



Contemporary NGO–Journalist Relations: Reviewing and Evaluating an Emergent Area of Research

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Abstract

Long recognized as key players in international politics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly assume important roles in the provision of news. By hiring photographers, staffing online departments and funding reporting trips, NGOs act in ways that overlap with the actions of professional journalists. This article reviews and evaluates an emerging area of research – the study of NGO–journalist relations – that analyzes these developments. It proceeds in four parts: First, it overviews changes in the NGO and journalism sectors that drive growing scholarly interest in the topic. Second, it summarizes the findings of the available research. Third, it suggests some of the ways in which this research connects with concerns in the sociology of media and communication. Fourth, it evaluates the findings in light of various normative frameworks of public discourse. It concludes by suggesting that NGO–journalism scholarship can benefit from further attention by sociologists working in the areas of media and communication.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have long been recognized as key players in the political process (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Whether providing services, advocating to government and business officials or waging public awareness campaigns, such groups form the backbone of much contemporary civic action (Lang 2013). Research has consistently found that publicity is key in helping NGOs achieve their various goals, from raising funds to exerting pressure on political and economic elites (Benthall 1993). Therefore, one important strand of research has examined the relationship between NGOs and the journalistic field in which they interact in order to achieve these aims. In this vein, scholars have examined the strategies NGOs use to garner media coverage (Fenton 2010; Waisbord 2011), investigated the permeability of the news media to such strategies (Thrall et al. 2014; Van Leuven and Joye 2014) and debated the effects of these interactions on NGOs, journalism and public discourse more generally (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Chouliaraki 2013; Orgad 2013).

Today, a host of changes in both the journalism and NGO sectors drive growing scholarly interest in this emergent area of research. On the one hand, news organizations face dwindling profits, technological upheavals and shrinking audiences that raise questions about the capacity of journalists to produce original reporting in an unending news cycle (Schudson 2011). On the other hand, NGOs – as a result of growing institutionalization, professionalization and competition in their own sector – are expanding the amount and types of information they produce (Powers 2015a). These twin developments raise a number of questions with implications for sociologists interested in media and communication. For example, will the diminished resources of news organizations give publicity-seeking NGOs greater prominence in the news? Of equal importance, will digital technologies allow NGOs to bypass the news media and become their own news provider?

To date, these questions have been addressed primarily by a small but growing number of researchers in the fields of communication and media studies (see, e.g. Powers 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Conrad 2015; Cottle and Nolan 2007; Dogra 2014; Fenton 2010; McPherson 2015;

Nolan and Mikami 2012; Orgad 2013; Russell 2013; Waisbord 2011). In this essay, my aim is to review and evaluate this scholarship for a sociological audience. To that end, the essay proceeds in four parts. First, I begin by overviewing key changes in both the journalism and NGO sectors that motivate a growing scholarly interest in the subject. Second, I summarize the key findings of the available research. Third, I suggest some of the ways that this research connects with sociological investigations into the news media. Fourth, I evaluate the findings of the available research in light of various normative frameworks for public discourse (Baker 2002; Benson, 2008; Christians et al., 2009).

In brief, my argument is as follows: The extant scholarship on NGO–journalist relations has done much to extend – and at times complicate – a number of issues identified in prior sociological investigations of the news media. In particular, it has contributed to debates about pluralism in the news (Gans 1979), helped make scholarship of news production less “media-centric” (Schlesinger 1990), and brought to light some of the “boundary work” (Gieryn 1983) in which NGOs and journalists engage while shaping news content. At the same time, NGO–journalism scholarship has been conflicted in terms of how to evaluate its findings. Where some see NGOs playing a potentially salutary role by supplanting the diminished reporting resources of journalists (Russell 2013; Zuckerman 2004), others worry that their growing presence in news production augurs a troublesome conflation of the lines separating advocacy from journalism (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010). Drawing on normative theories of public discourse, I argue that the primary impact of NGO–journalist relations is not so much that they “help” or “harm” either party; instead, I suggest that their primary effect is to reinforce the discursive status quo by privileging elite ideals of public discourse while marginalizing more participatory and radical forms of public engagement.

