

Overload: Finding the Truth in Today's Deluge of News

Bob Schieffer

H. Andrew Schwartz, Contributor

Rowman & Littlefield (Oct 1, 2017)

Hardcover \$24.95 (190pp)

978-1-5381-0721-8

In this incisive work, a veteran newsman explores modern media and why we have become so vulnerable to "alternative facts."

Overload is news veteran Bob Schieffer's insightful take on modern journalism, presented with the able assistance of H. Andrew Schwartz of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Schieffer enjoyed a sixty-year career in journalism, including forty years with CBS, where he hosted the popular news show *Face the Nation*. Schwartz contributes three chapters on how technology is revolutionizing media industries.

In addition to its state-of-the-art investigation of modern journalism, the book includes Schieffer's post-mortem on the 2016 presidential election, a race that discarded the traditional rules of political decorum.

Schieffer says the most frequent question he was asked about 2016 was why the choice came down to these two candidates. Charges of fake news and the reality of sloppy polling, the book claims, contributed to Donald Trump's surprise victory. Although Trump's use of Twitter infuriated his opponents, it resonated with and coalesced his supporters.

Much of the book describes how media outlets are evolving to meet the political information demands of their users. More than 80 percent of millennials—the largest consumers of news—turn to online sources for political updates, he reveals, and 62 percent of all news consumers receive their information from social media. Such outlets, he shows, are vulnerable to the viral spread of "alternative facts."

The most fascinating chapters include Schieffer's interviews with Martin Baron, editor of the *Washington Post*, and with Elisabeth Bumiller, the *New York Times* Washington bureau chief, who both relate how their respective newspapers have become 24/7 digital services. The *Post*, according to Baron, has made its website the priority over the print edition, transforming it into a truly national online digital service.

The book concludes with a discussion of the important lessons the authors learned during the past year, such as that digital information overwhelms users, that new ways of accurate polling must be identified, and that local newspapers, which once kept local politicians honest, will continue to fold. The electoral system, corrupted by excessive funding and gerrymandering, must also be overhauled, it declares.

Despite major challenges to media outlets, Schieffer's tone remains upbeat about journalism's future. This book is an important guide that has much to offer to those in media and journalism, as well as to concerned citizens.

KARL HELICHER (September/October 2017)

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