

**Deliberative Expediency
and Public Scholarship:
Addressing the Problem
of Timeliness and Credibility
in Political Deliberation**



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There are, given the setbacks in our public policy, significant concerns about the quality of public argument. These concerns center not only on the influence of mass media, advertising, and public relations in our political campaigns, but also about the relevance and utility of public scholarship that seeks to provide a timely alternative.¹ In communication and rhetorical studies, this has given rise to a large body of work devoted to how scholars and critics in these fields might make a timely difference across interpersonal, group, intercultural, professional, and public contexts.² Of particular interest has been the work of scholars who reflect on the potential of rhetorical scholarship and criticism to raise important issues, to reach audiences inside and outside academe, and to do so in ways that are accessible to the public at large and meet the expediency requirements of public deliberation.³

Rhetorical and communication scholars have explored how scholarship can achieve presence in public deliberation. Scholars have focused on their role in promoting citizenship and deliberation,⁴ the public work of rhetoric,⁵ communication activism as engaged scholarship,⁶ and theories and contexts for political engagement.⁷ Scholars have also been able to achieve presence in public debates through op-eds, blogging,⁸ social media, communication dialogue,⁹ and venues such as Wikipedia.¹⁰ Some scholars promote grassroots activism¹¹ while others have explicitly tried to impact decision-making and reshape public debates.¹²

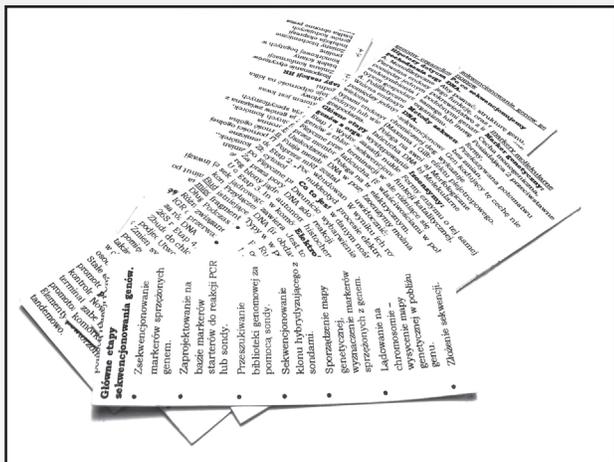


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The purpose of this essay is to move the above conversation forward. And to do so in two ways: (1) by revising the traditional role of public scholars and critics from that of spectators and commentators of civic discourse to expedient participants in public deliberation; and (2) by spelling out how scholars can make an expedient contribution to the quality and credibility of information available in public debate by taking advantage of archival technological changes that allow critics to contextualize and make publically available historical information that can have a direct bearing on contemporary deliberation.

Rhetorical scholars possess the expertise to contextualize and assess the credibility of information that can shape public understanding of public policy.¹³ This expertise includes the ability to access policy arguments, establish their credibility, identify audiences, synthesize ideas, and make them accessible by diffusing vetted information to a public audience. It has been argued elsewhere that critics can evaluate policy arguments for the benefit of public audiences.¹⁴ This type of public scholarship assesses the trustworthiness, consistency, credibility, and evidence of public debate and frees citizens from the burden of extensive technical expertise that can complicate public understanding of political policy.¹⁵

Unfortunately, there are institutional barriers that prevent rhetorical critics' scholarship from reaching public audiences. Three of them stand out. The first is prose as scholarly publications are written for academic audiences and the language employed reflects this. Jerome McGann bemoaned the elitism of scholarly writing because it was ineffectual and inaccessible to public audiences. He believed that scholars needed to overcome the transgressive boundary of academic discourse because it led to the satire of intellectuals in the media.¹⁶ Contemporary political discourse is littered with numerous references to academic elites who are not interested in interpreting their message for a public audience. Rhetorical scholarship has a tendency to engage in theoretical and methodological navel gazing that limits the discipline's ability to reach public audiences and develop allied constituencies.¹⁷ Chris Ingraham



claimed that this language boundary can be attributed to the inherent tension between academic elites and the masses and the rhetorical tradition's own anxiety with maintaining its own vernacular and disciplinary lens.¹⁸ The utility of public scholarship, on the other hand, is that it transcends disciplinary boundaries and theoretical complexity through the dissemination of arguments connected to public deliberation across time, place, and audience.¹⁹

The second constraint is that the public does not have access to a vast amount of scholarship that may aid their understanding of contemporary political issues. In other words, even if the public can interpret theoretical jargon they cannot access academic journals because unlike scholars they do not have free subscriptions to the vast amount of databases that we often take for granted when we review literature and conduct our own research. For example, at the liberal arts college where I am employed, I have immediate access to academic scholarship in over 500,000 volumes, 188 databases, and 59,000 electronic journals while scholars at "Research 1 (R1) universities" have access to much more. In short, scholars have access to a multitude of archived scholarly sources that are not readily available to the public.

