Trump, Trudeau, Tweets, Truth: A Conversation
By Bill Fox
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A Book Review by

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Bill Fox's new book draws from Canadian and U.S. political, legal, and journalism contexts to provide a compelling account of today's decentralized and disaggregated news in the social media age. Following Fox's previous *Spinwars* (1999), this new title showcases his first-hand experience in Canada's political news and industry scenes. While the title of the book may give the impression that the work is primarily on social media or Donald Trump, the book is essentially a work on Canada and the state of news in the country. Paying special attention to the relationship between traditional news and social media, Fox examines changes in political and commercial communications and examines its implications for public discourse.

The heart of Fox's argument is to be found in Chapter 3 in which he argues that journalists, as traditional news gatherers and gatekeepers, "see the assignment as airing the government's dirty linen", while political and commercial communicators, a news maker, hopes "to run it through the wash before the linen goes up on the clothesline" (p. 97). For Fox, social media have tipped the scale favouring news makers at the expense of news gatherers, with "news makers having their own 'distribution' system on platforms such as Twitter". This arrangement lets political actors send their messages directly without being subjected to the journalistic gatekeeping of news gatherers, leaving the "fact checkers" to catch up to tweets, only after unfiltered information reaches millions. For Fox this results in a problematic media landscape which is explored in the other chapters, where problems of misinformation can be found in the making of Canadian news.

Chapter 1, for example, examines Trump and Trudeau's use of social media for which the book gets its title. For Trump, Twitter cuts through mass media and enables him to directly address "eighty million-plus followers" (p. 3). Conversely, according to Fox, Trudeau's primary social media is Facebook, which enables him to craft a positive self-image through photo ops and community involvement. For both, the rules of political communication have been redefined, challenging established journalistic conventions, and reshaping public discourses (Chapter 2, 7-8). These wider changes are situated in the context of Canadian news, with a popular reliance on news for political information (Chapter 5), media regulations catering to an extinct media ecosystem, and where there are many "news deserts" in Canada due to local newspaper closures (Chapter 9).

The other chapters explore contemporary challenges in Canadian news. In terms of methods, each chapter relies on qualitative analysis of news media and/or social media related to the specific cases, and often draw from both academic literature and news reports. Chapter 4

examines troubles with traditional news reporting in the 2019 SNC-Lavalin affair and the Canadian legal protections for anonymous sources. Chapter 6 examines the 2007 Bell Canada Enterprises privatisation offer and traditional news as an elite-to-elite signaling system where headlines have a direct effect on market outcomes as evidenced in changing stock prices. Chapter 10 examines Trudeau's 2019 blackface scandal in traditional news and on social media, followed by Chapter 11, Trump and Trudeau's use of Twitter during COVID-19, and Chapter 12, the Capitol Riot event. The final Endnote chapter discusses traditional news and social media reporting on the 2021 Canadian Federal election. In terms of solutions to some of the problems Fox locates in the case studies above, he argues that "Canada cannot count on multinational giants such as Facebook or Twitter to foster a distinctly Canadian conversation [which] will require more domestic platforms than the public broadcaster" (p. 406). While we generally agree with Fox's sentiment, the book is more of a diagnostic of the ills faced by Canadian news than anything resembling a sophisticated treatment plan.

The book offers a commendable analysis of the state of news communication in Canada from a major figure in the field with intimate working knowledge of the realities of the situation. While the prose flows smoothly, without jargon, the book's overall analytical structure is difficult to locate. Missing in the book are significant engagements with Canadian local news, as well as acknowledgement of deplatformisation politics which would have strengthened the otherwise sophisticated analysis of Trump and others on social media. As much as some may appreciate them as an antidote to ethereal approaches to journalism, uncited opinions as analysis in the work take away from its academic prowess. That said, the case study chapters may be particularly useful for teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level to tether otherwise theoretical discussions to the actual practice and realities of Canadian journalism.

Works Cited:

Fox, B. (2002). *Spinwars: Politics and New Media*. Toronto: Key Porter Books.

About the Reviewers

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