

DOSSIER

# ENTERTAINING DEMOCRACY IN THE ERA OF NEO-LIBERALISM

Copyright © 2016  
SBPjor / Associação  
Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo

JAMES CURRAN  
*University of London, United Kingdom*

**INTROUDCTON** – James Curran’s article “Entertaining democracy in the Era of Neo-liberalism” is an essay written from the 13th SBPjor Conference Meeting in Campo Grande in 2015; a conference in which he was the opening speaker. The article was approved for publication in the BJR at the end of 2015, but we have decided to publish it in a special edition of Journalism and Democracy as it deals precisely with this issue. Curran begins the article by questioning the current state of democracy as it pertains to the decline of the nation state and the emergence of transnational institutions of deliberation which he calls “multilevel governance” but “is not matched by the development of a multilevel sense of citizenship”. As almost a prelude to the Brexit, Curran draws attention to the fact that the English do not consider themselves European despite being a part of the European Union. He tied this nationalist ideal not only to the British, but to other country populations in general. In a world dominated by transnational corporations and the presence and constancy of national media “supporting a national identity” he predicted that “Attempts at new institutional building are out of step with media development”. His analysis highlights several problems that are weakening modern democracy like “the increasing centralization of power by political leaders” and the “increasingly unrepresentative nature of the political class rendering them in some countries almost a ‘separate caste’”. Reading Curran’s text allows us to reflect on the situation in Brazil. At first, it is pessimistic and places meanings that we have lobbied for outside of our borders: “Governments are less able to govern; political power is becoming more centralized; and the unelected influence of big business is becoming greater”. The media also has a hand in contributing towards a “growing sense of disconnection from politics”, making reference to politics as a linear universe dominated by the elite. After further analysis of the contrasting possibilities that the Internet brings as well as its role in constructing news in public systems, Curran offers a slightly more positive outlook: “liberal democracy is in disrepair, and the media are implicated in its malaise. The rise of the internet offers some relief, as does an enduring political experiment – public service broadcasting.” Once more, there is no way to not compare his perspective with what is happening in Brazil nowadays; we are fighting for the hope of building an effective and autonomous public system. Lastly, Curran places importance on starting to think about politics from new vantage points, especially for creating policies and media entertainment. Once again, we can see similarities in Brazil. This understanding is common among our researchers, such as the numerous research spaces which work on this correlation. But, after tracing a series of inferences on specific materials, Curran puts forth a direct and definite conclusion: “A healthy democracy needs to be informed as well as entertained”.

\*By Claudia Lago BJR’s director

During the course of the twentieth century, the nation state declined<sup>1</sup>. The rise of international, deregulated financial markets, and of transnational corporations able to relocate production, with relative ease, to other countries, reduced the ability of national governments to manage their domestic economies. National governments also became subject to increasing global economic pressure to adopt market-friendly policies (such as lowering corporation tax) irrespective of the wishes of their electorates. Governments of nations are still important in a wide area of everyday life (as responses to the 2008 economic crash underlined). But national government power diminished as a consequence of deregulated globalisation. And this meant that the power of national electorates also declined.

The key shift took place in the 1970s and 1980s when much of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and controls over the flow of capital between countries was dismantled. This rendered governments more vulnerable to sudden outflows of capital, leading to currency depreciation, interest rate increases and unemployment, as well as higher government borrowing costs. National governments in developed economies found that they were increasingly in a similar position to governments in developing countries: they were no longer masters of their own destiny.

The democratic system is adjusting to this decline of the national state. In addition to national and local government, two new tiers have been extended. The first additional tier are continental or sub-continental structures such as the European Union (where national sovereignty is partly pooled) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which facilitates a collective response to political, economic and environmental issues in the region. The second tier are global agencies, of which the three most important are the United Nations (with numerous ancillary organisations), International Court of Justice and the International Monetary Fund. There has also been a growth in the number of quasi-global forums like the G20 country summits designed to support inter-government initiatives and agreements. The hope behind all these developments is that they will assist the extension of public control in areas like climate change and the global market where governments acting alone have limited power, and develop a system of regulation in relation to issues like human rights that reflect “global norms”.