The third constraint is that emerging critics interested in public scholarship operate in an environment where the publish-or-perish model does not honor research that is published outside of traditional scholarly journals. Tenure review committees sometimes frown upon publishing in "non-traditional" venues and on controversial topics.²⁰ In the face of such resistance John McGowan, distinguished professor of the Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, argued that we need to rethink the form of scholarship itself in light of public issue oriented research. Public scholarship has the potential to:



both transform the *form* of academic work (from individually produced print-based prose addressed only to professional peers to collaboratively produced work in forms appropriate to the results we want to achieve) and break the stronghold of a narrow notion of scholarship as the only thing professors can and should do.²¹

However, public scholarship often runs into organized political opposition. Put another way, when scholarship conflicts with existing policies and established ideas, however good and useful it may be, it is bound to be *controversial*. Rhetorical and communication scholars need to continue to address what can be done to protect the right to publish public scholarship on controversial issues. This is a legitimate concern and it reflects existing conversations about both the role of the academy in the marketplace and the sanctity of tenure.

One solution lies in online scholarly journals for academic research that possess the expediency necessary to sustain public scholarship. An added benefit—greater ease for readers to access information—may lead to increased interactivity between academics, policy-makers and citizens, and expedited processes for submitting, reviewing, revising, and publishing papers.²² This solution reflects a necessary institutional conversation about a critical issue: What counts as respectable (read: legitimate) scholarship that connects theory with practice and is used to reach public audiences.²³ This not only affects what makes it into print²⁴ but what type of scholarship counts for career advancement (such as retention, tenure, promotion, and merit increase).²⁵

This is not a new problem and one that is currently being addressed. Scholars have developed non-affiliated digital journals to promote public oriented scholarship. E-Journals such



as *Relevant Rhetoric* and the *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* now offer credible alternatives to traditional academic outlets. These outlets publish public scholarship on pressing public issues, expedite the peer-review process, and are tailored to both academic and public audiences in terms of access and readability. Encouraging the development of more journals like this should be a priority for the discipline because they illustrate that rhetoricians can participate in civic discourse and reach non-academic audiences. It also demonstrates the importance of *timely* public scholarship if the goal is to reach a public audience.²⁶ On less important issues, or issues that only concern professional audiences, time was less of a problem. This is not the case with public scholarship as the expediency requirements of the public sphere also mean that academic participation and talk about them cannot be postponed for a couple of years, while trying to get an article reviewed, revised, and eventually published in a traditional paper journal.

Public scholarship can be timely. The rest of this essay discusses how public scholarship can overcome issues associated with timeliness to achieve expediency within civic discourse. This essay is divided into three parts. First, this essay discusses expediency within the context of rhetorical criticism and what it means for critics interested in making readable scholarship accessible to a public audience. Second, it discusses how the critical navigation of digital archives enables critics to achieve expediency and perform timely public scholarship by contextualizing relevant historical arguments for public deliberation. Finally, it concludes by discussing credibility issues associated with electronic venues of communication and what can be done to establish source credibility among competing sources of information when rhetoricians do engage in timely public scholarship and want to insure the accuracy of arguments that are contextualized for a public audience.

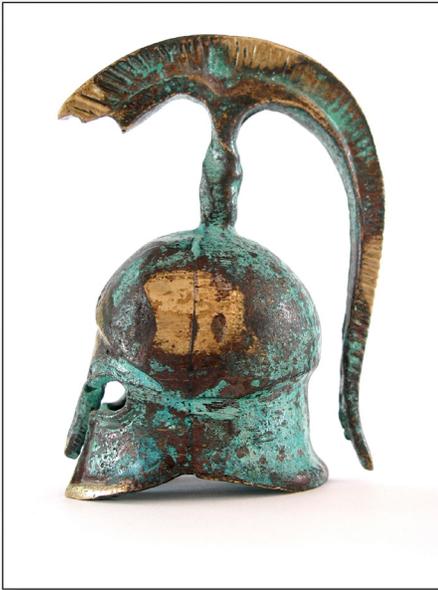
Public Scholarship and the Necessity of Deliberative Expediency

Public scholarship needs to achieve *deliberative expediency* if it is to have a timely impact on public deliberation. Public deliberation is a dynamic process that resides in the moment and the public and policymakers alike are dependent upon timely information in the present to make decisions that will influence the future. In other words, public deliberation is dependent upon information that is *available* and *accessible* at the time of debate. Ultimately, deliberation is based on the assumption that a decision must be made in the moment and this precludes from debate a great deal of evidence that is simply neither available nor complete. For example, the public did not have access to evidence that might have changed the parameters of the Iraq War debate in 2003 had it been available and accessible.²⁷ The timeliness of this type of evidence reflects the importance of expediency within public scholarship. Expediency, by definition, refers to the importance of taking immediate action to secure political advantage within political debates. In terms of public scholarship, expediency places significance on interpreting the rhetorical nuance of public argument in a manner that can be used to secure and influence public opinion on pressing issues and policies prior to decisions and implementation. Public scholarship needs to account for this urgency within public debates if it wants to secure a timely impact on political decision-making processes.

The importance of securing a timely political advantage within public deliberation can be traced back to Aristotle's considerations of expediency and its relation to deliberative rhetoric within Ancient Greece. The time constraints of deliberation made expedience a matter of practical importance when the Greeks debated issues of war and peace.²⁸ Expediency, for Aristotle, meant determining what was advantageous



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for the speaker when speaking on policies in front of the legislative assembly. Due to the time sensitivity of decision-making, speakers needed to not only do research on the policy they were speaking on; they also needed to provide contemporary and historical context for it immediately. The time constraints associated with political deliberation therefore made expediency for Aristotle a matter of practical necessity. Thus speakers needed to be both versed in policy and able to consider the past, present, and future implications of political proposals during debate. The time sensitivity of public deliberation also dictated that responses to counterproposals be formed rapidly, based on the speaker's knowledge of the situation at hand.

