
The Myth of Digital Democracy Featured on NPR's On The Media

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About a year ago, driving home from Tucson, I heard one of my grad school professors on NPR talking about his latest book. Boy, I thought, wouldn't it be great if I could go on NPR to talk about my book once it comes out?

Be careful what you wish for. A couple weeks ago I got a call from James Hawver, a producer for On the Media, NPR's weekend media affairs program. He had read Ben Carlson's piece in the Atlantic, and so he ordered a copy of the book. Long story short, this Monday I went down to KJZZ for a half-hour interview with Brooke Gladstone.

In part, the interview was a lesson in humility. Brooke is very good at what she does. Naturally enough, the hosts of OTM often adopt a skeptical tone and press their guests hard on points of disagreement. And I have very little experience in front of a microphone or a video camera.

This made for a couple of awkward moments. Early on in the interview, after I talked about online news readership being more concentrated than print readership, Brooke said that she doubted that this was the appropriate comparison. Shouldn't we compare Internet consumption to television broadcast audiences instead? I've heard this question before, and I think the answer is no: Newspaper readership and newspaper economics have been hugely impacted by the Internet, while changes in television viewership have been far more modest. But instead of saying that, I got nervous and mumbled something incoherent.

Which is not to say that all of the interview went badly. Much of it went well. Parts of it were even fun. But it is with trepidation that I am waiting to hear the final broadcast. Mercifully, On the Media interviews are highly edited for broadcast. Of the 30 minute conversation, only about 5 minutes will end up on the air. Whether I come off well, or come off like a idiot, depends largely on which 5 minutes get chosen.

But no matter what, it was a privilege to be invited on the program. Thanks to James, Brooke, and the folks at KJZZ for making this happen.