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Allan, Stuart; Peters, Chris

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## Journalism's digital publics: Researching the visual citizen

**Stuart Allan**  
*Cardiff University*

**Chris Peters**  
*Roskilde University*

### Contact Details:

Professor Stuart Allan  
Head of School  
School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies  
Bute Building, King Edward VII Avenue  
Cardiff University  
Cardiff, CF10 3NB  
UK

email: AllanS@cardiff.ac.uk  
tel: +44(0)29 208 75420  
web: [www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/)

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**Journalism's Digital Publics: Researching the 'Visual Citizen'**

*Stuart Allan and Chris Peters*

Disruptions associated with either financial or technological change have long garnered most of the attention when considering the democratic challenges facing journalism in a digital era (Pavlik, 2000; Picard, 2014; Usher, 2010). The proliferation of media platforms offering repurposed content has fragmented formerly stable audience profiles to varying degrees (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2017); declining advertising and subscription revenues, as well as an elusive business model, have impacted on staffing and resources (Deuze and Witschge, 2018); a multiskilling of roles in the newsroom and field risks compromising news outlets' capacity to produce quality reportage (Bro et al., 2016); and the ease with which digital manipulation and distribution can undermine accuracy and verification on a wide scale makes it ever more difficult to separate the truthful from the deceitful, the 'real' from the 'fake' (Graves, 2016). It is readily apparent issues such as these complicate any easy, straightforward alignment between journalism and civic participation in public life, yet also invite further consideration of the very nature of citizenship itself in a digital era.

Set against this backdrop of wider debates about journalism and democratic cultures, this chapter interweaves diverse, yet complementary strands of research to help discern, first, the ways in which journalism's digital publics are becoming increasingly image-ready, willing and able, and second, the implications for remediations of authority, objectivity and transparency. It argues there is heuristic value in reversing familiar emphases by adopting

bottom-up, citizen-centred perspectives to explore civic modes of seeing, particularly in and through the generation, deployment, and use of digital imagery. To substantiate this claim, this chapter strives to map the broad features of scholarly investigations into the ongoing changes between journalism, citizens, and the politics of digital imagery. Given there is a variety of useful research schematics around citizen witnessing, social movements, audience practices, and internet cultures (among others), which emphasize the growing importance of the visual, bringing them together offers a valuable holistic, interdisciplinary overview and periodization. Moreover, doing so allows us to clarify image-related technological affordances and constraints, news organizations' interactions with citizens in newsmaking and critique, and the envisioned potentials of news reporting for political engagement.

The first part of this chapter situates this evolving ecosystem in relation to our conception of the 'visual citizen' (Allan and Peters, 2019). Having briefly outlined pertinent technological developments and associated sociopolitical implications for journalism, we pinpoint a guiding research rationale for investigating precipitous civic commitments to creating, curating, sharing and repurposing vernacular imagery. On this basis, we proceed to assess recent scholarly literatures exploring the visual citizen, namely as: news observer and circulator (seeing and sharing news in everyday life through news consumption); 'accidental' news image-maker (citizen witnessing and 'amateur' photojournalism); purposeful news image-maker and activist (visualizing dissent and sousveillance); and, creative image-maker and news commentator (GIF and meme culture). We then conclude by highlighting possible trajectories for future research.

### **Digital Imagery's Communicative Implications for Journalism**

The reconfiguration of formerly stable patterns of news consumption (or so they may appear in retrospect) has been a recurrent theme occupying many news and journalism studies scholars in recent decades, with increasing attention being placed on the different ways audiences have taken up new media devices (e.g. Newman, 2018; Westlund and Färdigh, 2015). Frequently, the desired metric is ‘use’ – in terms of device preference, frequency, intensity, levels of interactivity, etc. – that people take with possible ways of engaging with journalism. Similarly, studies of newsroom practice, especially when it comes to the incorporation of analytics and algorithms, present the case that hard data on impressions, views and the like preoccupy the journalism industry (Tandoc, 2015). In short, the emphasis is on measurability over form, with the changing materiality of news being typically considered in terms of usage-based possibilities. Less prominent, however, is research addressing the shifting processes of socialization that occur for audiences around news consumption and the associated ramifications for norms, values and forms of political engagement. Capturing such transformations is challenging as “it is often much more difficult for researchers to identify, define, and study situational definitions than it is for the average citizen to navigate them” (Meyrowitz, 1986: 24). In this respect, this chapter makes the case that taking visual engagement as a starting point and contrasting it to what came before, offers a valuable heuristic.

