



## Book Reviews

Thomas E. Patterson

*Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism*. New York: Vintage, 2013.

256 pp.

**Reviewed by:** Dane S. Claussen, *Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China*

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Thomas E. Patterson's new book, *Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism*, would be called "slim" (only 143 pages not including end matter), but it packs a wallop, succinctly making as many points as most nonfiction books do in 300+ pages. Patterson might be partially repeating himself from another book, but perhaps it is because he is more confident than ever and no one listened before.

Perhaps without knowing it, he is calling for a revolution: journalists having substantial levels of expertise about what they write about, which will decrease factual errors, improve news judgment, increase the quality of sources used, and decrease journalists knowingly and uncritically passing along lies and misinformation from government (and corporate) officials (something that U.S. journalists were supposed to have learned through McCarthyism or Vietnam). Many Americans assume that U.S. journalists already are very knowledgeable, which is only one reason why they seemingly attribute all bad journalism to political (or other) bias rather than the simpler (and more obvious) answer: incompetence. Knowledge-based journalism also is not unprecedented in the United States or abroad, but merely rare. Patterson is not alone. Mitchell Stephens' new book, *Beyond News: The Future of Journalism*, argues for "wisdom journalism," and this reviewer also has repeatedly called for higher academic/intellectual standards in U.S. journalism education programs.

Patterson uses data to show that U.S. media audiences' preferences in, and opinions about, the news are closer to what he advocates than to what news organizations are delivering. And he dismisses concerns that knowledge-based news is more time-consuming and expensive to produce based on his quite logical deduction that highly knowledgeable reporters can work as quickly as less knowledgeable reporters. (Probably faster!)

Patterson fatally misses the anti-intellectualism-caused reasons, which this reviewer has written about, why knowledge-based journalism has not happened before. To recite only the major reasons, (1) U.S. news executives feel psychologically threatened by employees who are more specialized, better educated, and/or more intelligent

than they are; (2) U.S. news executives assume that specialized reporters are biased about their area(s) of expertise (as if ignorant people have no biases!); (3) U.S. news executives assume that specialized reporters (such as a business reporter with an MBA, or a medical reporter with an MD) are unavailable, won't stay long, and/or will be difficult to manage, or at the very least, difficult to edit (assuming lots of jargon!); (4) U.S. news executives know about the relatively very small audiences for all intellectual and/or political media; and (5) U.S. news executives think they will be unable or unwilling to move a specialist between beats. (Each one of these reasons is exaggerated or even incorrect, but Harvard political scientist Patterson apparently is not even aware of these well-known facts about the sociology of U.S. journalism.)

Patterson is overly optimistic about the willingness and ability of U.S. news executives to supply knowledge-based news, and overly optimistic about U.S. journalism schools training knowledge-based journalists. He writes that journalism schools have many professors who have subject-area expertise, that a balance of social science research-oriented professors and former practitioners is great for teaching knowledge-based journalists, and that many journalism schools (at least those in the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education) already have altered their curriculum for knowledge-based journalism training.

But even Patterson admits that, "Any large-scale effort to institute knowledge-based training in journalism programs would face resistance" (p. 101). Second, he overestimates the integration of professional and academic traditions in teaching and research. Third, subject matter expertise of journalism/mass communication professors tends to be very limited or out of date.

Finally, the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education was, in many ways, just an extension of the central, but unproven, assumption of the 125-year-old education model that still drives Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism & Mass Communications (ACEJMC) accreditation standards: journalists will be much better if they, cafeteria-style, take a little bit each of sciences, social sciences outside mass communication, humanities, and (lately) business. This model has always been based more on hope than experience; daily life and history tell us that a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing. As a sensible North Carolina student said in a Carnegie-Knight Initiative report, she was no more confident about her classmates' ability to report on business after they had taken one business journalism course than she was before.

In fact, Patterson omits journalism students other than vague references to selected students in the Carnegie-Knight Initiative. Patterson does not teach in a journalism school, so perhaps he does not know that, like their professors, the overwhelming majority of U.S. journalism students are neither particularly interested in, nor prepared for, knowledge-based journalism.

Dean C. Smith

*A Theory of Shield Laws: Journalists,*  
Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2013. 29

Reviewed by: Courtney A. Barc  
DOI: 10.1177/1077695814559006

In June 2014, the push for a federal sources was reignited once hear an appeal from James Ri ment in the prosecution of a fe tion. Following the decision t urged the U.S. Senate to sche offer journalists like Risen pr

Despite this push for a fed er's privilege is focused on th sion in *Branzburg v. Hayes*, it constitution. Yet much of th Smith, professor of communi disconnect by adopting and judicial actors in the process

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In an exemplary use of le in the long-told story of re story in a new way, extenc case that tends to be the foc the end" (p. 15). Instead, e opinion in *Branzburg* as "i process" (p. 232). Taken in might look less like inferi important pieces in a larg popularly think of as freed

The seven chapters of tl that infrastructure, from the