Public scholarship that makes a difference in political deliberation has to be expeditious. Much like Aristotle's deliberative speaker, public scholarship does not have the luxury of waiting until after policies are implemented to respond. Whereas the Greeks debated the implications of war with Sparta and Persia contemporary public deliberation draws critical attention to rogue nation states, implications

of inter-state invasions, and the consequences of such actions in an era of nuclear proliferation. Public scholarship that enters into and engages the greater political debates of its time finds the grounds for its response in democratic political theory's emphasis on expediency.²⁹ In terms of public deliberation it is imperative critics contextualize the means that drive decision-making processes and critically examine them to determine whether decisions secure advantage and coincide with the future interests of nation-states in the 21st century. The expeditious nature of deliberation reflects the contingent nature of the decision-making process and the complexity of securing political advantage when there are multiple competing narratives that have the potential to influence debate.

The time sensitivity of public debates mandates that for public scholarship to be effective it must be involved in the deliberative process from the start. Much like Aristotle's deliberative speaker, practitioners of public scholarship need to understand the particulars of policy debates, familiarize themselves with arguments and positions, and locate credible information that can impact deliberation. Effective public scholarship is therefore dependent upon timeliness and expediency. The time sensitive nature of public deliberation dictates that public scholarship pass this test of expediency if scholars want to participate and become relevant to a domestic public interested in acquiring vetted information and evidence that can shape future political policies.

Scholars have recognized the significance of this expediency test. James Applegate, president of the National Communication Association, argued that after the events of 9/11, there was a bigger need than ever for public communication scholarship. He believed that the expertise of rhetorical and critical scholars lay in their ability to improve the quality of public discourse and stressed the importance of extending scholarship beyond the pages of academic journals in "ways that have an immediate impact."³⁰ In other words, effective public scholarship that addresses political issues can no longer confine itself to academic environments and journalistic conventions that neglect public audiences and discuss political policies after they are implemented.

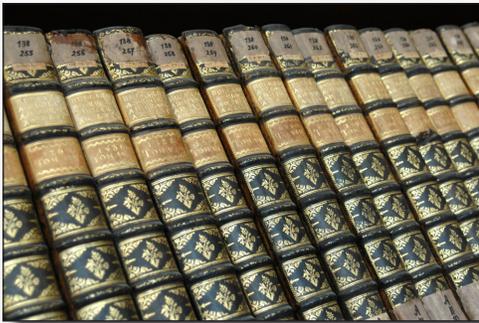
Failures in the media to fulfill fourth estate responsibilities also led scholars to explore the relationship between rhetorical criticism, public deliberation, and expediency. Many believed that media failures contributed to a quality informational deficit that impeded the public's ability to effectively participate in deliberation. Some concluded that this failure represented a U.S. public deliberation crisis; a crisis that will be repeated if the public relies exclusively on governmental sources and traditional forms of media for their political information.³¹ Others acknowledged that unreliable information and the



media's unwillingness to test it led to a decrease in the democratic deliberation of public policy post 9/11. Robert Ivie, for example, believed that critics could influence democratic practice in the here and now by promoting a rhetorical approach to deliberation.³² From this perspective, it is both a role and a responsibility for public scholars to participate and expediently contribute to how the public receives information that can impact political deliberation.

Modern technology provides the opportunity for public scholarship to achieve deliberative expediency. Critics can now find, analyze, and produce public scholarship quickly. Technological advances in archives have made it possible to expand and deepen public scholarship's sense of social and moral responsibility while simultaneously achieving expediency and extending its reach. Digital access to archival information provides an immediate wealth of evidence for public scholarship and when contextualized it can have a direct bearing on contemporary political deliberation. Critical attention to archival evidence not immediately made available for public debate and obtained from digital archives is also one way public scholarship can pass the expediency test.

This way to understand the potential of public scholarship for deliberation calls for a more critical



engagement with history. With the digital archive, stories about the past no longer depend on enormous investments in repositories and in traveling as well as finding the resources to live while using them. Histories bearing on debates that address public issues—this is not new. Pragmatic historians in the 1930s called for the creation of “usable pasts” and argued for their utility in deliberating issues when they fashioned the “new history.”³³ The legacy of Charles Beard and Carl Becker, who were heavily influenced by the trauma of WWI, rests in their legitimation of the political space they created for historians who sought to actively engage in policy debates by bringing forth archival usable pasts. Beard and Becker recognized the value of the archive, and that historical criticism could aid in the comprehension of contemporary political policy.³⁴

During periods of crisis our political leaders and public policy analysts rarely introduce historical information into debate, at least not in any systematic way. People, critics, and government officials alike may allude to or make up history. Even if they are aware of historical analogues or the prelude to the conflict in question, they seldom have the time, space, or desire to discuss these events in detail. As a result, critical engagement with issue-related history or histories is deferred until the actors secure book contracts and professional historians are able to comb through the available evidence, cross-examine, and interview key witnesses. These engagements become at best, in relation to public deliberation, lessons from the past that could have been but were not applied to a present, which, by now, has itself become something of the past.