But this project of strengthening public power in a globalised world is still in an evolutionary phase. There are continuing problems of efficacy and accountability. More fundamentally, the development of “multilevel governance” of the kind outlined above is not matched by the development of a multilevel sense of citizenship. Thus, British people tend not to think of themselves as being Europeans, still less as global citizens. This is partly because they consume mainly national media, supporting a national identity. Attempts at new institutional building are out of step with media development.

The second problem facing democracy is the growing power of money. This is sustained through professional lobbying organisations (often employing former public servants and senior politicians); through think tanks, supported by large corporations, which have both government access and media credibility; and, above all, through campaign contributions.

The plutocratic distortion of democracy is exemplified by the United States, where there is no effective curb on campaign expenditure and political advertising. Without corporate bankrolling, there is little chance of being elected to Congress and no chance of standing successfully for the Presidency. Campaign expenditure continues to escalate in the US, with the 2012 US presidential election being the most expensive ever. As before, television advertising accounted for the largest chunk of campaign outlay: Obama spent \$580 million on advertising in 2012, while Romney spent \$470 million (CURRAN, FENTON & FREEDMAN, 2016).

The third problem besetting democracy is the increasing centralisation of power by political leaders, supported by modern public relations and electoral marketing; and the increasingly unrepresentative nature of the political class rendering them in some countries almost a “separate caste”.

In brief, there are three ailments besetting contemporary democracy. Governments are less able to govern; political power is becoming more centralised; and the unelected influence of big business is becoming greater<sup>2</sup>. These are contributing to a growing sense of alienation from the political process. Thus, in an eleven nation study I and colleagues carried out in 2010, 35% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly with the statement that “no matter who people vote for, it won’t make any difference to what happens” (CURRAN et al., 2014).

The survey revealed significant differences between nations, a reminder that generalisations need to take account of important national variance. But overall it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that liberal democracy is in a state of disrepair.

### **Media complicity**

The media are part of the problem. Attempts to redress the weakening of national government capacity to manage economies through building transnational tiers of governance have obtained limited cultural support from the news media. The dominant news medium is still television (NEWMAN & LEVY, 2014). Numerous studies show that in most countries, around 75% of television news is centred on the news of the home nation (AALBERG et al., 2013; COHEN, 2013). TV news supports primarily national cultures, and impedes the development of a pan-national consciousness needed to sustain an effective extension of pan-national governance.

The increasing presidentialisation of politics, in parliamentary democracies, is also often abetted by the media. In essence, it is based on senior politicians concentrating power in their hands and using the media to address directly the nation, while bypassing colleagues and party apparatuses. The media are central to this process, even if they frequently criticise its abuse.

The growing influence of money over politics has extensive media support. In numerous countries (including my own), most leading media groups support small government, low tax politics favoured by their wealthy shareholders. This can result in these media groups going into virtual coalition with neo-liberal governments, and also relentlessly attacking governments and parties of the left that challenge corporate hegemony.

The media also contribute in some contexts to a growing sense of disconnection from politics. The standard criticism is that, in an effort to entertain, the media present elections not as democratic inquests but as horse races; and that they tend to focus on the personalities and processes of politics rather than its policy substance (ESSER & STROMBACK, 2014).

Perhaps more important, the world of politics projected by the media can also be off-putting. In a comparative survey of

nine nations, we found that women accounted for only 34% of people interviewed or cited on TV news. We also found that state spokespersons and experts accounted for 60% of people interviewed or cited in TV public affairs news (TIFFEN et al., 2014). Politics is thus presented as being a realm dominated by elite men. In fairness, the media are often reporting the way it is.