Before beginning, here is a note on the term “NGO.” As a category of actors, NGOs are notoriously difficult to define. Following Lang (2013, p. 12), I discuss them here as entities that are (i) nominally independent of government, (ii) not-for-profit, (iii) voluntary in nature and (iv) pursue some common good, rather than the interest of only their membership. This broad definition includes a wide swath of groups, from easily recognizable names like Greenpeace and Amnesty International to smaller groups working on specific issues in a single city or country. This definition also acknowledges that NGOs are nominally distinct from government or business actors, even though many receive funds from government and business sources and nearly all interact with them regularly. In using this broad definition, my aim is to draw out general patterns in NGO–journalist relations that may offer a useful starting point for sociologists interested in this emerging area of research.

Changing institutional contexts

Scholarly interest in the relationship between journalism and NGOs arises in the context of major transformations in both sectors. In journalism, news organizations across Western Europe and North America are in the midst of a number of crosscutting economic, technological and social changes. Economically, diminished revenues have led many organizations to cut costs and reduce newsroom staff size (Schudson 2011). Technologically, online platforms create an unending news cycle in which those smaller newsrooms are constantly searching for fresh content (Boczkowski 2011). Socially, audiences are fleeing traditional news providers in favor of more personalized “niche” news formats (Bennett 2008). Taken together, these changes mean that news organizations today have fewer resources with which they are expected to produce more reporting.

At the same time as news outlets experience these massive changes, NGOs have undergone three transformations that lead them to increase both the amount and types of information they

produce. First, NGOs have become *institutionalized*: that is, they have been established as durable organizations rather than ephemeral social movements (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Lang 2013). This institutionalization requires NGOs to produce a wide range of information materials (e.g. reports and policy statements) for a diverse array of stakeholders (e.g. donors, government officials and journalists). Second, NGOs have become *professionalized*. Its staff members (researchers, advocacy officials and communication professionals) are competitively hired for their capacity to produce specific information materials (Powers 2015a). Third, NGOs have become increasingly *competitive* as they compete with other NGOs for limited funds and public attention. As a result, many dedicate growing resources to managing their “brands” by maximizing the organization’s chances for positive publicity while minimizing its negative exposure (Orgad 2013). Together, these changes mean that NGOs today produce more – and more types – of information than they did in the past (Powers 2015a).

These changes in the journalism and NGO sectors shape a growing number of interactions between the two. Journalists with little topical knowledge about a subject matter turn to NGOs as sources for information and commentary. Some data even suggest that an unending news cycle leads journalists to use NGO materials “verbatim” (Fenton 2010, p. 116). Reciprocally, NGOs pitch news stories to – and share on-the-ground contacts with – journalists (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Waisbord 2011). In some cases, NGOs have even gone so far as to help fund reporting trips for news organizations that are unwilling to shoulder the expense (Conrad 2015; Coward 2010). To be sure, the frequency and interactions are uneven, with some NGOs attracting more attention from journalists than others (see, e.g. Thrall et al. 2014). However, the broad trend that results from changes in the journalism and NGO sectors is clear: NGOs and journalists are increasingly aware of – and in contact with – each other.

This growing interaction between journalists and NGOs raises a number of scholarly questions. Most basically, it raises the possibility that NGOs are more likely to succeed in garnering media coverage today than they were in the past (Thrall et al. 2014; Van Leuven, Deprez and Raeymaeckers 2013). Relatedly, the growing number of NGO–journalist interactions raises questions about the impacts on both parties. Some, for example, worry that journalism is inadvertently being turned into a platform for advocacy and fundraising (Rothmyer 2011). Conversely, others express concern that the growing emphasis by NGOs on publicity is distracting them from other objectives (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010). Finally, the growth of digital tools leads some to wonder whether NGOs are not better served by becoming their own news providers (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Lang 2013). In recent years, scholars have begun to offer answers to these questions. It is to the main findings of this scholarship to which I turn in the next section.

NGO–journalist relations: what the research says

The extant scholarship on NGO–journalist relations puts forward three primary findings regarding NGO–journalist relations. First, it finds that NGOs continue to face an uphill battle in the struggle for publicity, and that most news coverage accrues to a few leading NGOs. Second, it finds that in order to receive coverage, NGOs adapt to – rather than challenge – established news norms that emphasize conflict, spectacle and celebrities. Third, and as a result of the previous two findings, it finds that NGOs are increasingly using digital tools to selectively bypass the news media and become their own news providers. Below, I summarize the key findings of this research.

