Making Online News

Newsroom Ethnographies in the Second Decade of Internet Journalism

Edited by David Domingo & Chris Paterson
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CHAPTER ELEVEN

A News Portal without a News Team
Journalistic and Marketing Logics
at the Malaysian National News Agency

Amira Firdaus

The Internet has offered national news agencies the opportunity to extend the reach of their services to non-media customers. This chapter analyzes the case of BERNAMA, highlighting the tensions between journalism and marketing in the process of blurring the traditional definitions of news agency with their online services. While the journalists defend their role as a service to promote Malaysia’s place in the world, which fosters a pro-government bias, the marketing department in charge of the website strives for neutrality in order to avoid undermining their business. The multifaceted implications of strategic decisions in the design of online news products are discussed, with commodification of news being one of the most worrying for the author.

Much of the existing literature tends to be historical or systemic accounts of global news agencies, documenting the evolution of major international news agencies and evaluating the news agency role within different political systems (e.g., Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). A recurrent theme in news agency literature is that of ‘news agencies in crisis’ (Boyd-Barrett, 2010). As Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (2004) explain, the crisis of news agencies is ‘practical’ and ‘conceptual’ in nature. Practically,
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