### **Internet empowerment?**

So liberal democracy is in disrepair, and the media are to some degree implicated in this process. Is the internet riding to the rescue? The answer given by some analysts is a resounding yes.

The internet will install, it is suggested, a new form of participatory democracy. “It will not be long”, proclaimed cultural studies guru Lawrence Grossman (2015) “before many Americans sitting at home or at work will be able to use telecomputer terminals, microprocessors, and computer-driven keypads to push the buttons that will tell their government what should be done about any important matter of state”. The internet, we are also told, is undermining elite control of politics because, according to Mark Poster (2001), it is “empowering previously excluded groups”. Crowd sourcing will allegedly displace corporate funding, bringing to an end the domination of money over politics. The internet will also generate, according to Mallery (cited SCHWARZ, 1994), “a back-to-basics, Jeffersonian conversation among the citizenry”. This is because, in the words of Philip Elmer-Dewitt (1994), “anyone with a computer and a modem can be his own reporter, editor and publisher – spreading news and views to millions of readers around the world”. In short, the internet’s empowerment of the ordinary citizen will rejuvenate democracy.

In the event, so-called e-democracy has largely taken the modest form of inviting the public to comment, petition or otherwise respond online to an official website. The cumulative evidence suggests that this online dialogue with government has, in general, three limitations. Citizens’ inputs are often disconnected from real structures of decision making. Citizens are disinclined to take part in these consultations partly for this reason: thus, 10% or less report taking part in online consultations or voting in European Union countries (CURRAN, FENTON & FREEDMAN,

2016). Sometimes “e-democracy” means no more than one-sided communication in which the government provides information about services and promotes their use. In short, online consultation adds something to the functioning of democracy without making a great deal of difference.

Crowd-sourcing has not transformed politics. Thus while Obama proved adept in using the internet to raise contributions from ordinary citizens, he merely tapped into a supplementary source of revenue rather than used it to replace corporate funding. Indeed, in the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, Obama raised substantially more from major corporations and wealthy individuals than from small individual donations.

The frequent claim that the internet has replaced top-down communication with horizontal communication between citizens also seems overstated. A recent comparative survey, conducted by Nielsen and Schroder, found that only between one and five per cent of online users produce a blog, depending on the country (2014, p. 484). Even in the United States, the country with the highest proportion of bloggers in this survey, only a minority are interested in political blogs. Twelve per cent of Americans regularly read blogs about politics and current affairs, with a further 21% saying that they read them sometimes (KOHUT et al., 2012). Twitter is dominated by celebrities and public figures rather than ordinary citizens. More generally, in the EU, less than 20% of people report posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (SEYBERT & REINECKE, 2013).

Independent news websites have made only a limited impact because legacy news organisations have much greater resources. These established oligopolies from the past account for the large majority of the most visited news websites around the world. In the case of the US and UK, they account for eight out of the top ten. There are some spectacular breakthroughs by independents, but these are mostly in countries, like South Korea and Malaysia, where there have been popular mobilisations against the established order, and their success has often been short-lived. Research suggests that content aggregators like Google have extended the dominance of mainstream media, and of the institutional sources they rely on, by giving them first page prominence in listings (e.g. REDDEN & WITSCHGE, 2010).

However, one part of the democratic rejuvenation analysis

thesis does hold up. The internet has greatly increased the effectiveness of activists. In the Arab Spring, the internet and social media helped insurgents to publicise their cause, mobilised people on to the streets, enabled the uploading of powerful images of what was happening on the ground to Al-Jazeera satellite TV which broadcast across the region, generated support in the west, and gained practical external help in evading censorship. This is merely the best known example of internet supported opposition. Many other examples could be cited such as campaigns for global justice, against the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investments, police shooting of unarmed black people in the US, Nike's outsources exploitation of workers in Asia, gang rape in India and so on.