Scholars repeatedly find that NGOs face an uphill battle in the struggle to achieve publicity. Professional norms make journalists far more likely to utilize government and business officials – rather than NGOs and other civic actors – as news sources (Lang 2013). A study of press releases

in the United Kingdom, for example, finds that government and business officials are responsible for nearly 60 percent of all press releases found in the news, while NGOs account for just 11 percent (Lewis et al. 2006, p. 22). Recent trends of newsroom cost-cutting and endless publishing cycles, which in principle give NGOs greater opportunities for making the news, do little to alter this pattern. In fact, one recent study finds that a leading organization – Médecins Sans Frontières – received *less* coverage in 2010 than it did 15 years previously (Van Leuven, Deprez and Raeymaeckers 2013). Unobserved factors, like increased competition among NGOs for publicity, may help explain this particular finding. Nonetheless, as Trenz (2004, p. 301) remarks in his study of quality newspapers across Europe: “The remarkable absence of non-institutional, non-statal actors – be it on the transnational, national or local level – is striking... There is a clear bias towards institutional and governmental actors and not towards civil society.”

Research shows that the struggle for NGOs to receive news coverage is not simply uphill, it is also highly uneven. In a content analysis of 750 New York-based NGOs, Jacobs and Glass (2002) find that 2 percent of all groups in the study appear in more than 100 news articles, while nearly one-third are never mentioned once. Relatedly, a study of the prevalence of more than 250 human rights NGOs in over 600 news outlets finds that just 10 percent of all groups capture 90 percent of media citations (Thrall et al. 2014). This unevenness also extends to the relationships between small and large NGOs. Scholars find that larger NGOs, like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, choose causes on the basis of their own organizational needs (e.g. relevant cultural frames and linguistic capacities) more than on severity or need (Bob 2006; see also McPherson 2015).

The second finding of NGO–journalism studies is that NGOs adapt to – rather than challenge – dominant news norms in order to receive news coverage. Despite claims that journalism is being overrun by advocacy (Rothmyer 2011), most studies find that NGOs do little to alter dominant norms of news construction (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010; Waisbord 2011). Instead, NGOs package and pitch news stories in ways that mimic or “clone” the news that journalists would make, if they had the time to do so (Fenton 2010). This leads NGOs to focus on celebrities, conflicts and spectacles as methods for garnering media attention (Dale 1996; Gaber and Wilson 2005). Some argue that the adoption of such norms may balance the discursive playing field: For example, Greenberg and his collaborators (2011) suggest that the adoption of media-savvy strategies by environmental NGOs helps them compete with more powerful government and business actors in the struggle over policy and public opinion. Others are less sanguine. The adoption of news norms, they suggest, makes NGOs less able to engage in more radical forms of social criticism (Fenton 2010; Nash 2007). In either case, nearly all agree that NGOs display adaptive, rather than oppositional, tendencies vis-à-vis journalists.

Yet if journalism is not being overrun by advocacy, it is also not the case that advocacy is being overtaken by journalism. Research has stressed that NGOs are heterogeneous entities with different staff favoring different types of publicity (Powers 2014; Nolan and Mikami 2012; Orgad 2013). For example, Orgad’s (2013) interviews at humanitarian NGOs revealed key differences between advocacy staff – who objected to the sensationalized use of imagery featuring malnourished children – and fundraising and marketing professionals (who see the same images as necessary ways to garner media coverage, see also Nolan and Mikami 2012). More broadly, not all NGOs seek the same types of publicity: Where some seem primarily interested in using the prestige press to engage with political elites, others prefer broadcast media to attract new audiences for fundraising and educational purposes (Powers 2014). Importantly, these divergent publicity strategies stem from variable types of funding, political objectives and organizational dynamics across NGOs. Thus, while NGOs are adopting news norms, this adoption appears less

as a distraction than a deliberate, if diverse, component of a broader strategy of brand management and public engagement on the part of NGOs (see Dogra 2014).

The third finding of NGO–journalism research precedes directly from the previous two. Because access in the news media is limited and requires the adoption of news norms, scholars find that many NGOs are increasingly using digital tools to become their own news providers. Case studies demonstrate that many NGOs now provide an enormous array of information materials on their websites and use a variety of social media channels to engage with their various stakeholders (Powers 2015b). Moreover, at least some organizations are hiring former journalists to help produce news content (Cooper 2011). Finally, leading NGOs are using digital tools to provide news coverage that oftentimes rivals the information available from major news organizations. Russell (2013), for example, compared NGO coverage of a UN Climate Summit with the reporting provided by US news outlets. She found that NGO coverage, relative to its news counterparts, was “exhaustive and included the actions and comments of high-profile international and national officials, scientists, civil society, and locally focused grassroots groups” (p. 917). In fact, NGO coverage was so exhaustive that many news organizations simply directed readers to it for more complete coverage of the events.

