

Big Data Analytics and Journalism: New Tools, New Insights?

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Abstract

Riding on the wave of technological progress, journalists celebrate the integration of big data analytics to the reportage of political news. Big data are expected to usher in new insights, and as such, to help the press perform in its democratic obligation as a watchdog of government.

Through a historical investigation of the *Washington Post's* data based reports on political campaign financing, I will indicate how their use hinders rather than promotes the watchdog role.

Big data's gleaming appearances obscure from view journalism's firmly conservative view of political life – conservative, that is, in the sense of reiterating established narratives about politics due to their uncritical reliance on what Herbert Gans (1979) has called the profession's “enduring values.” The watchdog role is best served when journalists make use of new technologies in ways that challenge those values, thus providing their public with a diversity of interpretive approaches to political life.

Keywords: big data journalism, watchdog role, Herbert Gans, Washington Post.