

Apps, Algorithms, and Platforms: Emerging Objects of Digital Journalism

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Online journalism now entails a host of networked tools and practices for gathering, organizing, filtering, and distributing information to audiences. Objects such as smartphone apps, content management systems, application programming interfaces (APIs), relational databases, front-end user interfaces, personalized algorithms, and online metrics trackers all reinscribe and extend traditional news work. They are both material markers of historical approaches to news production as well as tangible evidence of contemporary journalistic practices currently being developed and contested.

For researchers studying these tools and practices, this moment in digital journalism poses distinct challenges about how and why to trace the co-evolution of news forms and technologies. What theoretical concepts, analytical lenses, and research methods are most appropriate for studying the institutional forces that create and make meaningful these new infrastructures? How might an interdisciplinary set of approaches—drawing from, for instance, science and technology studies of networked materiality—be applied to these emerging cultures and products of news innovation? How might we evaluate different models of journalistic ethics, norms, and values in relation to these emerging spaces and tools, understanding what the adoption and adaptation of apps, algorithms, and platforms means for the normative study of networked journalism? Most broadly, how might the study of these new objects in journalism best help us understand the social and structural nature of contemporary journalism, and what other moments in journalism history might we compare this time to?

This panel will bring together journalism studies scholars actively conducting analytically rich empirical work on these questions. We will highlight this as an emerging sub-field for AEJMC, review our current research findings, compare and debate our different projects, identify key tensions and unresolved challenges, and work toward creating a new set of concepts, methods, and field sites that might inform future research in this area.