One can make the broader case that the wave of visual technologies appearing over recent decades encourages a number of reconsiderations about “why we attend to the things to which we attend” (Comor, 2001: 282), as well as how “changes in communication technology influence what we can concretely create and apprehend” (Carey, 2008: 24). The rise of video camcorders, then personal digital cameras, and now smartphones change the ease with which ‘newsworthy’ imagery can be captured by ordinary people (‘user-generated

content’) and, in turn, shape public expectations of mobile ‘amateur’ witnessing of events typically relayed before professional journalists arrive on the scene. Similarly, the increased public sharing of photographs via the web and social media mean that these documented first-hand experiences can be widely seen, even without news organizations acting as intermediaries. Other examples, such as the emergence of GIF, meme and emoticon culture as features of connectivity in everyday life, or the generation of witnessing imagery to mobilize resistance, protest, and dissent, are just a few further instances of recent changes that underscore the growing ubiquity of myriad types of imagery in contemporary news landscapes. Indeed, highlighting such lived materialities of visibility invites further reflection on the political implications of their mediation, helping to inspire new questions regarding the ways diverse communities of interest struggle over definitions of what is ‘real’ and ‘meaningful’ in ideological terms.

This is evidenced in public disquiet over thorny questions of truth, authenticity and verification within an ‘image-saturated’ culture. From discussions surrounding the visible staging of electoral politics in the era of ‘fake news’ (Boczkowski and Papacharissi, 2018; Happer et al., 2018), to disputes over the acceptable limits of Photoshop where news photography’s indexical claim on the real is concerned (Ritchen, 2013; Wheeler, 2005), to the visual surveillance of authorities over publics (and sousveillance of publics over authorities) using video cameras (Ristovska, 2016), and many other debates, ongoing interdisciplinary dialogues around contemporary citizenship and democracy are often inherently bound up with the visual. Even though image-making has always mattered for civic politics, the shifting time-spaces of digitalization throw into sharp relief how everyday practices of seeing are being recast. The confusing, contested political realities of image-circulation and re-inflection disrupt previous understandings, such as when the emotive

qualities of violent imagery no longer necessarily claim a purchase on identification, let alone compassion (Mortensen et. al, 2017), or the objectivity ascribed to photojournalism is dismissed for being malleable, and as such compromised (Borges-Rey, 2015).

In the sections to follow, we gather together an array of insights drawn from pertinent literatures addressing four of the more significant areas of recent scholarly investigation into visual citizenship. Each of these foci resonates within a different regime of visibility (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017) and, as such, helps to equip researchers with an alternative basis from which to rethink journalism's normative relationships with its digital publics.

### **Visual Citizen as News Observer and Circulator**

The creation, processing, curation and sharing of various types of imagery in the digital media sphere is one of the manifest transformations of everyday communicative practices in recent times. Common social ways of observing and reacting to news stories are becoming bound-up and tied to the visual in emergent ways, while – paradoxically – at the same time mundane practices of news consumption are becoming less visible. Affective reactions about the news, for example, are increasingly expressed on social media through non-verbal emoticons and recommender buttons (e.g., like, favourite), and these markers, along with the algorithmic preferences ascribed to them, influence the persistence of online expressions and spreadability of messages (boyd, 2014). In turn, where news events are concerned, these changes may well impact upon related public forms of democratic engagement (see Larsson, 2018; Messing and Westwood, 2014). Research by Swart et al. (2018), for example, illustrates that many people opt for phatic communication on Facebook to respond to shared news stories, avoiding sharing or commenting explicitly themselves due to the face-

threatening nature of the act and possible exposure to criticism or abuse (see also Ksiazek et al, 2016; Larsson, 2017). The increased prominence of social media feeds as informational sources in everyday life (Bakshy et al., 2015; Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink, 2015; Newman et. al, 2018), in which public affairs and personal updates intermingle and interweave, is thus but one prominent example of the evolving interpretive contexts within which news stories are encountered.

