Sociologica
CURATED


# Journalism

C.W. Anderson, editor

Sociologica
International Journal for Sociological Debate

# Journalistic Culture in the 21st Century

**CONTENTS** **ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED**

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11516
Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# From Value to Values, from Field to Discipline: Understanding Journalistic Culture in the 21st Century

C.W. Anderson*

Submitted: September 4, 2020 – Accepted: September 5, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

The Introduction to this Symposium, "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News," outlines its primary themes. It begins with an elaboration of the argument that the past few years have seen a major shift in the analytical concerns of researchers interested in the production, consumption, and institutional transformation of news. Whereas public conversations about journalism in the first two decades of the internet era were primarily oriented toward questions of "value," a series of political shocks have called into question not only the value but the normative values of news. The Introduction then discusses the two major aims of the Symposium through an overview of the articles and essays contained herein. The first aim is to apply the theories and tools of sociology to the analysis both of news value and news value(s). The second aim is to reflect on what this analytical framework can tell us about the disciplinary relationship between journalism studies and sociology.

**Keywords**: Journalism studies; mass media; political protest; sociology; values.

* School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds (United Kingdom); C.W.Anderson@leeds.ac.uk; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3893-8411

## 1 Introduction

The past few years have seen a major shift in the analytical concerns of researchers interested in the production, consumption, and institutional transformation of news. Whereas public conversations about journalism in the first two decades of the internet era were primarily oriented toward questions of "value," a series of political shocks have called into question not only the *value* but the normative *values* of news. By value I mean the fact that sources of journalistic funding are increasingly decoupled from generic digital display advertising; in addition, with the growth of highly sophisticated digital metrics, the literal economic value of individual stories and even shorter blocks of text and multi-media can be quantified in sophisticated new ways. By value(**s**) in contrast, I refer to the fact that with the worldwide rise of a variety of anti-liberal political currents (Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, the power of an increasingly authoritarian China, etc) as well as the simultaneous emergence of protest movements (#BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, civil unrest and resistance in Hong Kong, and so on) journalists are increasingly being called upon to articulate and defend their normative beliefs in ways that go beyond simply the provision of factual, neutral information.

Given this intellectual and real-world shift from value to values, this symposium of *Sociologica* has two aims. The first aim is to apply the theories and tools of sociology to the analysis both of news value and news value(s). The second aim is to reflect on what this analytical framework can tell us about the disciplinary relationship between journalism studies and sociology. In the next two sections I discuss both of these aims through an overview of the articles and essays contained in this symposium.

## 2 From Value to Values

The first and most obvious aim of this symposium is to apply the theories and tools of various branches of sociology to the question both news value and news values. Sociologies of work, management, and quantification see the manner through which firms create economic value as central to what they study (see, for example, Stark, 2011; Boczkowski, forthcoming). Meanwhile, cultural sociology and the sociology of the professions (along with related disciplines like normative political theory) examine how workplace cultures construct and embrace normative values that give meaning to what they do (Lamont, 2000; Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006). The charge set out for the authors of these pieces was to problematize the easy conflation of value and values in newswork, a conflation that not only haunts the profession of journalism, but the academic subfield of journalism studies as well. While it may very well be the case that audience quantification, economic success, and normative values can be achieved simultaneously, this may also not necessarily be the case.

The opening invited essay by Sarah Jackson (University of Pennsylvania, Annenberg School of Communication) clearly marks this shift in focus. For Jackson (2020), reflecting on the newsroom controversies and tensions in American newsrooms that have accompanied the rise of #BlackLivesMatter, normative news values have always been at least partially subservient to the larger values of society, which means that they are unavoidably and structurally racist even as they simultaneously represent real efforts on behalf of an occupational group to enact values that help democracy function properly. Jackson's goal in this powerful piece is for journalists to be more self-reflective about the manner by which their professional efforts can harm particular people and groups even while they purport to benefit society at large. This concern is echoed at the end of the issue in an interview with Candis Callison and Mary Lynn

Young (University of British Columbia), both of whom reflect on how their own experiences in newsrooms helped spur them into PhD programs and eventual academic positions, so they could better understand the tensions between their early, purportedly noble journalistic goals and the racialized and classed institutional constraints that stymied their efforts to incorporate social justice elements into their daily newswork. What frameworks might we, as scholars, ourselves use to understand these tensions? Can we criticize the way journalists fall short of their normative goals simply by looking at a list of ideal news values and documenting the manner in which these values are shortchanged in practice?