It is worth mentioning, in passing, a less prominent example because it illustrates the way that the internet can mobilise consumer power. A part-time British DJ, Jon Morte, and his friends decided to launch a protest against the commercial manipulation of pop music. They chose as their target the way in which the winner of the television talent show *X Factor* in the UK regularly heads the Christmas music chart. Through Facebook and Twitter, they launched a counter-campaign for the group Rage Against the Machine, selecting as their Christmas choice a track which included the line: "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me". The campaign took off, securing celebrity endorsements and extensive media publicity. The protest track secured the No. 1 Christmas spot in 2009, in a collective expression of resentment against commercial control (CURRAN, FENTON & FREDMAN, 2016).

But at this juncture, it is necessary to enter three key qualifications to the notion that the internet has empowered the people. The first key point is that new technology *alone* has not given rise to dissent. The Arab Spring insurgencies took place in six countries primarily because there was deep-seated discontent in these countries, not because they were liberated by new technology. This is borne out by the fact that out of the six "insurgent" countries, Bahrain alone featured in the top five rankings of Middle Eastern and North African countries for Facebook user penetration or for internet use. What the great bulk of insurgent countries had in common was that they were *not* part of the Information Communication Technology vanguard in the Arab region. So, to take a specific example, in 2010, 24% of

Egyptians were internet users, compared with 41% of Moroccans, 44% of Saudi Arabians and 69% of those living in UAE. Yet, these latter countries with higher internet penetration rates did not turn on their dictators (CURRAN, FENTON & FREEDMAN, 2016).

The second qualification is that the wider social context can limit the impact of the internet. Thus, poverty tends to disempower, depressing political participation and voting by low income groups. This disempowerment can be carried over to the online world.

Thus, Di Genarro and Dutton (2006) found that in Britain the politically active tend to be drawn from the higher socio-economic groups, the more highly educated and older people. Those engaged in political online participation, they discovered, were even more skewed towards the affluent and highly educated, though they were more often younger. Similarly, Oser et al (2008, p. 99) found that “the advantaged were more active in both online and offline participation” in 2008 US election. Likewise, in the subsequent 2012 US election, Smith (2013) found that online participation, like offline participation, was dominated by the well-educated and well off. The same conclusion has been reached in numerous other studies (e.g. JURIS. 2012).

The third qualification is that internet political activism is not something that is confined to bottom-up protest. Governments, as in China, have mobilised volunteers to promote the official line; and corporations have funded movements, it is argued, that are more astro-turf than grassroots based, but with a strong, online presence.

### **New politics?**

A second claim made in relation to the internet is that, because it is a global medium, it will foster global understanding and a greater cosmopolitanism.

“The internet”, declared Vern Ehlers (1995), “will create a community of informed, interacting, and tolerant world citizens”. “People will communicate more freely and learn more about the aspirations of human beings in other parts of the globe” through the internet, opines the Oxford academic Frances Cairncross (1997), and “the effect will be to increase understanding, foster tolerance, and ultimately promote worldwide peace”.

Some critical political theorists also argue that the global reach and interactivity of the net is compensating for the nation-centric character of traditional media. “Decentered internet networks”, in this view, are creating an international public sphere of dialogue and debate. This, we are told, is a stepping-stone in the building of a new, progressive social order in a post-Westphalian world (FRASER, 2007).

The central weakness of this theorising is that it assesses the impact of the internet on the basis of inference from internet technology. What this approach fails to grasp is that the potential of the internet to broker international understanding through global dialogue is constrained in multiple ways by the wider context of society in which the internet operates.

First, the world is very unequal, and this results in unequal access to the gateway of global understanding that the internet is supposed to embody. In 2014, 87% of North Americans, 72% of people in Oceania/Australia and 70% of those in Europe - the three richest regions in the world – are internet users, compared with 27.5% of the population in the poorest region, Africa (Internet World Stats – IWS, 2015a). This disparity of access is even more marked, when comparing rich and poor nations. In rich, egalitarian Norway and Sweden, 95% use the internet, compared with 15% of the population in Pakistan, and 6% in impoverished Afghanistan (IWS, 2015n). In brief, the internet is not bringing the world together: it is bringing primarily the advantaged into communion with each other.

