Or whether it is best to leave things open and more permeable, so that there are larger numbers of people who actually can consume the news and participate in the life of a particular website. So, regardless of whether it is a good thing or a bad thing to implement this paywall, the chance is that some news sites will implement it and some will not. This would be an expression of hedging as a way of demarcation in the competitive territory.

Another main trend of online news over the past decade or so has been the proliferation of media, tablets, smart phones, laptops, and—in addition to the desktop computer—the objects or the artifacts that people utilize to gain access to news. And there's also the proliferation of tools, different software and applications that journalists utilize to produce news. Consumers rely on different sets of applications to navigate an increasingly complex and enlarged news and information landscape. This is an expression of hedging as innovating in multiple directions when confronted with an uncertain and evolving context.

So the answer to your question is basically yes. The notion of hedging, I believe, is still applicable to the contemporary scene, but in different ways. And it's important to be mindful of the two aspects of the idea of hedging as it was developed in *Digitizing the News*.

FL: **Another concept you developed in *Digitizing the News* is mimetic originality. You discussed how the creation of newness turned into the creative production of sameness in the technology section of American newspapers. Of course, the theme of mimesis,**

homogenization, and imitation would become even more central in your second book News at Work. You discussed how new technologies and specific operational features of Argentinian newsrooms facilitated heightened levels of mutual monitoring among news outlets, and hence higher degrees of content homogenization. Such imitation, as I understand it, seems to be premised on the presence of a finite set of news organizations which recognize each other as their main competitors. That is, they know whom to monitor. In the broader online arena, however, many other things are going on, and there is the emergence of phenomena such as online alternative media, citizen journalism, and the emergence of the news curator. How would you relate the dynamics you analyzed in *News at Work* to the broader processes of the restructuring of public communication in the digital arena?

PB: I believe that the changes you are pointing to mainly involve an increase in the number of alternatives that journalists could monitor, but what has happened is that those changes basically intensify the tendency analyzed in *News at Work*. It doesn't alter the direction of the tendency, it only deepens it. And when it comes to the issue of imitation, we see that the situation remains largely the same. I think the dynamics that were at play among the practitioners in the leading news organizations that I initially studied, the phenomena found there, and the patterns described and analyzed in *News at Work*, are still applicable to practitioners in those leading mainstream news organizations in media around the world today. They still show a much greater tendency to imitate their peers at comparable organizations rather than to imitate the practitioners at the new entrants that you are pointing to.

FL: **In this case, would the mainstream media organizations risk becoming irrelevant? That is, as online options proliferate — and yet the mainstream media keep providing the same content and just monitor each other instead of the new entrants — wouldn't this lead more and more people to disregard mainstream news media?**

PB: I don't think it is necessarily true that news organizations will or might become irrelevant. The research that I have done suggests that

the more homogenization there is in terms of the supply of news, the more the audience becomes detached affectively from the media, and the mode of consumption becomes quite superficial. That is, instead of spending significant amounts of time to engage with news products, they just surf the content, get the main headlines or the leads of the main stories, and move on to something else. This is why, on average, the most sticky of online news sites in the United States, which is cnn.com, has on average one minute a day per unique visitor to its site; that is, thirty minutes in a month. That is the average. You have a small proportion of very heavy users who spend much more time than that, and a vast majority of people who spend even less than a minute a day on online news consumption on cnn. com. So it's important to understand that the main driver, or one of the main drivers, of news consumption on- and offline is to have something to talk about with your friends, with co-workers, neighbors, and family members. So people do seek out for information, and if that information is shared, that helps people to have conversations. But overall, the more commoditized and the more homogenized news products tend to be related to affecting detachment on the part of the audience. It does not necessarily lead to irrelevance, but to a lesser degree of relevance, and especially more shallow forms of engagement with their news products.