There are three ways critics can incorporate historical arguments to achieve deliberative expediency within public scholarship. First, scholars can take on contemporary political issues and demonstrate the sort of difference that timely, informed, well-researched criticism might make. There are drawbacks to this



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approach because the time lag that bedevils the publication of scholarly research in the professional domains remains. Such work, no matter how excellent or timely, takes from two to three years to get into print. One such example is Kathleen Hall Jamieson's analysis of whether the George W. Bush administration's use of evidence warranted claims that Iraq possessed WMD. This research was not published until 2007 more than four years after the decision to invade Iraq was made.³⁵ Publishing this type of research in electronic journals somewhat alleviates this problem. Electronic journals, such as *Relevant Rhetoric* prioritize the type of expediency this essay is advocating and they are committed to making academic scholarship accessible to public audiences.

The second way of advancing this argument lies in discussing how public scholarship can achieve deliberative expediency by demonstrating methodological and theoretical possibilities for how historical arguments can be accessed and contextualized for public understanding of contemporary controversies. This approach would provide a template for how critics can access, contextualize, and establish the credibility of public argument through a case study that demonstrates how evidence obtained from digital archives can enhance the quality of public deliberation and achieve expediency. Scholars looking to expand upon the potentiality of historical scholarship to achieve deliberative expediency would be wise to explore Janine Solberg's argument about the implications of digital tools for research, Niels Brügger and Niels Ole Finnemann's discussion on the functional architecture of digital media, and Bob Nicholson's case study on keyword-searchable digital archives.³⁶

A third way, and this essay's approach, is to provide a rationale for deliberative archival expediency and discuss how archival evidence can now be obtained, analyzed, and brought forth for public debate through a better incorporation of digital archives, coupled with e-journals, into public scholarship. In other words, it demonstrates the democratic potential of digital archival research for public scholarship by exploring conceptual and technological changes that have reinvented how rhetorical scholars employ and engage archives and how these changes make achieving deliberative expediency feasible. This approach also provides one answer to arguments of *historical expediency* that claimed extended debate and systematic critique of public deliberation are counterproductive to making expedient policy decisions. Historical expediency is a rhetorical strategy that policymakers employ to rationalize policy decisions that avoid extended debates and the incorporation of contextualized research.³⁷ The digital archive can help scholars achieve deliberative expediency, and it carries with it the advantage of integrating scholarship, criticism, and the archives by re-establishing rhetoric's expedient contribution to the deliberation of public affairs.



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The Archive's Civic Function and Deliberative Expediency

Rhetorical scholars are not unfamiliar with either the archive or political deliberation. In the U.S., one of the fields focusing on the study of argument and the issues associated with public policy is rhetorical studies. However, when it comes to the archive, conversations rarely focus on its expedient deliberative potential. Instead, scholarly conversations about the archives focus on theoretical principles. A 2006 special forum on the "Politics of Archival Research" in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* is indicative of rhetorical studies' theoretical tendency.³⁸ Contributors raised important theoretical questions about archival scholarship through their examination of terministic screens, rhetorical constructions, preferred memories, and the

ideological significance of archival silences.

Intermingled within these theoretical discussions scholars discussed the benefits that archival research brings to rhetorical scholarship. David Houck lauded the capability of archival sources to complement scholarship and to provide credibility to scholarly arguments.³⁹ Houck's comments are compelling for public scholarship, primarily, because he drew attention to the value of archival sources in providing context to both rhetorical cases studies and political issues. He also drew attention to the importance of providing missing, forgotten, or silent voices with the opportunity to speak. This argument suggests that archival evidence (both authoritative and marginalized) has potential for public scholarship that focuses on political deliberation. Equally important for this conception of the archive, Houck suggested that archival work should steer rhetorical conversations away from theory and more toward a practical engagement of the archive.

Theoretical conversations are important. But the question is: do these conversations benefit political deliberation and the public comprehension of civic discourse? Some, but not much. Emphasizing theoretical principles that address the archive prioritizes theory over both research and criticism within rhetorical studies.⁴⁰ Emphasizing theory also neglects the archive's deliberative potential for public audiences because it solely focuses on an academic audience. However useful theoretical scholarship has been and may still be, it continues a trend and, at the same time, is uncritically equated with practice or the proper way to do things, sets aside alternative approaches to scholarship and criticism. It also makes it extremely difficult to demonstrate to the public how archivally informed public scholarship can be applied to current events.⁴¹

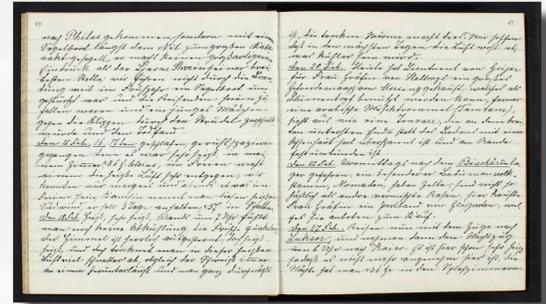
The archive serves a practical, as well as ontological function. Practicality, it opens up other opportunities. Thomas Miller and Melody Bowdon valued the practical engagement of civic discourse over theoretical speculation in historical inquiries. Practical approaches to archival scholarship revitalize rhetoric's civic tradition, and they called for critics to educate the public about how to address pressing political problems through contextualized research.⁴² Miller and Bowdon concluded that a rhetorical stance toward archival research allowed critics to maximize their "civic potential," while at the same time expand past elite audiences associated with theoretical academic discourse.⁴³



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In this sense, rhetoric's civic tradition is much more in line with the pragmatic tradition in philosophy and history, which valued the critic's ability to contextualize and use archival evidence to advance public understanding of complex issues.