Second, the world is divided by language. Most people speak only one language, and cannot understand foreigners when they speak in their own tongue. The role of the internet in bringing people together is thus severely hampered by mutual incomprehension.

Third, language is a medium of power. Those communicating online in English can reach, in relative terms, a substantial public. By contrast those conversing in Arabic communicate with 5% of internet users able to understand Arabic (IWS, 2015c). And those speaking Marathi reach almost no one outside their immediate orbit. Who gets attention on the internet depends on what language they speak.

Fourth, people have different degrees of cultural capital to draw upon. Some are eloquent, speak multiple languages, can draw upon relevant expertise, and have flexible work hours,

while others lack these assets. This also influences who gets to be heard.

Fifth, the world is divided by conflicts of value, belief and interest. This is exemplified by the skilled use of the internet by Isis, a bigoted, violent, repressive organisation with a punitive policy towards those it regards as Muslim heretics and apostates. But while indignant attention centers on Islamic militancy, it is worth noting that the west has a tradition of online hatred. Thus, western Christian groups feature in the Raymond Franklin list of hate sites, which runs to over 170 pages (PERRY & OLSSON, 2009).

Sixth, nationalist cultures are strongly embedded in most societies, and this constrains the internationalism of the web despite its global reach. Indeed, leading news websites in nine countries devoted, in 2010, only 23% of their content to exclusively international news, a proportion that was not much higher than their press and television rivals (CURRAN et al., 2013).

Seventh, authoritarian governments have developed ways of censoring the net, though software filters, the licensing of internet service providers, and the intimidation of would-be dissidents. In many parts of the world people cannot, without fear, interact and say what they want online.

In short, the idea that cyberspace is a free, open space where people from different backgrounds and nations can commune with each other and build a more deliberative, tolerant world overlooks a number of things. The world is unequal and mutually incomprehending (in a literal sense); it is torn asunder by conflicting values and interests; it is subdivided by deeply embedded national cultures (and other nodes of identity such as religion and ethnicity); and some countries are ruled by authoritarian regimes. These different aspects of the real world penetrate cyberspace, producing a ruined Tower of Babel with multiple languages, hate websites, nationalist discourses, censored speech and over-representation of the privileged.

Yet, there are forces of a different kind advancing greater cosmopolitanism. Cheap travel, mass tourism, increased migration, global market integration and the globalisation of entertainment have encouraged an increased sense of transnational connection. Some of these developments find support in the internet. YouTube showcases shared experience,

taste, music and humour from around the world that promotes a “we-feeling” revealing, for example, that stand-up comedy in Chinese can be very funny<sup>3</sup>.

The internet also facilitates the rapid global distribution of arresting images that strengthen a sense of solidarity with beleaguered groups, whether these are earthquake victims or protesters facing repression in distant lands. The internet has the potential to assist the building of a more cohesive, understanding and fairer world. But the mainspring of change will come from society rather than from the keyboard or touchpad.

### **Different organisation**

If the internet is only partly coming to the rescue, perhaps public intervention into the media market has the potential to support democracy. The most prominent example of this is publicly owned television, and strongly regulated commercial broadcasting – the two versions of public service broadcasting (PSB).

A study investigated the impact of public service broadcasting by comparing four countries: the US where deregulated commercial broadcasting is overwhelmingly dominant, and where public broadcasting accounts for less than 2% of viewing time; the “intermediate case” of the UK where public broadcasting is strong, but where commercial TV has been extensively deregulated; and the two Nordic countries of Finland and Denmark where public broadcasting is strong and where the main commercial TV channels are extensively regulated.

These different systems were found to produce different diets of news. Finnish and Danish TV news carried the most hard and most international news: the US the least, with the UK falling in between.