FL: **Over the years, your work has displayed a keen sense of the importance of contexts; and indeed, your work has covered both North America and Latin America, and more recently Western Europe. Although each of your two major books focuses mainly on one specific geographical region or country, there is arguably a comparative angle underlying each of them, especially *News at Work*. Can you share with us what you consider as the most meaningful or provocative insights that you derived through these comparative studies?**

PB: In addition to the work I did in *News at Work* looking at the phenomena of monitoring and imitation in Argentina, a book that I recently completed with my doctoral student Eugenia Mitchelstein at Northwestern is forthcoming with The MIT Press in the fall, called the News Gap. That book deepens the comparative dimension of my research program by looking at the gap between the supply and

demand of online news content in twenty leading online news sites in seven different countries of three different regions of the world: North America, Western Europe, and Latin America. So what I found over the past ten years, through doing this comparative research, is that there seems to be a significant degree of convergence among the leading media of countries in different regions of the world, and also among the public of the media. In my research in the western hemisphere—so far, I have not studied online news in other parts of the world—there are, of course, important differences across nations or across media in different nations: nations with different histories, systems, structures, and cultures when it comes to the media. But, together with the differences, there are more important similarities in terms of the types of stories that are produced, how they are produced, how they are presented to the public; and there is convergence also in the interest and in the behavior of the public. One could think that the convergence in the work of journalists and the stories they produce is not highly surprising. In a sense, the journalists are trained and socialized in the same systems of values and beliefs and practices that, together with a natural tendency to monitor and to imitate, explain this convergence across the leading media organizations in different countries, countries with very different media systems, structures, histories, and cultures. What is also remarkable to me is the convergence in popular taste; that is, similarities in popular culture, in the interests and behaviors of the public for online news. I think that is partly the result of the globalization of popular taste, and we are seeing also what is probably the result of convergence in news supply, as there is not much diversity in the content to choose from. So that's one of the interesting things that I have learned over this decade through doing comparative media research.

FL: **So you pointed out that there is a convergence in popular tastes around the world. But can you elaborate a bit more on the contrasts between the different regions that you studied?**

PB: There are some contrasts, not so much with respect to regions of the world, but more with respect to countries in the studies, on the supply and demand of online news content. But you can see the details of that in our paper in *Communication Research*.[1] We

conducted our research in the leading online news media in Western Europe, and the countries are the UK, Germany, and Spain—having grouped the results of those studies on the supply and demand of the online news content—and then compared the findings with the aggregate results for Latin America, and the countries there are Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. What we found is a fairly similar level of preference for public affairs news among the journalists of these sorts of news organizations on both sides of the Atlantic. And also there is a remarkably high level of similarity in the preferences of consumers. So, yes, there are differences across countries, but all in all, the tendencies are quite similar with respect to the regions.

FL: **So is it fair to say that, based on the findings from your studies, the convergence among online news in different countries is overall more notable than the differences?**

PB: The short answer is yes. Or more elaborately, as I reported in the article published in *Communication Research*, and let me just quote here: "The comparative study of the homepages of the online news sites in the various countries has yielded two key results. First, journalists selected substantively more public affairs stories than the consumers did across all sites—even after dividing them by geographic region and ideological stance—thus signaling convergence in the existence of a thematic gap between the news choices of journalists and consumers. Second, together with this convergence, there is comparatively less important variance in the proportion of public affairs stories in journalists' and consumers' top choices across sites. Together, these two results represent a pattern of convergence across divergence: A sizable and robust thematic gap in the online news choices of journalists and consumers in Western Europe and Latin America."

FL: **The thematic gap you mentioned here is also one of the key findings in your forthcoming book *The News Gap*. Although a large proportion of the top stories on online news sites is about politics, international relations, and economics, users of online news sites show a preference for news about sports, crime, and entertainment. But it seems to me that this gap itself is actually not new. The gap is basically the one between serious journalism,**

> **preferred by professional journalists, and tabloid journalism that tends to attract the largest audience. What is new is that, in the online arena, the "news gap" becomes much more readily visible due to the presence of all kinds of "measures" and "counts": the number of clicks, views, likes, shares, and so on. Also, while audience ratings or circulation figures are conventionally associated with holistic news products, such as a TV newscast or a newspaper issue, things like likes and shares in the online arena are associated with each specific news story. Anyway, can you elaborate more on the nature, characteristics, and consequences of the "news gap" in the online arena?**

PB: You're right to point out that, as we suggest in the book, the gap between the kinds of stories that journalists consider to be newsworthy and the stories that the consumers of these organizations find interesting has probably existed for a long time. But there have not been studies that systematically analyzed whether the gap indeed exists, and measured its magnitude. And in the book we tried to study the different factors that influence the existence and magnitude of the gap. What we argue in the book is that the gap has probably been tolerated by the leading media organizations for a long time because of their very strong competitive position in their respective markets. If you think of the United States, for instance, for the newspapers, they are often the only paper in town. There is only one newspaper per market in 97 percent of the media markets in the United States. So when you are the only player, or one of two or three players in one sector of the economy, you have an extremely strong market position. And if you are the leading or only news organization, and you are being mostly funded through advertising, that means the advertisers have to come to you to advertise their services or products to the potential consumers. Because they have to come to you, you can actually give the audience the information that you think the public needs, regardless of whether the public actually wants that. Because you know that the advertisers would have to come to you.