In this respect, when it comes to assessing the potential significance of variable news habits, it is illustrative to consider the shifts in visibility of news consumption from the analogue era of traditional broadcast media to today. It has been something of a truism amongst researchers that news consumption facilitated the creation of collective identity, and with it the potential of shared, communal senses of belonging; that is, journalism prompted a ‘national conversation’ and, in so doing, staked its claim to be at the centre of public life (Anderson, 1991). The cultural history of the newspaper in many countries was closely connected to its status as “a mobile object designed to be carried through the streets and read on trains, platforms, or subway cars, not simply in isolation, but in a connected social space” (Sheller, 2015: 14). In other words, visibility (both actual and imagined) was key to the establishment of journalism’s proclaimed status and cultural authority. Moreover, the social formation of news habits was largely predicated on seeing others consume journalism, from the aforementioned newspaper on public transit, to radio bulletins in the kitchen, newscasts on the family television, and so forth (Peters, 2012). For researchers striving to anticipate future trends, it remains unclear what impact the continued individualization of media devices will have on future generations’ inclination to consume journalism, the forms of engagement these will take, or how new technologies will be ‘domesticated’ as expedient



news devices in everyday routines (see also Haddon, 2006; Livingstone, 2002). Smartphone use renders news consumption as a personally-visible, but publicly-*invisible* practice.

In this regard, then, technologies of observation are crucial resources for future generations to be socialized into understanding not only how, but also when and where we culturally expect to ‘see’ journalism. ‘Getting the news’ via social media feeds and smartphone apps is a pronounced change in the visuality of news akin to the introduction of the news ticker and multiple screens with cable news in the 1990s. Alongside other visual complexities that have also presented themselves over this timeframe, and continue to do so – from hyperlinks, to data visualizations, embedded tweets and videos, and so on – the myriad changes in the visual presentation of journalism indicate that how citizens come to see, potentially share, and socially engage with news is undergoing a radical transformation.

### **Visual Citizen as ‘Accidental’ News Image-maker**

The way social life is seen, felt, and communicated has become constantly intertwined with these ongoing, emergent, visual potentialities and in this respect, it is unsurprising that on-the-spot ‘amateur’ imagery has become an essential part of news coverage. No longer the occasional exception to the general rule, breaking news reporting now routinely relies on the willingness of ordinary people to bear witness to what they see and hear unfolding around them, sometimes at considerable risk to themselves. Such instances point to the potentialities of personal imagery being re-appropriated from the lived contingencies of the ordinary (everyday life contexts) into projections of the extraordinary (personal perceptions of – even possible engagement in – citizen photojournalism).

Our everyday image-ready culture may not demand such an elevated sense of civic duty, but it has certainly alerted individuals to the reality that they could potentially be called upon to act as crisis reporting surrogates (Allan and Peters, 2015). Moreover, citizen imagery has been shown to strongly engage citizens around its perceived authenticity and affectivity even if concerns remain about ethics and possible manipulation (Ahva and Hellmen, 2015; Reading, 2009; Rentschler, 2009). These developments, along with other experiments in user-generated content (UGC) associated with the digitalization of journalism, have led to a more collaborative ethos for news organizations committed to enhancing audience participation (Peters and Witschge, 2015). Amongst the pertinent factors here are two largely concurrent developments, namely the rise of first camera phones and then smartphones, and the introduction of image sharing websites and apps. The successful integration of cameras on personal devices and newfound visual mobility for the public in the mid-2000s led commentators at the time to anticipate startling implications for the fledgling device – ‘everyone becomes a photojournalist’ – which proved newsworthy in their own right (Allan, 2017; Caple, 2014). These developments, much like the introduction of camcorders in the 1990s, had a similar effect of bringing the possible contributions of ‘amateurs’ in contact with the journalistic ‘needs’ of news coverage. Several instances in the years following the early introduction of camera phones, when citizens relayed mobile imagery to document major news events in the absence of journalists on the ground, gradually normalized the role of the ‘citizen witness’ (Allan, 2013) in generating reportage to such an extent that having access to such imagery is now almost the expected norm. ‘Pics or it didn’t happen’ is “the populist mantra of the social networking age,” as Silverman (2015) sums it up. “Show us what you did, so that we may believe and validate it” (see also Alper, 2014; Mortensen, 2014; Wardle, et al., 2014).