In the first of the peer reviewed pieces here, Juliette De Maeyer deploys a refreshingly original framework for understanding news values, one based on John Dewey's theories of valuation, and one that tackles this question head-on. Dewey, in line with his overall philosophical pragmatism, proposes in his theory that we move "value(s) to valuation, considered as an action. This action comprises both prizing (an immediate, felt dimension) and appraisal (an intellectual dimension), it moves along an ends-means continuum, and it is always situated." (De Maeyer, 2020, p. 120). De Maeyer looks at the journalistic metadiscourse that has accompanied the deployment of the stock journalistic cliché, "a nose for news," showing how this nose for news always involves some sort of situated action that bridges the gap between idealism and structural constraint. Bringing the two arguments full circle, we most certainly *cannot* interrogate the racialized elements of news production by simply documenting journalistic failures, but can perhaps interrogate the manner in which the nose for news does or does not also take into consideration the presence of racial and economic injustice in deciding what counts as appropriately newsworthy. It would be interesting to apply De Maeyer's Deweyan framework to the problems Jackson, Callison, and Young outline in their pieces to see what might new discoveries emerge.

At the conclusion of her piece, De Maeyer wisely notes that news valuation is not simply emotional and affective but also carries within it an economic calculus as well; "news is a hybrid good, with both a price-tag and a symbolic/public worth." (De Maeyer, 2020, p. 124). In their article that immediately follows, Angele Christin (Stanford University) and Caitlin Petre (Rutgers University) begin to tease out the implications of journalism's imbrication of both the economic and the symbolic. They do so by turning to Vivian Zelizer and her concept of "good matches," wherein social actors engage in complex forms of relational labor in order to smooth over the contradictions between monetary transactions and social relations. In the context of digital journalism, these tensions occur within the realm of audience quantification, and most sharply at the border between "good journalism" and "good audience metrics." Drawing on two ethnographic case studies, the authors conclude that these value/values disputes are organizationally managed by newsroom managers who engage in moral boundary-drawing, strategic invocation, domestication, reframing metrics as democratic feedback, and justifying metrics as organizational subsidies. Invoking and extending Marion Foucarde's insight that most of sociology is often silent about "bad matches," Christin and Petre themselves make on the task of looking at those moments when the "smoothing over" process fails through a series of bad matches that they helpfully generalize as *overspelling*: "when the profit-generating potential of journalists' activities was plainly spelled out and incentivized through metrics for its own sake" (Christin & Petre, 2020, p. 145).

The line between value and values, for Christin and Petre, thus exists in a state of constant tension rather than at a moment of profound change. The next piece, by Lucas Graves (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Laurens Lauer (University Duisburg-Essen) takes stock of a moment when new values *do* manage to permeate an institutional field. Fact-checking is (along with blogging) one of the few genuinely new phenomena to penetrate the world of journalistic work in the past twenty years. It is also work that increasingly possesses an institutional structure. But the values of that institution — as seen through changes observed at the yearly Global Fact-Checking Summit — have shifted over time, driven in part by the need to manage internal diversity and consolidate more formal structural mechanisms to coordinate a diverse membership. Drawing on extensive ethnographic and observational data, the authors argue that changes in structure can be used as a heuristic through which to understand and even measure changes in professional values. "The case of Global Fact." They write "highlights the particular demands of codifying dominant values in a diverse, growing transnational field; it also indicates how event-level structures help to resolve these tensions, and offer a kind of scaffold for more permanent field-level governance mechanisms" (Graves & Lauer, 2020, p. 168).

Elizabeth Hansen (Harvard University) also looks at the manner in which journalistic values have shifted in the digital age, this time through the lens of "digital disruption," which, in the world of American public radio, functioned as both a rhetorical device used to encourage change as well as a looming organizational "death sentence." Hansen, drawing on two years of fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2015, argues that the rhetoric of "business model disruption" deployed during that time obscured the fact that the changes that actually occurred within in news organizations lay more at the level of values (beliefs) than they did at the level of value (business model). Hansen's embrace of an idealist lens, focusing on "the ideological clashes — the clashes over values and assessments of what matters," perhaps primes her to see shifts in belief as at least as important as shifts in socio-material infrastructure. "One of the core disruptive effects of digital media innovations," she concludes, "is the evolution of actors' identities to contain more complex role relationships, which are complemented by a reconfigured set of values, and undergirded by a transformed set of practices" (Hansen, 2020, p. 190).