So what has happened over the past decade is that the media market has become much more competitive. There are many more players; and now, with the Internet, the geographic boundaries have become much less relevant. And there are many more options for

advertisers to reach their consumers. So, even if we think that there is the same gap, in terms of size, composition, etc., the meaning of the gap has changed dramatically when we moved from a much less competitive to a more competitive media environment. And you're right to point out that the gap has become more visible—and it's something we underscore in the book as well—because popularity is now measured at the story level of analysis, not at the aggregate level of analysis.

So, in terms of what we found, some of the main findings show the fact that there is a sizable gap between the supply and demand of online news contents—two digits in magnitude, you know, across the twenty sites we studied in seven different countries in three different parts of the world. It is a regular element of the news environment, even though we have chosen sites with very different ideological orientations, and they are located in different parts of the world with divergent media systems and cultures. We also found that the gap decreases not uniformly; it decreases to a certain extent during periods of heightened political activity, like national elections or government crises, because there is increased interest among the population in news about politics. We also looked at the influence of different storytelling formats, and we found that the storytelling formats do not affect the gap to the same extent that content preferences do. So these are some of our findings.

FL: The point you mentioned about market competition is highly important and I want to tie it to another issue here. What commentators typically agree is that nowadays we have a proliferation of media channels and outlets given the Internet, multi-channel TV, etc. In political communication research, for example, there has been renewed interest in the past few years in the concept of selective exposure, and the interest is driven by the perception that, as channels proliferate, more and more media outlets have become partisan again because it makes more sense for media outlets to target niche audiences in the era of channel proliferation. In other words, what is changing is not just the level of market competition but also the type of market competition that we have. What are your own views and observations about this point?

PB: Regarding the changing competitive landscape, I would like to highlight two related transformations that I think are particularly relevant to understanding online news. The first one has to do with the fact that the media industry used to compete within their own smaller markets; that is, television news competes with television news, newspapers compete with other newspapers, magazines versus magazines, and so on. But what has happened with digitization over the past three decades is that the media industries have become part of the larger information industries. And you have players competing across many of these markets. You now have Microsoft, you have Google; they are competing for the same kind of dollars. These are not just enterprises or organizations in the media sector per se, they are from the information sector. That is the first transformation. The second transformation is that, if you think about what has happened online, you might see that the main winners in the online game are not organizations coming from the conventional media sector. You have Google, you have Facebook, you have eBay, you have Amazon, and so on, and so forth. They are not organizations belonging to and coming from the traditional media industries. So the conventional media organizations and media industries have seen their share of the pie decreased and diminished. This is something important to take into account when trying to understand the present and make sense of the probable futures of online news.

FL: **As I mentioned to you earlier, this Dialogue will be published in association with a special issue on new media and journalism in Chinese societies. In one of the articles of the special issue, Professor Baohua Zhou of Fudan University followed a Goffmanian approach and constructed a conceptual framework regarding how new media technologies have made the news production process itself increasingly visible to the general public. In Goffman's language, the "back region" is increasingly exposed. This exposing of the news production process poses challenges to journalistic authority in some cases; yet, it also allows journalists to strengthen their authority through strategically making part of the news production process visible. In the context of mainland China, strategic exposing of the news production process can even become a means for journalists to**

evade or fight against state control. Put aside the details of the arguments made in that piece. I am just curious whether you think this idea of exposing would be useful in the contexts that you have studied; that is, whether there are digital journalism phenomena there that this idea of exposing can shed light on.