Differences in the supply of news contributed to different levels of knowledge. The Finns and Danes knew most about public affairs and international news; the Americans least; and the British fell in between.

There were also differences when news was scheduled. The principal US channels broadcast the news at a less prominent time than the Nordic channels, and to a lesser degree the UK channels. As a consequence, American TV news picked up fewer inadvertent

viewers, contributing to a greater knowledge gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged compared to the European countries (CURRAN et al., 2008).

A similar study was mounted in 2008-9 during the financial crisis, this time comparing the US with five European countries. US television in this context reported more hard news, especially in relation to the economy, and US citizens proved to be relatively well informed about economic affairs. But again, the US reported much less international news than the European countries. And again, Americans knew least about international affairs.

This time round, we also focused on the differences between publicly owned television and publicly regulated commercial television within the same country. We found a consistent pattern in which publicly owned channels reported more public affairs news than private channels, and after controlling for other influences, public TV news audiences were better informed about public affairs than private TV viewers (CURRAN ET AL., 2012; AALBERG & CURRAN, 2012).

A third study, this time based on eleven countries around the globe, again found that public service broadcasting (PSB) fostered higher levels of public affairs knowledge (SOROKA, 2013). Consumption of PSB news, in particular, seemingly gave rise to a mutually reinforcing dynamic of enhanced political knowledge, political interest and sense of political efficacy (CURRAN et al., 2014).

In short, there is an accumulation of evidence supporting the conclusion that public service broadcasting supports a culture of democracy.

### **Entertaining Democracy**

To summarise my arguments, so far, liberal democracy is in disrepair, and the media are implicated in its malaise. The rise of the internet offers some relief, as does an enduring political experiment – public service broadcasting. However, long-term solutions entail international institution building, and collective political action that lies outside my focus of concern.

So far, this analysis has focused narrowly on journalism

and politics. This is consistent with mainstream journalism studies and political communication. Yet, this tradition has a blind spot. Most media content that most people consume most of the time is entertainment. We tend to exclude this content from our analysis because it is not overtly about politics. But a moment's reflection would indicate that much of this entertainment makes some kind of input into the political process.

First, popular entertainment like TV drama offers images of society and its component parts, helping us to visualise its totality in a way that goes beyond anything that we can possibly experience at first hand. It also helps us to interpret society in terms of the mainsprings of human action, and the dynamics of power shaping our lives. In influencing cognitions of society, entertainment contributes to the political process.

Second, entertainment feeds into the democratic process by contributing to the formation, maintenance and (sometimes) reformation of social identity. The consumption of popular music for example is an important marker of group membership among young people, at a seminal moment in their self-definition. More generally media consumption, from TV reality shows to social realist films, influences people's understandings of who they are, where they fit into society, whom they identify with and whom they feel threatened by. This matters since social identity is a significant feature of contemporary politics, influencing how people vote.

Third, entertainment provides a way of engaging in a debate between social values. Thus, the UK TV hospital soap opera, *Casualty*, celebrates the values of collectivism and public service, while the US TV series, *Random 1*, upholds the value of self-reliance supported by private charity. In implicitly inviting audiences to choose between competing values, entertainments are contributing to a political process in which value conflicts play a significant part.

The fourth way in which media entertainment impinges on public life is through contributing to a dialogue about social norms. These are the rules, conventions and expectations that guide individual behaviour, and the social interaction of society. Social norms generate shared understandings about what actions are appropriate and inappropriate. They are thus part of the way we govern informally our common social processes. Changes in social

norms, as in relation to sexual behaviour, can also give rise of course to changes in legislation.

Thus, *Sex and the City* provides a running debate about what it is to be a contemporary woman, with the four friends each taking different positions. Thus one episode has the traditionalist, Charlotte, saying that she was thinking of giving up her job in anticipation of getting married, only to encounter strong disapproval from her friends<sup>4</sup>. Yet, Charlotte was expressing something that was once a widely shared and enforced social norm. Even as late as the 1930s, a marriage bar existed in Britain where women in jobs like teaching and librarianship had to resign when they married. This illustrates the way in which entertainment enables social norms to be debated, revised and their revision reaffirmed.

