



## Trump and the Media

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To cite this article: Robert E. Gutsche Jr. (2018): Trump and the Media, Digital Journalism, DOI: [10.1080/21670811.2018.1530064](https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1530064)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1530064>



Published online: 06 Nov 2018.



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## BOOK REVIEW

**Trump and the Media**, edited by Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi, Cambridge, MA and London, The MIT Press, 2018, 272 pp., \$19.95/£14.99 (pbk), ISBN: 9780262037969

*Trump and the Media* is a collection of essays—many brief—that position issues related to the tumultuous presidency of Donald J. Trump and his troubled relationship with mainstream media. Edited by Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi, the volume is, as expected, a strong presentation by some of the leading scholars in media and journalism studies. Through its 27 chapters, ranging from work based on empirical studies related to the role of emotion in the politics and communication surrounding Trump to original constructions surrounding journalistic interactivity and media trust, this book provides readers with overviews of contemporary communication debates in a changing media world.

The book also highlights major points of contention surrounding the role of media in altering or maintaining issues of power that have become paramount to understand during and through the rise of Trump. And, gladly, with a few exceptions the book does not completely let the media off the hook for what some consider to be a tyrannical approach to governance within today's White House. Barbie Zelizer's early chapter, for example, should set a tone for the critical reader of *Trump and the Media* to examine the discourse throughout the book's pages. In her analysis, she argues that journalists today rely on tendencies of Cold War reporting that looked to create enemies and conflict based on exceptionalism and closed ideologies that protected journalistic communities as much as they sought to foster any larger sense of nation and power.

But Zelizer's points about journalists shaping the news based on methods of conflict-creation—supplementing reporting of “facts” with false equivalencies, notions of and attempts at impartiality, and moderation, rather than hardcore attacks against blatant lies hailing from the presidential candidates, particularly Trump—speak to larger issues related to cultural meanings of journalism. These issues highlight how power systems are so deeply embedded not only in the political spheres of communication (i.e. press agents, political reporting pools, press conferences) which present top-down directives and narrow understandings of the everyday, but also within journalism itself. Furthermore, and not surprisingly, journalists fail to acknowledge their role in power systems and in creating the spectacle of Trump, Zelizer argues. And it is this point—that journalists may act with their own agency to maintain systems of power—that should be heeded while reading each following chapter, as authors subscribe (or not) to these notions to varying degrees of success.

Certainly, when it comes to addressing issues of power, *Trump and the Media* is balanced by chapters focused on normative theory and on journalism practice. This balance also reflects the degree to which the schisms and complications of the field of journalism studies itself continue to emerge, particularly in times of crisis or confusion—as it now finds itself. As a result, the book requires critical rejoinders from scholars to identify the influence of popular discourses and moments of mass emotion on scholarly interpretations of social and cultural forms such as journalism.

Stand-out chapters that apply critical and intriguing perspectives to further this discussion include those by Mike Ananny, who identifies the influence of creating “news time” through news rhythms and, in the case of Trump, hyper-formulated pseudo news events. “Trump Time has never been Standard Time,” Ananny writes (p. 103). Instead, the public

gaze cast on Trump and his spectacle has extended to how and when journalists cover political news. The 24-hour new cycle, then, has been transformed into a hyper-real-time environment, directed by a single individual but adopted by a star-crazed personality. As a result, Ananny writes, American public(s) are left with the agenda and news that Trump wants—or that the press want. He cites now former CBS executive Les Moonves as saying that Trump “may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for CBS” (p. 105) was not just a reflection of the market economy in terms of reality or entertainment television, but for journalism, as well. The debate to be had, Ananny suggests, is not just about who and what journalists cover, but about who decides and influences the news agenda.

Daniel Kreiss discusses the role of identity in creating interpretive communities of voters, journalists, and professional communicators that adds complication to understanding the immense influence of “fake news” on today’s political activities. Interestingly, Kreiss provides a provoking critique on the media’s love affair with the concerns of “fake news” during and after the 2016 election, whereas journalists focused on the phenomena rather than on “identity and racism, sexism, or even partisanship, which were far more important factors in Donald Trump’s elevation to the presidency” (p. 97). It is much harder for journalists, and journalism scholars, he writes, to confront issues of how media cover and influence identity that lead to voting and citizens’ political speech than focusing on the influence “fake news” had in Trump’s win, an argument which Kreiss argues “lacks much in the way of empirical evidence” (p. 96).

Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt presents interesting possibilities about the degree to which media projections of candidate’s success can fold in on themselves and can blind journalists to realities other than their own. In her chapter, Tenenboim-Weinblatt explains how the use of polls and projections, rather than interviews with actual voters, contributed to a news agenda and to a journalistic community that largely saw the Trump candidacy and win with surprise. The coverage during the election about issues, then, reflected journalists’ collective agenda and perspective shaped by “experts” and popular expectations of the future. She writes: “To the extent that people’s plans and behaviors are aligned with their expectations, such projections can intervene in the reality that they set out to predict via both self-fulfilling and self-defeating dynamics” (p. 115).

In the end, the volume struggles, as we did in writing *The Trump Presidency, Journalism, and Democracy* (2018), to differentiate—or to collate—what and whose discourse is being analyzed when looking at coverage of Trump and related policies. This complication (and how hard it is to articulate) raises important questions about who is responsible for race-baiting, name-calling, wall-building, and women-hating communication and actions plaguing society. Who shares what amount of blame? Voters, candidates and elected officials, or the journalists who cover these issues with a lost critical lens? *Trump and the Media* shows us there seems to be enough blame to go around.

## Reference

Gutsche, R. E. Jr., ed. 2018. *The Trump Presidency, Journalism, and Democracy*. New York: Routledge.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1530064>