Two articles conclude the central section of this symposium, each of them focusing, like Hansen, on the tension between "value" and "values" which has been exacerbated by numerous socio-political shifts in journalism over past twenty years. Ronald Jacobs (SUNY-Albany), provides a comprehensive (and depressing) account of the numerous "legitimation crises" faced by Western journalists, most notably changing structures of media ownership, algorithmic disruption, and vitriolic populist attacks on expertise and professionalism (Jacobs, 2020). While these are familiar ailments, the most intriguing aspects of Jacob's paper outline the legitimation strategies journalists can (and do) deploy in order to try to confront the manifold crises. These include making greater use of opinion columnists (who can "speak truth" in ways not normally afforded to traditional news reporters) partnering with social media companies to develop fairer, more journalistic algorithms, boycotting populist demagogues, and injecting "aesthetic values" into the public sphere. In contrast, Amanda Brouwers and Tamara Witschge (University of Groningen) stake out an optimistic position almost diametrically opposed to the pessimism of Jacobs. In their paper, these two scholars deploy a unique auto-ethnographic method in order to study, from the inside, how "hope" can function as both a value for both journalism and innovation. Most studies of journalism do not discuss hope. And most studies of entrepreneurial journalism, particularly in the last half-decade, have tended toward the cynical or at least the skeptical, looking at the larger background discourses of the California Ideology as a structure which exploits entrepreneurs as much as it empowers them. While Brouwers and Witschge acknowledge the truth of this skepticism, they also want to go beyond it and study the hopeful and idealistic motivations that drive so many individuals seeking to reinvent journalism. In their own words, "we challenge the current scholarship that predominantly views journalism from a sense of lack, or even dread. We consider entrepreneurs as those longing for change in journalism, which means they operate not from a known, fixed understanding of the field, but much more from a sense of what is"not yet" (Bloch, in Miyazaki, 2004) and from the possible" (Brouwers & Witschge, 2020, p. 203).

All of these papers in the central, peer-reviewed section track these tensions between the possible and the impossible, and the dialectical swings between journalistic value and journalistic values. Unlike most recent academic and popular writing on the news business, they do not focus *only* on the economic side of the crisis in journalism *or* on the assault on normative values. Rather, value and values are inherently intertwined, and trying to understand one without understanding the other — as these pieces so clearly demonstrate — is a fool's errand.

## 3 From Field to Discipline

The changes in the study of news and journalism over the past two decades has been remarkable, and those of us entering the discipline in the early 2000s have been able to witness the birth, growth, and healthy adolescence of an entirely new field. Twenty years ago there was no "journalism studies" as an academic field, although there were of course many studies "of journalism" housed in different segments of the Western university. This began to shift in 2000 with the establishment of the Journalism Studies division at the International Communications Association and the founding of two field consolidating journals: *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* (Sage), and *Journalism Studies* (Routledge). More recent years have seen further disciplinization and consolidation, marked by the founding of additional journals like *Journalism Practice* (2007) and *Digital Journalism* (2013). Routledge academic publishing, in particular, continues to produce journalism related research at an astounding rate, featuring hardback imprints ranging from "Routledge Focus on Journalism," to "Routledge Research in Journalism," to "Journalism Studies: Theory and Practice." A few leading scholars have even argued that *digital* journalism studies is *itself* a field, separate and apart from the study of journalism, a field marked by its own theories, problems, and canons of relevance. The days when the study of news could be found scattered across a wide variety of venerable communications subfields including "sociology," "mass communication," "political communication," "cultural studies," "media theory," and the even more generic "media studies" seem like a long time ago.

Given all this, the second aim this symposium call is to critically reflect upon the relationship between sociology and journalism studies in the opening decades of the twenty-first century, a highly appropriate goal given the presence of these articles in an internationally oriented sociological journal. Once tightly linked, the disciplinary bonds between sociology and journalism studies have increasingly attenuated as sociology gains in methodological sophistication and journalism studies grows increasingly disciplinary. What do sociologists still have to say about journalism — if anything? And why should journalists and scholars of the media care about what sociologists have to say? Can the tools of social science, outside political science and journalism studies, help pick apart the knot of value and values discussed above?