Public address scholars have found it difficult, if not impossible, to take this final step in the process: to influence contemporary deliberation immediately. On the one hand, public address scholars have primarily confined their engagement of the archive to historical case studies, at least in one sense disconnected from present political deliberation.⁴⁶ On the other hand, critics who are interested in



Reuniting the civic potential of the archive with rhetoric might also alleviate some of the abstraction in academic discourse that Robert Asen and Brett Lunceford identified as problematic to public comprehension of scholarship.⁴⁴ It is necessary to avoid falling into the "theory wolves" trap, which Stephen Hartnett identified, where scholars write for miniscule audiences in generally inaccessible prose and engage in "elegant irrelevance," not civic engagement.⁴⁵ Scholars need not stop writing well; they need to write with a purpose that prioritizes public understanding and the importance of civic engagement when seeking to make a difference. One way critics can achieve this is to write with a civic purpose that clearly identifies arguments, establishes their credibility, and then take steps to synthesize them for a public audience.

contemporary public policy seldom rely on archival research to bolster their arguments; rather, they choose to focus on how rhetorical principles present themselves in civic discourse.⁴⁷ Rhetorical archival research therefore remains disconnected from critics interested in contemporary civic discourse, democratic political theory, and public scholarship.

Scholars who engage in archivally informed criticism should no longer feel confined to commenting on rhetorical strategies employed in historical cases, nor should they ignore their significance in contemporary political debates. Introducing archival information into public debate encourages academic participation and it can pass the test of expediency within civic discourse by providing historical context to public deliberation. Archivally informed public scholarship also demonstrates how historical perspectives can be both useful and timely.⁴⁸ Taking advantage of new media storage, access, and recovery advances allow critics to achieve deliberative expediency and to participate in pressing policy debates. In this sense, archival criticism is not just a contribution to rhetorical theory; it is a contribution that demonstrates how critics can use digital archives to develop public scholarship that contributes to contemporary political debates.

Digital archives are online repositories of knowledge that archive textual and visual historical information. Digital archives also reflect disciplinary and technological changes in the rhetorical function of archives. As Ferreira-Buckley has argued, rhetorical theory's conception of what comprises an archive has been construed too narrowly.⁴⁹ The discipline's notion of what constitutes a historical record has changed, and ultimately what gets included in the archive has changed. This change is one for the better. The explosion of historical and rhetorical research that probes the centrality of women, racial minorities, and members of the working class has expanded the discipline's conception of artifacts as well as what gets included in the archive. Cultural historical accounts now compete for journal space with traditional studies such as diplomatic history.

Changes in archival inclusion have led to changes in how critics conceptualize the archive. For example, Kevin DeLuca, Christine Harold, and Kenneth Rufo challenged critics to conceptualize artifacts such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt as an archive that records and makes accessible the meaning of the AIDS crisis at a specific place and time.⁵⁰ These changes reflect twenty-first century interdisciplinary discussions about what the word "archive" now means.⁵¹

Changing conceptions of the archive illuminate how critics are implicated in transformations in scholarship and criticism.⁵² Historians, for example, reinvented archival methods and recognized the access limitations of book-bound archives. Widespread reproduction technologies and the use of computers have transformed how critics both now access and engage historical documents.⁵³ Libraries are increasingly turning to electronic versions of the very journals in which rhetoricians publish research, while at the same time reducing costs. Digital technologies have changed the scholarly conception of the traditional printed journal, and, in many cases, this has allowed rhetorical criticism to be accessed by a greater number of people.⁵⁴

This digitization of history is directly related to the archival dramas of the mid twentieth century when historians advanced the democratic benefits of microfilm for research.⁵⁵ World War II saw an increase in demand for microfilms, as archivists saw the benefits of this technology for insuring the preservation of the public record during a time of uncertainty. Franklin D. Roosevelt urged the Society of American Archivists to increase public support for microfilm and called it insurance for the preservation of the United States' documents and records.

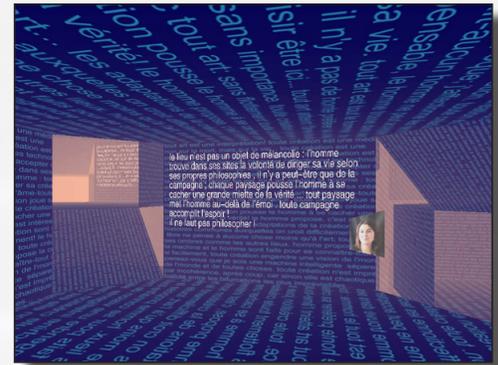


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Historians were urged to jump on the microfilm bandwagon as this technology offered numerous possibilities for revolutionizing scholarly techniques.⁵⁶ R.S. Ellsworth referred to microfilm as the “wonder tool of our time” and that its “technological potential gives it a versatility that makes its use limitless.”⁵⁷ Martin Jamison, reflecting on the influence of microfilm during the 1930s, summarized these benefits for scholars in terms of its cost, easier release, and rapid access. And as an appropriate medium for specialized research that attracted a limited audience.⁵⁸

