



Journalism and Democracy: An Evaluation of the Political Public Sphere

Brian McNair

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The public sphere is said to be in crisis. Dumbing down, tabloidisation, infotainment and spin are alleged to contaminate it, adversely affecting the quality of political journalism and of democracy itself. There is a pervasive pessimism about the relationship between the media and democracy, and widespread concern for the future of the political process.

Journalism and Democracy challenges this orthodoxy, arguing instead for an alternative, more optimistic evaluation of the contemporary public sphere and its contribution to the political process. Brian McNair argues not only that the quantity of political information in mass circulation has expanded hugely in the late twentieth century, but that political journalism has become steadily more rigorous and effective in its criticism of elites, more accessible to the public, and more thorough in its coverage of the political process.

Journalism and Democracy combines textual analysis and extensive in-depth interviews with political journalists, editors, presenters and documentary makers. In separate chapters devoted to the political news agenda, the political interview, punditry, public access media and spin doctoring, McNair considers whether dumbing down is a genuinely new trend in political journalism, or a kind of moral panic, provoked by suspicion of mass involvement in culture.

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