The most direct discussion of this second aim can be found in the interviews that conclude the symposium. Callison and Young (authors of the recently published *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities*) along with *MEDIA INDIGENA* podcast creator Rick Harp, do not have much to say about sociology in their conversation, but the three of them together provide a deep and personal set of insights as to why the field of journalism studies came to function the way it did and why that field so often falls short in its analysis of issues related to race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender identity. Both Callison and Young highlight the manner in which their drive to enter the academy was driven by their hope for journalism (similar in some ways to the hope expressed by Brouwers and Witschge) and the gap between that hope and the reality they faced when they worked as professional reporters. As Young puts it,

> Fundamentally though, I was compelled and I believed the idealized mission that journalism told about itself. When I worked as a journalist, I thought I was finding the truth through fact gathering through my interviews, sources. It was only until I ended up reporting on crime in Houston, Texas, for the *Houston Post* that I started to have a number of moral dilemmas and crises about: was I representing things accurately? Could I, given my level of expertise, my educational background, given the complexity of the structural and sociological landscape that I was covering?" (Harp, Callison & Young, 2020, p. 237).

This gap between ideal and reality has helped define American and Northern European journalism studies as fundamentally a *problem oriented* discipline. What Young and Callison help highlight is how some problems, under this framework, can get overlooked in favor of others.

Both Michael Schudson and Todd Gitlin (Columbia University), who wrap up this symposium in an interview with Jiang Chang (Shenzen University), have walked the line between sociology, journalism, and communication research throughout their entire careers. Their perspective differs from that of Callison and Young in some obvious (gender, race, generational) and less obvious ways. Among the less obvious ways is their memory of another academic world, one that preceded not only the world of journalism studies but the world of a sociologically inclined media studies more generally. Interestingly enough, both remember a moment when the study of news could have been housed within the sociology of culture section at the American Sociological Association (ASA), but was not — a development that helped pave the way for today's hyper-specialized analysis of news. It is futile, of course, to wonder what a journalism studies more influenced by cultural sociology might have looked like, and perhaps the academic world of today is the better one. Nevertheless, I tend to agree with Schudson, who notes that

> sometimes I do feel that my younger and intellectually talented colleagues settle too comfortably into "journalism studies" as the world that defines them. People are too content to focus only on journalism as if it were the whole universe. Journalism's a very important institution. But so are political parties. Party systems matter. And so on and so forth. The economy matters. And if you are thinking and writing only about journalism, you're going to miss stuff. And I think media-centrism is an endless danger in journalism studies. Looking at the culture of cultural studies, or the study of culture, more widely would help but so, you know, so would knowing a little about political power. There's a lot besides the news that makes a difference. I once told graduate students that the concept most sorely absent in communication studies is the concept of "institutions." Institutions matter, both in and around the media (Chang, Gitlin & Schudson, 2020, p. 254).

One of the most pressing questions for journalism studies going forward is the question of how it can occasionally "discount" the importance of its object of analysis in order to remain attentive to the other objects that also matter. It is my opinion that the articles in this symposium provide a helpful guide for how to do just that. Of course, intentions are one thing; what matters is results. In that spirit, I hope the readers of this journal find these articles of interest.

## References

Boczkowski, P. J., Zelizer, B., & Anderson, C. W. (Forthcoming). *Journalism: A Manifesto*. London, UK: Polity.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brouwers, A. D., & Witschge, T. (2020). Hope as a Portal to Change: Reimagining Journalism's Value(s). *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 201–216. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11238

Chang, J., Gitlin, T., & Schudson, M. (2020). Reflecting on Forty Years of Sociology, Media Studies, and Journalism: An Interview with Todd Gitlin and Michael Schudson. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 249–263. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11515

Christin, A., & Petre, C. (2020). Making Peace with Metrics: Relational Work in Online News Production. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 133–156. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11178

De Maeyer, J. (2020). "A Nose for News": From (News) Values to Valuation. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 109–132. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11176

Graves, L., & Lauer, L. (2020). From Movement to Institution: The "Global Fact" Summit as a Field-Configuring Event. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 157–174. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11154

Hansen, E. (2020). Disrupting the News. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 175–199 https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11177

Harp, R., Callison, C., & Young, M. L. (2020). Value and Values in the Interstices of Journalism and Journalism Studies: An Interview with Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 235–247. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11514

Jackson, S. J. (2020). On #BlackLivesMatter and Journalism. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 101–108. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11425

Jacobs, R. N. (2020). Virality, Algorithms, and Illiberal Attacks on the Press: Legitimation Strategies for a New World. *Sociologica*, *14*(2), 217–233. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11190