Jamison’s argument regarding new technology warrants scrutiny in light of new media’s impact on the democratization of the archive. Technological innovation increases access to historical texts, but this does not necessarily translate into increased public access. Microfilm did aid researchers and academic elites in their pursuance of archival knowledge during the latter part of the twentieth century. Scholars have always been in an interesting position in terms of archival access in that many sources of funding are supported by state institutions. Nonprofit universities operate for the “public” benefit, but the state often controls access to archival points of entry, access points that are more restricted for the general public. Cost also often plays a pivotal role in determining archival access. Historians did not universally adopt microfilm in the 1930s because, despite the relatively cheap cost of duplication, the technology to view such reproductions was cost-prohibitive for all but the largest research libraries.⁵⁹

New media technologies: From the papyrus to parchment to microfilm and to the web provided the seeds of liberation, but they also came with constraints that restricted public access and they benefited the existing social order. During the late 1970s, bibliographic databases provided scholars the technology necessary to immediately access online journal and book citations to facilitate research. Jean Tener noted the democratic tension here, arguing that institutions would have to increasingly rely on government funding and with funding came government access to those records. It would be ironic, Tener concluded, “to discover that a hard-won liberalization” of the archive benefited “only an increasingly elite clientele.”⁶⁰ Similar arguments have been made about the Internet’s ability to democratize archival access.⁶¹ Scholars, in their position of privilege, are able to access digital archives, but others and the public in general face restrictions.



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Digital archives do transform historical research. They also provide critics with more informed search criteria that negate the need to spend hours searching through antiquated card catalogues. In this fashion, digital archives, as John Nerone argues, do make texts easier to use.⁶² This benefit is also a risk in using digital archives. Every archival researcher knows not to place complete trust in a catalogue, whether it takes a print or digital form. Research not archived by digital aggregators can be missed.⁶³ Advocating the use of digital archives for the purposes of expedient political deliberation does not mean that physical archives are out of date. Physical archives will continue

to serve an important critical function in historical research, since there is no guarantee that not all the relevant documents will be digitized.

Digital archival discourses do avoid restrictions associated with traditional archives. This does, of course, mean that digital archives do have their own constraints. Money is still a factor. Digital archives are not free. Not everyone possesses the technology necessary to access digital archives. At the same time, access to digital archives is virtually unlimited. Opportunities do exist for researchers in a position of privilege to access exponentially increasing digitized historical content. But we must not overlook the limits: in the

digital age they come with the terminal, the license, and the access code.

Critical use of digital archives is one possible solution where scholars can contextualize the credibility of public arguments while simultaneously meeting the expediency demands of public deliberation. Scholars have recognized the value of material controls to access, use, store, and discover how transformative technologies can impact deliberation in the public sphere.⁶⁴ Digital archives do have epistemological implications for how scholars discover, access, and make use of the past to inform public deliberation. Digital archives provide the opportunity to speed up the research process and overcome geographical proximity to find, contextualize, and establish the credibility of public arguments and this type of archival scholarship is redefining entire fields of research.⁶⁵ Rhetorical critics continue to define and redefine how they engage digital archives and how criticism can function within the new media. Ekaterina Haskins, for example, researched the strengths and limitations of the Internet as a vehicle for exploring traces of the past in her examination of the September 11 Digital Archive, a robust online effort to document public involvement with archived discourses that memorialize the event.⁶⁶ Haskins' work is encouraging because it provides an awareness of how the digital landscape changes the discipline's conception of what constitutes a primary source, while at the same time explaining how a digital archive can function as a site for public scholarship and criticism.

Digital archives can lead to deliberative expediency if critics employ a research process that contextualizes and establishes the credibility of public argument and takes advantage of technologies that makes it easy to access, synthesize, and make accessible historical argument for a public audience. Achieving deliberative expediency, through critical use of digital archives, responds to disciplinary calls to make academic criticism publicly accessible by taking advantage of new media technologies.⁶⁷

The significance of digital archives for understanding public deliberation is that they provide scholarly access to multiple forms of public argument that can be made accessible to diverse audiences. In terms of deliberation they provide: (1) an invitation for the formulation of global publics that connect scholarly argument and evidence to public audiences; (2) a nationwide invitation for dialogue with a broad-based coalition of citizens interested in accessible, understandable, and useful public scholarship, (3) an interdisciplinary-wide invitation for scholars to take advantage of new media technologies to access, contextualize, and establish the credibility of arguments for public audiences; and (4) a policy-wide invitation to political elites and decision-makers to access and share contextualized public scholarship with others by communicating across socio-political and geographical boundaries, and armed with credible argument raise the quality of deliberation to make the historical complexity of political debates understandable for public audiences. Combined, these invitations create the opportunity for public scholarship to establish relevance and achieve deliberative expediency through digital archival access, the establishment of credible contextualized narratives, and the synthesis of historical arguments that provide diverse viewpoints and alternatives to preferred and authoritative renditions of controversies.