Diverse forms of public participation in visual newsmaking are flourishing as never before, often neatly sidestepping the mainstream media's professional gatekeepers striving to mediate or, more to the point, regulate and monetise demotic contributions within preferred institutional boundaries. Pessimistic appraisals of photojournalism's future are being readily countered by bold assertions about the promise of citizen-centred coverage, especially the advent of alternative, embodied approaches to visual truth-telling (Madrigal, 2012; Wall and El Zahed, 2015). Tempering this enthusiasm, however, are those expressing their misgivings – commentators and scholars alike – about occasional shortcomings in the quality, fidelity or credibility of this reportage (Pantti and Sirén, 2015; Tait, 2011). News organizations routinely encounter 'flak' over their choices of visuals, not least by politically-motivated media monitoring 'watchdogs' – situated across the political spectrum – increasingly taking it upon themselves to police for perceived misuses of imagery for partisan or commercial advantage. At the same time, many photo editors have adapted, taking elaborate care to cultivate a nuanced relationship with their publics, effectively crediting them with the interpretive skills necessary to differentiate subtle gradations in journalistic authority over contested evidence (Allan, 2017). Tell-tale words such as 'purportedly', or phrases such as 'appears to show', signal this contingency, the unspoken acknowledgement that sometimes cameras – or, more to the point, the people holding them – cannot always be trusted.

### **Visual Citizen as Purposeful News Image-maker**

Many scholars seeking to move beyond all-encompassing conceptions of 'citizen journalism' recognise the importance of discerning multiple modalities for purposes of closer analysis, three of which can be briefly differentiated across an imagined continuum as follows. At one end is the individual engaged in self-described citizen newsmaking, perhaps enacting a sense

of civic duty or obligation by offering their community a form of ‘hyper-local’ news coverage otherwise unavailable in the absence of professional journalists employed by news organisations. For some researchers, such assumed roles are suggestive of what they describe as a ‘fifth estate,’ a nascent realm of digitally-savvy citizens intent on fashioning alternative forms of reporting actively supplementing – and, in some instances, supplanting – the mainstream news media’s fourth estate commitments (see Cooper, 2006; Dutton, 2009; Williams, et al. 2011). At the opposite end of this continuum is the individual who, much to their own surprise, performs the type of impromptu, ‘accidental’ reportage discussed above, namely by bearing witness to an unfolding event for the benefit of distant family, friends or followers, most likely via a social media platform (Allan, 2013; Mortensen, 2015). A third modality, situated in a shifting, even contested (at times) relationship to the other two, is the individual self-reflexively committed to purposeful witnessing. Examples include the activist determined to challenge injustice (Atton, 2015; Greer and McLaughlin, 2011; Martini, 2018), the NGO worker revealing a humanitarian crisis (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017; Dencik and Allan, 2017), the combatant recording the grisly realities of violent conflict (Ibrahim, 2014; Kross, 2015; Rodriguez, 2011; Smit et al, 2015), or the whistleblower exposing corruption (Brevini, et al., 2013), amongst other possibilities.

Examinations of this third modality have frequently brought to light frictions besetting the maintenance, repair and policing of professional-amateur normative boundary-making (Carlson and Lewis, 2015; Waisbord, 2013). Of particular interest to some scholars concerned with questions of state power in this regard has been the efforts of citizens to wield portable, often wearable personal technologies to gather and share visible evidence in the public interest. In contrast with ‘surveillance’ (watching over), the term ‘sousveillance’ (watching from below) has been elaborated in several studies to capture further dimensions of

these processes, notably the reverse tactics employed to monitor those in positions of authority “by informal networks of regular people, equipped with little more than cellphone cameras, video blogs and the desire to remain vigilant against the excesses of the powers that be” (Hoffman, 2006; see also Bakir, 2010; Mann, 2002). Such lens-reversal practices, studies have shown, have facilitated concerted efforts by afflicted communities to confront institutions of authority, in part by affording counter-narratives of their lived experience of oppression with the potential to disrupt what can otherwise seem to be a hegemonic politics of visibility in news reporting.

Several pertinent initiatives have attracted academic enquiries over recent years. A formative example is WITNESS, an international non-profit organisation widely perceived to be a leader in a global movement to create change by developing citizen-centred approaches to human rights reportage. Launched in 1992 by a small group led by the pop-star Peter Gabriel (2014), its current website declares its aim to empower “human rights defenders to use video to fight injustice, and to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools that can pressure those in power or with power to act”. Its initial strategy, namely to provide “people who chose to be in the wrong place at the right time” with video cameras so as to help them document violations and abuses in the field, has evolved to prioritise both activists’ and ordinary citizens’ engagement in personal reportage with a view to its evidential importance for the advancement of human rights causes. To date, WITNESS has partnered with more than 360 human rights groups in 97 countries, devoting particular effort to supporting the inclusion of citizen video as a ‘democratic tool’ in human rights campaigns seen by millions of people around the world (see also Allan, 2015; Gregory, 2015; Ristovska, 2016).