Scholars are just beginning to analyze what these developments mean for the relationship between journalists and NGOs. To date, most of the scholarship suggest that NGOs are using digital tools to renegotiate their relationships with journalists. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) analyze the use of social media by NGOs during an environmental protest and find that NGOs mostly communicate with the protestors and other NGOs rather than journalists or news outlets. Relatedly, others argue that NGOs are increasingly becoming more selective in their interactions with journalists. Chadwick (2013), for example, finds that groups like Wikileaks enlist leading news organizations in their efforts to ensure as broad a public reach as possible. In both, scholars suggest that NGOs are renegotiating their relationship with journalists in order to maximize their public relations efforts. Whether they are in fact able to do so remains a question for future research.

NGO–journalism research and the sociology of media and communication

To date, the majority of NGO–journalism research has been put forth primarily by scholars in media and communication. Yet these findings speak to – and in some cases extend – core concerns of sociologists interested in media and communication. In an effort to link this research with those concerns, below, I briefly highlight three ways in which the available research on the relationship between NGOs and journalists connects with themes at the heart of the sociology of media and communication. These three connections are suggestive rather than exhaustive. I provide them primarily as an invitation for scholars to see the sociological concerns at stake in this emerging field of research.

First, the available research echoes and extends established research on pluralism – that is, investigations into the diversity of topics and sources in the news. Scholars have long found that news coverage skews towards the statements of government and business officials (Gans 1979). Neither professionalization on the part of NGOs nor cost-cutting on the part of the news media seems to dramatically alter this wisdom. In the scheme of total news coverage, NGOs remain a relatively minor news source. At the same time, NGO research also extends this body of scholarship in several ways. By showing that only a few leading NGOs receive news coverage (Thrall et al. 2014), it suggests that long-held concerns about pluralism across source types (e.g. government, business and NGO) must also be accompanied by questions about pluralism within source categories (e.g. the degree to which different NGOs appear in the news). Furthermore, by suggesting that large NGOs inadvertently favor some groups and issues more

than others (Bob 2006; McPherson 2015), it pushes concerns about pluralism across the entire journalist–source continuum, from where NGOs get their information to more traditional concerns about how journalists “decide what’s news” (Gans 1979).

Second, the available research confirms previous research about the influence of media on civic groups, while also correcting for one of its key analytical blind spots: namely, its “media-centrism” (Schlesinger 1990). Like previous scholarship (e.g. Gitlin 1980), NGO–journalism research finds that the pursuit of media coverage often leads NGOs to shy away from more radical political claims (Fenton 2010; Nash 2007). However, NGO–journalism research has also explored the different factors that lead NGOs to pursue their publicity strategies (Powers 2014; Nolan and Mikami 2012; Orgad 2013; Waisbord 2011). By showing that NGOs are a diverse category with heterogeneous interests, this scholarship has helped bring to light some of the ways in which NGOs themselves – and not just the news media – shape public discourse. Analytically, this focus on NGOs helps produce a more complete picture of the entire circuit of cultural production that shapes news content.

Third, and finally, the available research connects with sociological concerns regarding the drawing and maintenance of organizational and professional boundaries. Extant research on “boundary work” (Gieryn 1983) asks how it is that some groups attain the authority to perform certain actions. Sociologists have productively used this concept to examine the ways boundaries are maintained, crossed and blurred. Journalism has long been seen as a profession with porous, contested boundaries (Abbott 1988). The study of NGO–journalist relations is an empirical setting that is ripe for the continuation of such analyses. Current research suggests that NGOs and journalists alike struggle to define the terms upon which they interact with each other. NGOs, for example, find it difficult to bring the media spotlight to countries and topics that are otherwise shunned in the news media (Ramos et al. 2007). In such cases, one might argue that journalistic boundaries are being maintained (i.e. that reporters, rather than NGOs, are deciding what constitutes newsworthy coverage). In less common cases, as when NGOs fund reporting trips for journalists (Conrad 2015), those same boundaries may be blurred, as the lines separating journalists from NGOs become less distinct. In both, analyses of boundary work can illuminate key issues about who speaks in the public sphere and under whose terms actions are legitimized.