The problem of what constitutes credible argument, however, still remains. Just because critics and the public can access online forums and digital archives does not necessarily translate into them receiving credible information. Media critics, such as Douglas Kellner, argued that the Internet represents the best

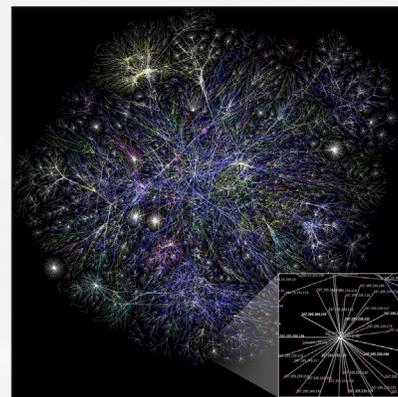


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source of alternative political information because it “offers a wealth of opinion and debates and a variety of sites present information to a better informed public.”⁶⁸ This claim is debatable. While the digital capability of the Internet has dramatically increased the amount of political content available, it has also led to questions of credibility.⁶⁹ Eli Noam warned that, as the quantity of information made available on the net rises, so too will “informational clutter,” which leads to political deliberation becoming “distorted, shrill, and simplistic.”⁷⁰ Web based information also suffers from inefficient gatekeepers to monitor content, the convergence of advertising and information genres, the established reputation of information sites, and is prone to alteration.⁷¹ This is problematic for deliberation because much of the information introduced is grounded in misinformation.

Technological changes that have led to increases in the availability of public information and the fast tracking of academic research for immediate publication via new media outlets do warrant one caution. The benefit of new media archival research is that there are numerous sources of information available to critics that were not available before, or at least not easy to obtain. This can be a curse. Innovations that have addressed questions of access and expediency have historically created a problem in relation to the *quality* of the information. Specifically, too little emphasis has been placed on the quality of the research underlying criticism and deliberation in the rush to publish it. One way to measure the quality of information in policy debates hinges upon the sources that we rely upon.

Concluding with Credibility

Patricia Roberts-Miller noted that democracy is dependent upon talking well about political issues.⁷²



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“Talking well” refers to the ability to openly debate political issues. It is a defining feature of an informed democratic public. Gerard Hauser argued that without access to information, the public cannot participate in informed deliberation and form balanced opinions.⁷³ Theoretically, access to more information should pave the way to more informed deliberation. Deliberation, however, is dependent on quality--not just the quantity--of information. Source credibility therefore becomes paramount. Most of what the public believes is based on the testimony or authority of others, often political actors. Since the public cannot often confirm claims about political policy, it is forced to rely on political judgment, credibility, and source reliability. This is unavoidable. Determining source credibility therefore

represents, as political theorist John O’Neill argued, one of the central problems of public deliberation.⁷⁴

Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson drew attention to the need for some type of system that provides citizens an independent basis for assessing which experts are trustworthy. This can include an established record of reliable judgments, as well as a decision-making process that maintains checks and balances by experts who exercise critical reasoning over each other. Such a system would validate the role of expert testimony in deliberation, as well as fulfill deliberative democracy’s purpose to justify reasoning by making reasons public and accessible.⁷⁵ This also opens up the door for public scholars to become more involved in the deliberative process.

Frank Fischer believed that such a system would lead to credible experts contextualizing evidence



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for public deliberation.⁷⁶ The public scholar thus becomes the facilitator who has the ability to open up deliberative spaces by problematizing issues in ways that lead to reflexive learning and citizen empowerment before decisions becoming binding.⁷⁷ Albert Dzur refers to this process as “democratic professionalism” and claimed that those with training and expertise could facilitate and enable civic engagement by sharing information. Fischer and Dzur provide theoretical justification for how scholars can enter into, contextualize, and facilitate trust within public deliberation. Trust emerges in deliberation when the public faces political uncertainty, a choice between alternatives is required, and the conditions of debate require that the public places faith in the credibility of others prior to making decisions.⁷⁸ Due to the significance that the public must place on others (politicians, journalists, academics, pundits), it is vital that deliberative and ideological credentials be evaluated and that self-serving arguments be identified.



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What is needed is a strategy that reduces the level of information, clarifies, and establishes credibility. It involves merging the access and immediacy innovations of new media with established criteria that are designed to net credible sources of information specific to public deliberation. Because so much information is available in the electronic age, this essay suggests that revisiting the work of Robert P. Newman would be beneficial to public minded scholars. Newman, who was interested in facilitating debate about complex political issues, was concerned about the quality of evidence in public argument. In arguments over public issues, Newman urged, recalling the way the courts of law handle expert witness, scholars to cross-examine sources to determine credibility that can, even with current controversy, improve political deliberation.⁷⁹



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Newman’s approach synthesizes publicly available information so the public can reach decisions on controversial issues.⁸⁰ He does this by putting two questions to each source of information: (a) is the source in a position to know the truth of the matter?; (b) is this source, based on his/her personal interests, willing to relate the truth in that matter? His articles are case studies of his method, and they wind up as lead articles in prestigious journals in powerful fields of study, ranging from political science, to diplomatic history, to geology.⁸¹ One may call Newman’s approach historical method or credibility/argumentation theory. But, the point here is that when the narrative grows not simply out of whatever one can get a hold of in a library or online, but instead out of stories told by the most credible sources of information available on a topic, it will get us nearer to the truth of the matter.

A narrative built up out of credible sources of information does not mean that one will necessarily agree with what is said. But arguments advanced on the basis of credible sources warrant taking what is said seriously.