A further important strand in scholarship investigates citizens' purposeful uses of visual imagery in the politics of protest and dissent concerning longstanding antagonisms over poverty, injustice and corruption. Examples include the 'London Riots' of summer 2011, where residents living in some of the city's most deprived areas shared real-time still photographs and video footage over several days. An array of 'haunting images' chronicling the violence 'flooded the Internet,' including on community sites such as Citizenside and The-Latest, amongst many others, capturing what were frequently poignant visual testimonies of loss and personal hardship (Kalter, 2011; Vis et al, 2013). A relatively small portion of the imagery was shot by the participants themselves, including incriminating 'trophy' snapshots of one another standing in front of ransacked shops (Holehouse and Millward 2011). Later the same year in New York, Occupy Wall Street set in motion a fledgling network of activists – symbolised in its rallying cry 'We are the 99%' – intent on refashioning social media platforms to strategic advantage. Live-footage gathered and posted online by 'the army of citizen documenters' (O'Carroll, 2011), galvanised sporadic protests into a movement, leading *The Economist* (2011) to observe: "what's going on in America right now may be the world's first genuine social-media uprising" (see also Penney, and Dadas, 2014). Similarly, the Black Lives Matter activist movement has recurrently drawn upon sousveillant documentation in its campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people, recognising the raw power of imagery to focus media – and thereby public – attention on instances of alleged police shootings, brutality or misconduct (Allan and Dencik, 2017; Bock, 2016). In making such acts visible, nationwide protests resulted, federal investigations were launched and discussions of policy and attitudes on racial prejudice and discrimination came to the fore on media agendas (Stephen, 2015; Steiner and Waisbord, 2017). Visual citizenship was also shown to be a double-edged sword, however, with those

engaging in sousveillance sometimes finding themselves rendered too visible, quite possibly at risk of arrest, violence or intimidation.

### **Visual Citizen as Creative Commentator**

Research into different aspects of visual citizenship and the impact on journalism is gradually catching up with increasingly common efforts by citizens to transform how everyday political critique is performed online. Once the purview of fan sites, hacker communities, and groups at the vanguard of internet cultures (see Knobel and Lankshear, 2007; Shifman, 2012), digital visual practices such as the creation and circulation of memes, GIFs, and video remixes are now regularly deployed as forms of news commentary (see also Bayerl and Stoykov, 2016; Eppink, 2014; Milner, 2013a, b). Taking forms ranging from bricolage to repurposing, parody, critique, and subversion, these creative visual reflections on public affairs are no longer merely confined to message boards and ‘lonely people in their basements’ but have emerged into the mainstream. Indeed, the idea of such communicative practices have become so culturally-ingrained that it is now commonplace to assert the controversial nature or absurdity of a political statement by noting it has ‘become a meme’.

Native-online forms of image creation potentially impact the relationship the visual citizen has with journalism in terms of facilitating accessible forms of critical engagement – specialist websites like ‘Know your Meme’ and ‘GIFY’ categorize and sort significant examples while easily-learned meme and GIF generators abound, welcoming participation. Relying on the power of networks to spread them within the social media ecosystem, engagement with such visualities is, of course “bounded by technical limitations (features and affordances), entrenched social behaviours, and inclusion in (or exclusion from) a shared

understanding of the meme” (Leavitt, 2014: 148; see also Mitner, 2014). However, it would be a mistake to underestimate their political and journalistic importance. As Highfield and Leaver note, “visual content on social media is not necessarily a set of selfies, food porn, memes, and GIFs, marked in their narcissism or frivolousness. Instead, visual social media content can highlight affect, political views, reactions, key information, and scenes of importance” (2016: 48; see also Gal et al. 2016; Milner, 2013b). There seems to be growing recognition of this on the part of journalists too; creating and curating these visual commentaries is now a common part of news coverage, forming an interpretive loop wherein the visual commentary on the news event folds back into the ‘original’ story itself.