In brief, media entertainment provides a way of exploring and affirming social identities, and of debating social values and social norms, and offering understandings of society. While seeming to have nothing to do with politics, entertainment can in these different ways contribute to the political process<sup>5</sup>.

### Implications

One obvious implication of this is that the study of political communication should pay more attention to the analysis of entertainment than it does. This is what historians of social and political change have done now for a generation.

A reorientation also raises normative issues. It is easy to see how the revalorisation of entertainment can be incorporated into a rational choice perspective. This tradition contends that it makes sense for people to delegate politics to intermediary organisations, in much the way that people call in a plumber to fix plumbing problems. This also acknowledges, in their view, the pragmatic reality of politics. In one comment attributed to John Zaller, an individual is more likely to be run over by a car when crossing the road than to influence any public policy. It makes more sense, it is argued, to spend valuable time on things that really matter like the family rather than become a news junkie (SCHUDSON, 1998). Indeed, citizens have cognitive shortcuts – for example, following the cue of a preferred

political party – that enable effective democratic judgements to be reached without accumulating detailed knowledge of public affairs (ZALLER, 1992). To this arsenal of argument, it can also be now claimed that people can key into democratic debate through pleasurable entertainment.

However, the rational choice approach has been convincingly challenged by empirical research. In particular, Delli Carpini and Keeter's classic study demonstrates that in the United States informed citizens are more likely to have stable, meaningful attitudes towards issues, align their attitudes to their interests, participate in politics, and vote for political representatives consistent with their attitudes, than less informed citizens (DELLI CARPINI & KEETER, 1996).

In general, people need to be adequately informed about public affairs in order to hold power to account. They need to be fully briefed in order to identify both their self-interest and the wider public interest. They will be better able to exercise an independent judgement and resist being manipulated by emotional appeals and selective facts, when armed by good journalism. A healthy democracy needs to be informed as well as entertained.

## NOTES

- 1 This essay is based on the opening keynote address delivered to the Annual Conference of the Brazilian Journalism Studies Association on November 4, 2015 at Campo Grande.
- 2 These themes are developed more fully in Curran (2011).
- 3 For an example of good Chinese stand-up comedy, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iailMSUVenA> (accessed 15 August 2011).
- 4 Sex and the City, 'Time and Punishment', Season 4, 2001.
- 5 For a fuller explication, see Curran (2011).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

AALBERG, T.; CURRAN, J. (Eds.). **How Media Inform Democracy**. London: Routledge, 2012.

AALBERG, T. et al. International TV News, Foreign Affairs Interest and Public Knowledge. **Journalism Studies**, 14 (3), p. 387-406, 2013.

AFRICA Stats. In: INTERNET WORLD STATS – IWS. **Database**. 2015a. Available in: < <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>>. Access on: Aug. 10 2016.

ASIA Stats. In: INTERNET WORLD STATS – IWS. **Database**. 2015b. Available in: < <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>>. Access on: Aug. 10 2016.

COHEN, A. Where in the World is the Global Village?. In: A. Cohen (Ed.). **Foreign News on Television**. New York: Peter Lang, 2013, p. 129-150.

CURRAN, J. **Media and Democracy**. London: Routledge, 2011.

CURRAN, J.; IYENGAR, S.; LUND, A.; SALOVAARA-MORING, I. Media Reporting, Public Knowledge and Democracy: A Comparative Study. **European Journal of Communication**, 24 (1), p. 5-26, 2009.

J. CURRAN, J., COEN, S., AALBERG, T.; SHANTO, I. News Content, Media Consumption and Current Affairs Knowledge. In: T. Aalberg & J. Curran (Eds.). **How Media Inform Democracy**. London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 81-97.

