Book notes

Edda Humprecht

Shaping Online News Performance: Political News in Six Western Democracies, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke; New York, 2016; 194 pp.; £65.00

Online news media can be said to have enhanced national media environments and challenged conventional forms of news production and consumption, but they have also been criticised for poor quality, sacrificing accuracy for speed and propagating unfounded tales rather than verifying content. Mixed evaluations have been made along other lines, so a book offering detailed research data on the performance of online news media in Western countries is timely and welcome. Edda Humprecht has conducted content analysis of 48 news outlets from different types of media organisation in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Switzerland and the United States. The main emphasis throughout the book is on political reporting. She provides an analytical framework for understanding new performance and explaining variations in such performance, as well as investigating combinations of conditions that foster high-level outputs of news content using fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis. The book begins by outlining the main normative principles relating to news media functions, both with reference to the public interest and news performance, and then offers a multi-level analysis of such performance, showing that it varies considerably among different media outlets. Humprecht examines four main indicators of news performance – analytical depth, hard news, critical distance and content diversity – and argues that the difference between high- and low-performing outlets depends very much on the balance they achieve (or in lesser or greater degree, fail to achieve) between information provision and commercial imperatives. The book supplies an excellent slice of empirical research. It also provides an exemplary counter to those contributions to 'new' media studies where speculation and trend-spotting outweigh the sophisticated analysis of systematically collected data set out here.

Jefferson D Pooley

James W. Carey and Communication Research, Peter Lang: New York; Bern; Frankfurt; Berlin; Brussels; Vienna; Oxford; Warsaw, 2016; 234 pp.; £36.00

James Carey undoubtedly has a significant place in the history of communications research, but what is the nature of that significance? This is not easy to explain, and the
difficulties involved provide Jefferson Pooley with his starting point. The book’s central focus is the dynamics of reputation. Carey certainly had a well-deserved and highly positive reputation within his own field, with the 1989 collection of essays, *Communication as Culture*, cementing it, but more than the influential themes in his work, for Pooley it is his presence as an intellectual talisman that is crucial. Intellectual life for Carey took the form of engaged humanist conversation and exhibited a committed anti-positivism. In this, he resonated and gained prestige among many scholars in the field. Jefferson offers an informative and absorbing account of Carey’s career and work, from discussion of his 1963 dissertation at the University of Illinois onwards. His trenchant criticisms of mainstream communications research in America are fully treated, as is his approach to journalism and public life. The book overall is both an accessible introduction to Carey’s work and a fitting tribute to its interpretivist values and virtues.