Such creative visual critique, while attended to in the research literature around social movements and protest (Milner, 2013a) and politics in general (Shifman, 2014) is a somewhat neglected dimension within journalism studies. It demands more sustained scholarly attention going forward. Visual critique in journalism, historically the purview of the political cartoonist (Greenberg, 2002), is now increasingly seen through the lens of these digital commentaries created, shared, and further curated by the public, creating entirely new visual communicative forms and conversational dynamics around public affairs. As Shifman argues, “human agency should be an integral part of our conceptualization of memes by describing them as dynamic entities that spread in response to technological, cultural and social choices made by people ... building blocks of complex cultures, intertwining and interacting with each other” (2012: 189). They are ‘spreadable media’ (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013), in which their movement (through sharing and circulation), combined with ongoing encapsulation of publics (through awareness or active participation around them) strengthens the potential impact of their message (see also Wiggins and Bowers, 2015). Their emergence has led to them becoming an increasingly integral part of political campaigns –



grassroots to national – as witnessed in their sustained use as tools of delegitimization (Ross and Rivers, 2017). Similarly pertinent is the increasing presence of ‘social media consultants,’ who are tasked with the job of trying to create visual messaging via memes, gifs, hashtags, video mixes and mashups that resonates with desired electors (Bowls, 2018).

Just as scholars endeavoured to understand the factors shaping the rise of professional PR consultants in the 1980s and ‘90s, today much attention is focusing on visualized political communication strategies and their implications for civic engagement. Disputes over imagery open up new, fluid spheres of contestation, both in the ‘mainstream’ and more radical ‘fringes’ of global newscapes (Massanari, 2017; Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2017). Well-known examples of visual critique in the 2016 US Presidential Campaign (e.g. Pepe the Frog, #TrumpTapes) and first 100 days of the Trump Presidency (Prankster Joe Biden, #AlternativeFacts) are not the exception but the new normal, it would appear. This emergent communicative ethos means that research agendas going forth will need to attend to the significance of ‘creative’ audience-generated imagery for visual journalism, with critical insights into the role of humour, ironic detachment and critique in such interactive practices. Intriguing on their own terms, these newfound illustrative techniques also warrant investigation with regard to the modes of citizenship they affirm – and undercut – within broader civic deliberations.

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship concerned with citizen-centred forms of visual reportage brings to light the promise – and, on occasion, the pitfalls – of news organisations’ concerted efforts to rethink their relationship with their publics. Coming to terms with “the people formerly known as the

audience” (Rosen, 2006) invites ever greater commitments to innovation and experimentation, with a variety of tactics, devices, protocols and strategies undergoing active, ad hoc revisioning, often under intense pressure in difficult circumstances. When it works, such as in several examples discussed above, these types of synergies help to secure first-hand perspectives long before the professional journalist arrives on the scene. They enable news stories to secure an evidential basis that may be otherwise too dangerous – or, indeed, prohibitively expensive — to cover with sufficient rigour and depth. In other instances, as we have seen, purposeful practices of sousveillance afford vital insights into the experiences of those who may be otherwise ignored, marginalised or trivialised in media representations. Still, serious shortcomings have also come to the fore. The same visual practices facilitating empathetic spectatorship in response to a newsworthy crisis may simultaneously embolden visual regimes determined to legitimise extremist views or incite hatred against women or minority groups (Carter, et al., 2019). Similarly, the playfulness long associated with Internet meme culture is open to the risk of re-appropriation to troll, bully, or otherwise undermine others’ personal rights to self-expression.

In striving to delve deeper into the sociopolitical significance of such transformative shifts, this chapter’s evaluative survey of pertinent new media research has sought to move beyond familiar conceptions of ‘citizen journalism,’ in part by disentangling civic modes of seeing for closer analysis and critique. Using our formulation of the ‘visual citizen’ to guide our enquiry, we have attempted illuminate the contingent, uneven – and politically fraught – nature of these transitional processes of visual connectivity, and also why the civic responsibilities they elucidate are so important. In this way, we have aimed to facilitate efforts to explore pressing questions regarding the visualities of journalistic collaboration and connectivity, and inclusion/exclusion, within democratic cultures.

This chapter's discussion is intended as a strategic starting point for future investigations, not least as an encouragement for those seeking to attend to complexities frequently glossed over in broader assertions about the challenges facing journalism's continued viability. The uneven, inchoate ways in which visually-centred forms of news reporting are evolving in a 'post-truth' environment, where 'alternative facts' abound, warrant urgent attention for news and journalism studies research (see also Allbeson and Allan, 2018). At a time when longstanding assumptions regarding journalism's presumed centrality to public life appear to be in danger of unravelling, laudable platitudes about media and civic empowerment risk seeming anachronistic within a digital networked ecology all but obscured in the swirl of 'fake news' rhetoric (Boczkowski and Papacharissi, 2018; Happer et al., 2018). Critical research, we suggest, must find new ways to assist efforts to secure deliberative spaces for dialogue and debate over the reinvigoration of journalism's reportorial commitments for tomorrow's participatory news cultures.

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