Evaluating the findings of NGO–journalism research

The available scholarship sheds light on many aspects of the relationship between NGOs and journalism. It also informs and at times extends many long-held concerns in the sociology of media and communication. Yet despite these admirable strengths, this scholarship exhibits a key weakness. To date, NGO–journalism scholarship remains conflicted in how to evaluate its own findings. In the eyes of some, NGOs provide original reporting from neglected areas of the world (Schudson 2011; Zuckerman 2013). By contrast, others believe the growing presence of such groups augurs a worrisome conflation of the lines separating advocacy from journalism, with deleterious consequences befalling both parties (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010). In this section, I want to suggest that one way to clarify these debates – and which previous sociological research can serve as a guide (Benson 2013; Ferree et al. 2002) – is to utilize normative frameworks in order to make explicit the values guiding scholarly evaluations of the NGO–journalist relationship.

Normative frameworks concern the ideal functions of journalism, of what the press *ought* to do (Baker 2002; Benson 2008; Christians et al. 2009). These frameworks articulate a set of values that cluster together to emphasize certain ideals that journalists are tasked with achieving (e.g. accountability, inclusion and transparency). In theory, there are as many

normative frameworks for journalism as there are political ideologies. In practice, sociological research has emphasized a fairly small number of frameworks that pertain directly to the ideal functions of journalism in democratic societies (Benson 2013; Ferree et al. 2002). I shall follow in this practice here by introducing a small number of distinct frameworks and using them to offer a preliminary evaluation of the findings in the emerging area of NGO–journalism research.

One model is known as the elite liberal theory of public discourse (Baker 2002). It maintains that political life is too complex for ordinary citizens to understand. Therefore, the role of the journalist is to present citizens with the debates conducted by elites, without undue fear or favor to any one segment of elites. When elites shirk their duties, journalists are called upon to inform the public through investigative or watchdog reporting (Benson 2008). In this model, the role of elites is to provide expert knowledge to citizens as dispassionately as possible, with the expectation that the marketplace of ideas will zero in on the best available solution (Baker 2002). For NGOs, the elite liberal model suggests that only those groups with expertise – rather than, say, lived experiences – are legitimate speakers in the news. Moreover, because news norms espouse elite values of objectivity and detachment, NGOs are expected to conform to those ideals when seeking publicity. Finally, to the extent that growing relations between NGOs and journalists imperils the independence of reporting, elite liberal theories argue that the issue can be resolved through heightened transparency.

A second model of public discourse is the democratic participatory framework (Ferree et al. 2002). It sees the primary aim of public discourse to be the mobilization of debate and discussion across a wide range of social groups, not just elites. Journalists are called upon to facilitate this broad participation by opening their reporting to a broad range of communicative styles, not just the transmission of expert knowledge. In this framework, NGOs are seen as important vehicles for the expression of public concerns. As Habermas (1998, p. 381) argues in his reformulated version of the public sphere, when looking at the “great issues of the last decades” (environmentalism and human rights), NGOs (as well as social movements more generally) have played a key role in bringing these issues onto the news media’s radar. A more fully realized participatory public sphere would thus include NGOs of varying sizes and ideological stripes whose participation is not predicated on the adoption of dominant news norms. Instead, the democratic participatory model argues that journalists have a responsibility to actively promote the political involvement of NGOs and other groups.

A final model of public discourse is the radical constructionist perspective (Christians et al. 2009). It believes that public discourse should strive to include individuals and groups located at the social periphery (Benson 2008). Because news norms often suppress alternative modes of communication, radical constructionists encourage journalists to eschew detached communicative styles in favor of reporting that can address the “roots” of social problems. In such a model, NGOs are not *ipso facto* privileged speakers; instead, their inclusion is assessed based on the degree to which they foster emancipatory approaches to extant social problems. Additionally, radical approaches favor the inclusion of ideas and social groups that originate from the social periphery and aim to challenge the status quo.

Given the preceding discussion, what evaluation can be made about the implications of NGO–journalists relations? On my reading, a preliminary analysis suggests that NGO–journalist relations most closely approximate elite liberal ideals of public discourse. To the extent that NGOs have gained news access, this has been largely restricted to the most elite groups that operate within the dominant logics of the news media. By contrast, the available research offers less room for optimism about the capacity of NGO–journalists relations to fulfill democratic participatory and radical constructionist ideals. Journalists seem uninterested in using NGOs to mobilize broad public debate or to include voices and viewpoints from the margins of society. To the

extent that NGOs do achieve news access, it stems primarily from their adoption of communicative styles that reinforce elite ideals of objectivity and detachment.