PB: I have not read the article you mentioned. But, based on your description, I am not surprised about these findings, and I think they illuminate a more general tendency or pattern in the case of online news and other aspects of digital culture more generally. This tendency or pattern has to do with an increase in visibility of the social field or the social setting, and of the different actors who participate in the setting. In the context of *News at Work,* we saw that the increase in monitoring and in imitation is made possible by the fact that the journalists in different newsrooms have greater knowledge of what their peers in other newsroom settings are doing. Another aspect of that, which is also present a little bit in *News at Work*, is that journalists in online newsrooms now have much more knowledge about what their audience or the public is doing than before, by using tools like Google Analytics or in-house tools that process website traffic. So, if we couple that with the increased knowledge that the public has of what's going on inside news organizations—you know, Timecast and other ways through which the audience can track the popularity of stories, the most commented, the most this, the most that, the trendiest ones, and so on, and so forth—then what this does at the aggregate level is a continual movement toward a much greater visibility of the social setting that in part exacerbates existing phenomena such as heightened levels of mutual monitoring and imitation among news organizations. It might also increase the conflict between the values of the occupation and the values of the market. That is, when journalists have greater knowledge of the stories that sell, and if those stories are not necessarily the stories that are consistent with conventional conceptions of newsworthiness, they might experience more conflict in terms of whether they should abide by the conventional values or cater to the perceived desires or interests of the marketplace. But the bottom line is that this is becoming an age of increasing visibility, and it is likely to have major impacts or consequences for how we understand online news in particular and digital culture in general.

FL: **After more than a decade of research, and maybe also based on your reading of other people's work in the area, how would you summarize your observations regarding how digitization has redefined news fundamentally or not?**

PB: Maybe I want to talk about not necessarily the effects of digitization on the news but general trends regarding online news in recent years. One trend is the increasing visibility of the public from the perspective of the journalists and the visibility of the journalists from the perspective of the public. Another trend is a major acceleration of the temporal patterns in news production—and consumption, too. And also a deepening of the temporal differences between different genres of news, different kinds of content, and also modes of news consumption. Another trend is the expansion in the spaces and times in which consumers access news stories, and how that affects both the production and the circulation of news. News is basically ubiquitous, and its consumption is ubiquitous, and it is really being coupled with interesting transformations in the production of news. And another trend, a fourth and final one, is the proliferation of devices to access the news, which I alluded to earlier. It's not just the desktop, but it's the laptops, it's the tablets, it's the smart phones, and it's the connections between all of them. And also a proliferation of the tools used to produce and to access the news, anything from your different options for multimedia, interactive applications, and so on, and so forth. That is something that we didn't think of in the mid-90s when online news started to become popular. It's a massive, massive change. So these are four general patterns where we see significant development; and they represent major differences from what things were twenty or so years ago.

FL: **The four trends constitute indeed a very good summary of the major changes of journalism in the digital era. Just curious, after your new book this autumn, what will be your next project? Or is a new project already under way?**

PB: Together with some collaborators, I have been working over the past couple of years on a study of the demise of the print newspaper, and

we use that as a window into understanding how institutions decay. This is a study that we have been conducting in three cities that have relatively comparable sizes, located in three different countries and regions of the world. The cities are Chicago in the United States, Paris in France, and Buenos Aires in Argentina. The idea behind the comparison is to have two cities from developed nations, the United States and France, but two nations which have very different media systems, structures, and histories, and also different configurations of popular taste. Then we have a city located in a country in the developing world, which is Argentina. We try to have this contrast between the news industries operating in two highly developed nations, and then also the same industry in a developing nation.

We see the newspaper as an integral member of the urban ecology, so that's why we are comparing cities. And we have been doing this study primarily ethnographically, but also have complemented that with some quantitative research. It is a very large project, you can imagine, in three cities, three different languages. Hopefully, in a few years, we will be able to write a book. Along the way, we will write a number of articles. I have other projects at work as well. For example, some works are a continuation of the research reported in The News Gap. We have data that we didn't include in the book. We will work on publications from that later this year. And there are also other research projects, not necessarily about journalism, but about some other interests of mine, including the relationship between communication studies and science and technology studies, things of that nature.

FL: **We will be looking forward to these new works from you. Thanks a lot for sharing your insights with our readers.**

Selected Works by Pablo J. Boczkowski

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for Pablo J. Boczkowski's selected works.

Note

1   Editor's note: bibliographical information of the article is listed in the list
    of representative works associated with this Dialogue.