CURRAN, J et al. Reconsidering “Virtuous Circle” and “Media Malaise” Theories of the Media: An 11-Nation Study. **Journalism**, 15 (7), p. 815-833, 2014.

CURRAN, J.; FENTON, N.; FREEDMAN, D. **Misunderstanding the Internet**. 2. Ed. London: Routledge, 2016.

DELLI CARPINI, M.; KEETER, S. **What Americans Know and Why It Matters**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

DI GENARRO, C.; DUTTON, W. The Internet and the Public: Online and Offline Political Participation in the United Kingdom. **Parliamentary Affairs**, 59 (2), p. 299-313, 2006.

ELMER-DEWITT, P. Battle for the Soul of the Internet. *Time*, 144 (4), p. 50-57, 1994.

ESSER, F.; STROMBACK, J. (Eds.) **Mediatization of Politics**. Biggleswade: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

GROSSMAN, L. **The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age**. New York: Viking, 1995.

JURIS, J. Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social Media, Public Space, and Emerging Logics of Aggregation. **American Ethnologist**, 39(2), p. 259-279, 2012.

KOHUT, A.; DOHERTY, C.; DIMOCK, M.; KEETER, S. In Changing News Landscape, even Television is Vulnerable. **Pew Internet & American Life Project**, 2012. Available in: <http://www.people-press.org/2012/09/27/in-changing-news-landscape-even-television-is-vulnerable/>. Access on: May 30 2015.

NEWMAN, N.; LEVY, D. Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2014: Tracking the Future of News'. **Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism**. University of Oxford, 2014. Available in: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Reuters%20Institute%20Digital%20News%20Report%202014.pdf>. Access on: Jun. 10 2015.

MIDDLE EAST Stats. In: INTERNET WORLD STATS – IWS. **Database**. 2015c. Available in: < <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>>. Access on: Aug. 10 2016.

NIELSEN, R.; SCHRØDER, K. The Relative Importance of Social Media for Accessing, Finding, and Engaging with News. **Digital Journalism**, 2(4), p. 472-489, 2014.

POSTER, M. **What's the Matter with the Internet**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

REDDEN, J.; WITSCHGE, T. A New News Order? Online News Content Examined. In: N. Fenton (Ed.). **New Media, Old News**. London: Sage, 2010, p. 171-186.

SCHUDSON, M. **The Good Citizen**. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.

SCHWARTZ, E. Power to the People: The Clinton Administration is Using the Net in a Pitched Effort to Perform an End Run Around the Media. **Wired**, 1 January, 1994. Available in: [http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/2.12/whitehouse\\_pr.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/2.12/whitehouse_pr.html). Access on: Jan. 10 2010.

SEYBERT, H.; REINECKE, P. Internet Use Statistics – Individuals. **Statistics in Focus, Eurostat, European Commission**, 2013. Available in: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Internet\\_use\\_statistics\\_-\\_individuals](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Internet_use_statistics_-_individuals). Access on: May 30 2015.

SMITH, A. Civic Engagement in the Digital Age. **Pew Research Center**, 2013. Available in: <http://pewinter-net.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement.aspx>. Access on: Jun. 1 2015.

SOROKA, S. et al. Auntie Knows Best? Public Broadcasting and Public Affairs Knowledge. **British Journal of Political Science**, 43 (4), p. 719-739, 2013.

TIFFEN, R. et al. Sources in the News: A Comparative Study. **Journalism Studies**, 15 (4), p. 374-391, 2014.

ZALLER, J. **The Nature and Origins of Public Opinion**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

**James Curran** is Professor of Communications on Goldsmiths, University of London. He has written or edited 22 books about the media, some in collaboration with others. His latest book is *Misunderstanding the Internet* (with Natalie Fenton and Des Freedman), Routledge, 2012, arising from Leverhulme funded research. His work falls mainly into two linked areas: media history and media political economy.

RECEBIDO EM: 04/01/2016 | ACEITO EM: 12/02/2016