When evaluated from the vantage point of normative theories, I would suggest that the primary impact of NGO–journalist relations is not so much that they “help” or “harm” either party. Instead, the primary effect of NGO–journalist relations is to reinforce the discursive status quo by privileging elite ideals of public discourse while marginalizing more participatory and radical forms of public engagement. Indeed, positive valuations of the role played by NGOs tend to emphasize the value such groups place on accuracy and factualness, rather than advocacy or conflict (Schudson 2011). Relatedly, NGOs are seen as valuable because they provide information about places where journalists are not – but largely in ways that mimic the norms journalists would employ if they had produced the news themselves (Powers 2015a; Zuckerman 2004).

To be sure, there are exceptions to this analysis, and more research remains to be done. For starters, while NGO–journalist relations most closely approximate elite liberal ideals, the fit is not a perfect one. Elite liberal theory assigns a “watchdog” role to journalism vis-à-vis elites. As NGOs – or, rather, as some small segment of NGOs – become “elites,” it is not clear to what degree journalists are reporting on this growing sector (Waisbord 2011). Moving beyond elite models, it is also the case that some news outlets do seem to more closely approximate participatory ideals than others (Powers 2014). Finally, the growing use of digital tools by NGOs to become their own information source raises the possibility that NGO–journalist relations might be moving to formats that more closely approximate democratic participatory – if not radical constructionist – ideals of public discourse (Russell 2013). Future research can move forward by investigating these developments and evaluating them in light of the various normative frameworks they satisfy or frustrate.

Conclusion

Research examining NGO–journalist relations presents scholars with a range of exciting and relevant questions. In this article, my aim has been to introduce the key findings of this emerging area of research to sociologists and to link some of its findings with established concerns in the sociology of media and communication more generally. To these ends, I began by outlining key changes in the journalism and NGO sectors that drive growing scholarly interest in this emergent area of research. Then, I turned to discuss three findings that this research has produced: First, that NGOs face an uphill and uneven struggle for publicity; second, that in order to achieve publicity, NGOs adapt to – rather than challenge – established news norms; third, and as a consequence of the first two findings, NGOs are increasingly using digital tools to become their own news providers. I have suggested that each of these findings connects with – and in some cases extends – sociological concerns about pluralism, media-centrism and boundary work. Future research can thus expand on and depart from this emergent area of inquiry.

While the extant research has – and continues to – shed much light on NGO–journalist relations, it has been conflicted in the evaluation of its findings. While some see an increased role for NGOs as a boon for journalism (in that it provides reporting on important topics that may otherwise receive scant coverage), others worry that the growing imbrications of NGOs with journalists augur a worrisome conflation of the boundaries separating advocacy from journalism. I have suggested that one way to clarify these debates is to draw on previous sociological research that assesses the degree to which public discourse satisfies various normative criteria for public discourse (Benson 2013; Ferree et al. 2002). In reviewing these frameworks, I have argued that the primary effect of NGO–journalist relations is not that they “help” or “hinder” either NGOs or journalists. Rather, I have argued that the primary effect of NGO–journalist

relations is that they reinforce the discursive status quo by emphasizing elite liberal ideals of public discourse (e.g. expertise and detachment), while eschewing more participatory and radical norms.

In this essay, I have focused primarily on reviewing and evaluating the available scholarship. This should not detract from the fact that a great deal of scholarship in this area remains to be undertaken. NGO–journalists relations remain a fluid, changing area of study. The very forces that propel growing interest in the subject matter are themselves not stable: Journalism continues to change at a rapid rate, and NGOs are constantly experimenting with ways to maximize their publicity efforts. For these reasons, future research is likely to modify and deepen scholarly knowledge of the trends identified in this essay. As this occurs, scholars will do well to draw from – and contribute to – the analytical and normative foci of previous sociological investigations of the news media. NGO–journalist relations may support or detract from various democratic goals. The sociology of media and communication can be useful in linking empirical scholarship to normative frameworks that specify which democratic ideals are met or frustrated as a result of the growing interactions between NGOs and journalists.

Short Biography

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Note

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