Newman maintained that expert testimony can be evaluated by using principles based on jurisprudence and history and he established two criteria to achieve this. The first criterion of a good witness assesses the source’s ability to tell the truth and establishes credibility by determining if the source has: (a) sufficient political, economic, historical, and cultural knowledge; (b) regional language fluency; (c) deviated from official channels to develop source information; and (d) visits the area to develop an educated opinion.⁸² The second criterion might prove more useful to public scholars as it is designed to account for source bias.

Newman identified seven precautions that are still useful for detecting bias in the digital age. First, it is important to determine the ideological disposition of the source as policy statements often take the form of ideological justifications. This is especially true in the description of international conflicts. “We” become noble, holy, and justified, while “they” become evil, savage, and contemptible. Newman believed that those who got caught up in the rationalizations of either side were undependable. Second, Newman advises critics to determine if financial interests provide justification for potential evidence manipulation. Implicit in this precaution is that if financial incentives are determined for policy justifications, it should lead the critic to question its credibility if not reject it outright. This precaution becomes more important in an era where Supreme Court rulings have blurred the boundaries between influence, money, and politics.



Third, public scholars should be aware of the partialness that experts develop for their ideas. Individuals, academics, organizations, and think-tanks can develop attachment to theories and explanations. Public acknowledgement of contradictory evidence is equivalent to admitting a mistake and personal and organizational pressures can prevent these sources from exercising good judgment. Newman’s fourth precaution refers to biases associated with legal evidence. This bias is perpetuated outside



the courtroom in the form of close relationships between reporters and government officials. Friendly association can prevent sources from making critical commentary that reflects negatively on others. Journalists, politicians, and academics who accept favors are susceptible to this bias. Fifth, public scholars should be aware of what Newman referred to as “the refugee mentality.” Newman cautioned critics to question this type of testimony as exiles felt

compelled to create a darker picture than the evidence suggested.⁸³ This bias is illustrated by the case of Curveball, who was an Iraqi defector who claimed he had worked at a plant that manufactured mobile biological weapon laboratories as part of Iraq’s WMD program. Curveball’s allegations were later proven to be false by the Iraq Survey Group’s report published in 2004. Despite warnings from the German Federal Intelligence Service questioning the claims credibility, the U.S. Government used them to build a rationale for the 2003 Iraq war.⁸⁴

The sixth precaution refers to sources who are disillusioned by former affiliations. Newman’s example referred to the intelligence the U.S. received from a large number of ex-Communists who made a career of exposing former comrades. Newman questioned their ability to moderate their views, having been conditioned with authoritarian beliefs. This is also applicable to those who change political parties and whose perspectives are drastically altered. The seventh precaution refers to sources who may distort testimony due to the potential to gain employment in government and private sectors. Political deliberation is particularly subject to this bias due to the interconnectedness of academics, think-tanks, and government office. Newman’s precautions provide a critical foundation that accounts for ideological bias, national interest, self-interest, unconscious partnerships, friendships, past injury, and other motives that are significant determinants for evaluating source credibility.

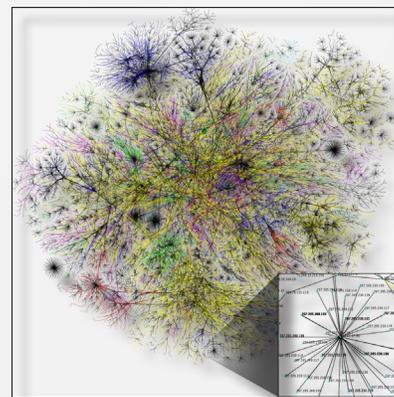


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Extending Newman’s approach to a practical framework for identifying source credibility can be achieved in two steps. First, critics can include extensive source background information in the narrative or footnotes so audiences can weigh credibility of evidence on its own merit. This includes, where feasible, identifying sources’ areas of expertise, books written, institutional affiliation, and regional and cultural attachments. Critics should take care to incorporate Newman’s criteria for detecting bias not by rejecting

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them outright, but through identification and contextualization that places these sources in context. The second step involves placing public deliberation of an issue within a larger body of discourse. Historians refer to this process as immersion and argue that this process is vital for understanding the content and context of deliberation. Extensive reading of secondary sources fulfills this purpose and it will indicate where disagreements exist as well as identify textual silences. Critics interested in exploring how silences function within the context of political deliberation might also consider incorporating a theoretical framework that identifies silences in terms of utterance, argument, and source such as rhetorical contextualization.⁸⁵ Finally, an extensive critique that features ideologically diverse sources will also allow the critic to determine for the public how the arguments relevant to deliberation both collaborate and contradict each other as well as identify evidence and voices not present in the debate.

In conclusion, critical contextualization of historical argument, when placed in dialogue with contemporary evidence, provides an opportunity for public scholars to analyze how old and new evidence might impact deliberation regardless of medium.



This type of criticism incorporates historical perspective to understand public arguments at the time of their utterance and in original context as well as how this impacts contemporary debate. In terms of credibility, Newman's dialogical approach allows critics to explain issues in more detail and cross-reference evidence from multiple sources to determine irregularities in public deliberation. Newman's approach demonstrates what Stephen Hartnett and Laura Stengrim call "rhetorical-criticism-as-the practice-of-democratic integrity."⁸⁶ This assumes that verifiable evidence, ethical norms, and counterarguments have the potential to transform public debate. Rhetorical scholarship therefore can establish credibility, contextualize arguments, and pass the test of expediency while simultaneously achieving presence in public deliberation.

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