

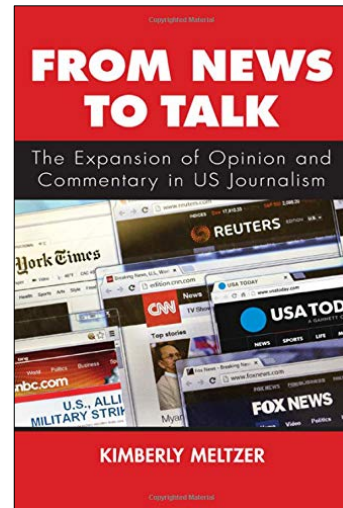
Kimberly Meltzer, **From News to Talk: The Expansion of Opinion and Commentary in US Journalism**, New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019, 270 pp., \$84.46 (hardcover).

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Kimberly Meltzer's latest book, *From News to Talk: The Expansion of Opinion and Commentary in US Journalism*, serves as an outgrowth of her previously published 2010 book, which tackles the relationship between journalism and television technology from the 1950s to 2009 and scrutinizes how journalism and TV news revitalize. With the springing up of opinion and commentary (i.e., "talk") in TV news programs over the past decades, it engenders novel discursive practices in the journalistic press. Drawing on qualitative discourse analysis and personal interviews with journalists, this book aims to expound various factors that promote the transferring from news to talk in mass media from the perspective of economic, political, technological, and sociocultural backgrounds.



To date, there is a huge volume of communication research focusing on the trend toward talk, the influence of this shift on viewers, and relevant approaches for the adaptation to the new model. However, the participation of the party concerned—the journalists—seems to be left unmentioned. Compared with previous research in this field, Meltzer attempts to investigate how journalists themselves construe this movement and the corresponding effects on social roles and political authority in turn.

In addition to a list of interviews and original exchanges with journalists and four pages of notes, this book is well organized into eight chapters, the first of which opens with a critical introduction, dwelling on the journalism in the pre- and post-2016 election of Donald J. Trump. It consists of three major parts—that is, research background, research method, and the interpretation of relevant terms. Attention should be paid to some concepts akin to journalism and communication, such as misinformation, disinformation, hybridity, interpretive community, and community of practice, among which Meltzer makes a fine-grained comparison between interpretive community and community of practice. She holds that journalists can be classified into the latter in that "it is a way of understanding how knowledge and learning are intertwined and how this occurs naturally within a social group" (p. 21), which is fully consistent with the nature of journalists.

Chapter 2 starts with a comprehensive survey about different viewpoints held by journalists toward the increase in talk in news over the past 10 years. Findings reveal that most interviewees verify the increase and account for it as follows: cable news, competition in technology, low cost of opinionated talking, and social and political changes. Besides, journalists' polarized opinions of CNN's strategy to diversify programming and journalistic self-branding are thoroughly elucidated, respectively.

Chapters 3 and 4 jointly delve into journalists' views about the increase of opinion and incivility. Chapter 3 traces the diachronic research since the 1990s, which provides the premise for chapter 4's discussion about journalists' contemporary perspectives in all types of news. What appeals to me most in chapter 3 is the various definitions of incivility—for instance, a lack of respect and/or frustration with the opposition (Mutz & Reeves, 2005); behaviors that threaten democracy (Papacharissi, 2004); insulting utterances, deception, and behaviors tending to break down or destroy ongoing conversation (Stryker, Conway, & Danielson, 2016). In spite of the lack of a unanimous definition, there is no doubt that incivility is endowed with a negative and unethical nature. Chapter 4 outlines the reasons for the increase in incivility in political media discourse, journalists' divergent opinions and comments on this phenomenon, and their concerns about regular people.

Chapter 5 is a concrete case study of the interview between Mark Shields and David Brooks on PBS NewsHour, with an attempt to examine how these two participants with converse political ideas (one liberal and one conservative) realize civility in political opinionated discourse. Meltzer explicates it within two points, including factors based on the NewsHour format and factors based on the men themselves (p. 163). The former engages the participants with a platform where they exercise humorous exchange, listen to others with patience, and conduct self-control and fair-mindedness. The latter is concerned with personality and mutual friendship between the two hosts. By and large, the integration of these factors allows the civility to maintain transparency and prevalence in news media.

Chapter 6 centers around the journalists' thoughts about Katie's, Anderson's, and Brian's failure of transition to talk shows, in which Meltzer works to elaborate on the reasons leading to this transformation. The threefold factors are highlighted as follows: (1) the new news/media environment requires/expects/demands that journalists, and all public figures for that matter, be present in multiple venues/platforms, and journalists are hedging their bets/making multiple bets; (2) hubris of the journalist-star: already well-known personalities want to expand their brand, get in front of the largest audience possible, show another side of themselves, have another forum for their work; (3) corporate strategy and business interests on the part of the networks and hosts (synergy, financial incentives; p. 170). Nonetheless, in terms of the three identified cases above, some journalists advocate their combination to be systematic and available for the ventures, while others dismiss the coexistence with the indication of coincidence and transience.

Chapter 7 mainly discusses the novel orientation about the future of news through personal interviews with journalists and analysis of their published discourse (e.g., opinion and personalization of news, the notoriety and brand of individual journalists, the survival of television news). It is noteworthy that the striking disparity about the prospect of TV news requires an effective convergence between television and other digital devices; in Meltzer's words, "Convergence was also cited as the essential ingredient in keeping newspapers afloat" (p. 207).

This book concludes in chapter 8 with a brief summary about the findings of the previous five chapters, followed by recommendations and implications of future research. What makes this chapter stand out is Meltzer's reiteration of the dual and implicit meaning underlying the title—the gradients of formats, contents, and delivery in the trend toward talk and a movement from news to entertainment as well as opinion/commentary, which echoes her argument in chapter 1. More importantly, Meltzer adds a third allusion

of the title: news leads people to talk, in all sorts of ways (p. 209), emphasizing the dynamic and initiative change in current social media.

Overall, concisely structured in clear and readable language, *From News to Talk: The Expansion of Opinion and Commentary in US Journalism* should embrace a wider audience, which will arouse great interest among those who are committed to studies in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, communication and mass media, American history, and so on. Despite the fact that it is written by a media worker, the scope of this book reaches far beyond mass media studies. What's more, it also succeeds in original insight to journalists' own performances by means of qualitative personal interview and conversational analysis, which gives available access to the real sound of their voices so as to ensure the authenticity and credibility of the collected data. Undoubtedly, we should commend Meltzer's careful pickup of this refined topic in line with current trends. However, a sense of subjectivity and arbitrariness arise simultaneously in the process of interpretation. Hence, the involvement of quantitative approaches, such as the distribution and frequency of journalists' evaluation toward an event, should be taken into account.

Another critical point of this book is situated in the fluctuation of the definition of *civility*. There is a great need for an accurate and unified understanding of civility for the reason of further research, measurement, and evaluation purposes (Muddiman, 2014; Stryker et al., 2016). Finally, although Meltzer specifies some key concepts in an articulate and straight manner in each chapter, it would be more pleasant reading if a holistic glossary of terminologies was presented at the end of the book for more accurate information location and a broader readership.

To sum up, as Meltzer has mentioned, there is still a long way to go for journalism to put research and findings into practice. This illuminating and informative book is readily intelligible to general readers, students, and researchers with an interest in the fields of sociology, discourse analysis, communication studies, mass media, and even politics and history.

### References

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