

Tracing the History of Journalism on the Internet

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In seeking to contribute to current debates about the evolution of the internet over the past four decades, this paper focuses on the changing nature of journalism in online contexts. Normative questions concerning what should count as 'news' in this regard are shown to have been the subject of considerable discussion in light of the definitional possibilities ushered in by the world wide web. This paper, in examining the gradual consolidation of an emergent ecology of online news, unravels the key factors by which 'journalism on the internet' gradually evolved into 'journalism of the internet.' In so doing, it seeks to challenge the premise that this is a history punctuated by technology-driven revolutions in reportorial form, practice, or epistemology. The identification of technical innovations is crucial, yet equally noteworthy are the uneven ways in which these innovations are taken up, modified, and recrafted to render them fit for purpose. Such a focus on the situated materiality of technology, this paper argues, pinpoints the ways in which online journalism has been shaped by the lived negotiation of its affordances and possibilities, as well as by its pressures and constraints. To help illustrate these developments, the paper revolves around a case study of the history of BBC News Online, from its inception in the 1990s to the present day.