

Shelton A. Gunaratne, Mark Pearson, and Sugath Senarath (Eds.), **Mindful Journalism and News Ethics in the Digital Era: A Buddhist Approach**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2015, 252 pp., \$145.00 (hardcover).

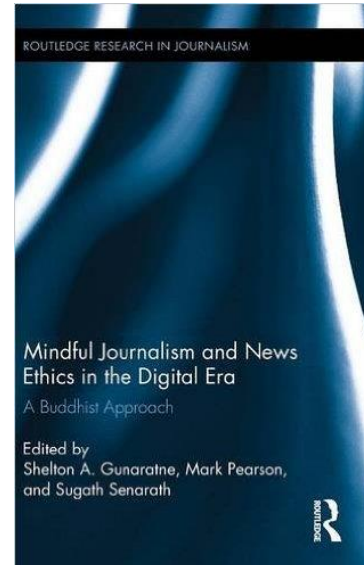
Book Review by  
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***Mindful Journalism and News Ethics in the Digital Era: A Buddhist Approach*** insightfully explains weaknesses of Western journalism from historical, social philosophical, and spiritual viewpoints. When concepts of mindfulness are applied as the bedrock of news reporting, writing, and production, as well as consumption and use, the Western approach is laden with problems.

This book critically investigates core concepts of journalism, truth and storytelling, and discovery of truth; the journalist as an objective, independent observer of truth; and the ethics of reporting truth. It presents an alternative model of defining, understanding, and interpreting the truth that could lead to solutions. To this end, the book propounds a quintessential Buddhist concept based on the Four Noble Truths, from understanding the problem (suffering), affirming and validating the method (cause of suffering), and identifying the way (path) to solve the problem (end the suffering).

Regarding journalism and the process of news reporting, journalists, editors, and consumers have important roles to play as systematic thinkers, advisors, and socially engaged practitioners, in contrast with the traditional roles of truth seekers, independent observers, agenda setters, gatekeepers, producers, and even purchasers. The book presents Eastern philosophical concepts from Taoism and Hinduism, as discussed and promoted by Eastern philosophical theorists of communication, through the lens of a pragmatic, balanced, self-sufficient, and economical mode of living. This approach to journalism regards happiness not as an end or as something to achieve but rather as a process, a total experience through the right means of living. This approach to storytelling challenges the journalism model, which, for a century, has been subsumed under a market economy philosophy, priming conspicuous consumption. Now storytelling requires mindful thinking and practice. The approach is applicable to both traditional and digital media.

The book is worthy of an experiment in college journalism classes as an antidote to the overwhelmingly Western-centric views familiar to journalism students. In particular, it presents a clear framework of journalists as change agents in the digitized world, with a revisionist definition of nirvana and the end of suffering using a lay person's interpretation. The book also introduces the PS (*Paticca-samuppada*) model to students of journalism in ways that can be relevant to their lives and living environments, with templates and examples of mindful journalism.



The presented approach emphasizes harmony with nature and revisits Taoism and Hinduism, pointing to the connection of mindful journalism with harmonious and peaceful coexistence between nature and human beings. A unique aspect of mindful living through self-sufficiency based on Buddhist concepts is discussed as a safeguard against conspicuous consumption and blind pursuit of wealth—the driving forces of the market economy under which the journalism industry operates worldwide.

An outcome of using this approach could be the creation of a people-centric journalism network guided by wisdom and mindfulness. Such a network might be able to address the dilemma of news as a commodity, ratings wars, and other commercially driven concerns that place the journalism industry in jeopardy of creating suffering for society unknowingly and unconsciously while reporting the news.

The book offers eclectic views and interpretations by Eastern and Western thinkers and practitioners of the Buddhist mindfulness approach. They establish cases of why and how the propounded Buddhist model can be applied in various circumstances with students, practitioners, and theorists of journalism across the Western and Eastern hemispheres. Chapters introducing concepts are closely followed by excursuses that provide clues to and guidance on how the topics discussed can be put to use.

With the aforementioned points raised about the book, further exploration is warranted. Research, training, and curriculum development should be undertaken to better understand and apply some of the core concepts of the book, including journalists as change agents, happiness derived from living a mindful and morally and spiritually guided life instead of from material wealth and conspicuous consumption alone, understanding of news contexts through mutual causality, experienced journalists and editors mentoring less trained journalists, and workshops or short courses on mindful training for journalists and journalism students.