Lamont, M. (2000). *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Miyazaki, H. (2004). *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Stark, D. (2011). *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**C.W. Anderson:** School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds (United Kingdom)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3893-8411
C.W.Anderson@leeds.ac.uk; https://www.cwanderson.org
C. W. Anderson is a Professor of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds and member of the board of advisors at the Tow Center, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He studies journalism, politics, and how the production of public knowledge is being transformed in the digital age. He was the author of *Apostles of Certainty: Data Journalism and the Politics of Doubt* (Oxford University Press, 2018) and *Rebuilding the News* (Temple University Press, 2013), and co-author or editor of *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism* (with Tamara Witscghe, David Domingo, and Alfred Hermida, 2016), *Remaking the News* (with Pablo Boczkowski, The MIT Press, 2017), and *The News Media: What Everyone Needs to Know* (with Michael Schudson and Len Downie, Oxford University Press, 2016). From 2001 to 2008 he was an editor and organizer at NYC Indymedia, one of the world's first "citizen journalism" websites.

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News"
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11425

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# On #BlackLivesMatter and Journalism

Sarah J. Jackson*

Submitted: July 30, 2020 – Accepted: August 1, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

In this refined version of a 2020 talk given to journalism students at Duke University, Professor Sarah Jackson reflects on the newsroom controversies and tensions that have accompanied the rise of #BlackLivesMatter. She argues that normative news values have always been at least partially subservient to the larger values of society, which means that, in the United States at the very least they are unavoidably and structurally racist even as they simultaneously represent real efforts on behalf of an occupational group to enact values that help democracy function properly. Jackson's goal in this powerful piece is for journalists to be more self-reflective about the manner by which their professional efforts can harm particular people and groups even while it purports to benefit society at large.

**Keywords**: #Blacklivesmatter; political protest; Civil Rights Movement; newsrooms; values.

* Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania (United States); sarah.jackson@asc.upenn.edu

## 1 Historical Background[1]

Like potentially many people in this room I had initially hoped to work as a professional journalist, and in fact did a little of that at various points in my life. I ended up going the academic route because it turned out I was more interested in the question of interrogating the power of stories, and the power of journalism, and who gets to tell those stories and whose voices are included in terms of shaping culture and politics. And that's part of what got me to where I am in terms of my academic career — really having a lot of these questions very early on about the cultural, and political, and social power of journalism and journalists telling some stories and not telling other stories — and telling some stories well and not telling other stories so well.

With that, I'm going to jump into a little background. I wanted to make sure that we're all on the same page in terms of some of the basic scholarship about the history of recent journalism. And so I'm going to talk a little bit about that before jumping into this contemporary moment and talking about what things look like now and what the best journalistic practices might even look like for the current moment. In terms of history, we know that just like other institution in the United States, that the field and institutions of journalism that initially existed in this country were those engaged in the planned and organized exclusion and demonization of Black voices. And when I say this to people, I think they often feel like, "Oh, I can't believe you're saying this about my institution that I work in," but we have gotten to a point where I think we can honestly accept that the United States was founded on ideologies that very specifically were white supremacist ideologies. And therefore, a byproduct of that is the simple fact that many of our institutions, from our universities to our journalistic institutions, to our political institutions and many others, just assumed that it was normal and natural to exclude certain stories and/or to stereotype and demean certain groups.

There has been a lot of scholarship about how that has and hasn't shifted over time. But I think for me and in my work, one of the things that's really important is that even though it's important for us to acknowledge that history and acknowledge the exclusions and the harms that that history has caused in the field of journalism and in media in particular, we also need to uplift and know that there are examples in which, even at time periods when people tend to say, "Well, that was just the culture. That's just how it was done," there were always people pushing back against this. And we can see that pushback in any historical time period. My first book was about the Black press. You can see that African Americans, even before the abolition of slavery, were pushing back about how they were being represented in the media. And so for example, the first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, which was founded in 1827, was founded by two free African American citizens in New York City. And their opening editorial said, "Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations of things which concern us dearly. From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented." And so, the goal of this paper was to correct some of the representations of Black Americans.

Similarly, just this year, 2020, Ida B. Wells was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize, but at the turn of the twentieth century, the journalism that Ida B. Wells was doggedly doing to tell stories about lynching, the violence of lynching and the heinous and prolific phenomenon that was lynching, was really significant in helping to set the stage for eventually passing anti-lynching legislation in the United States. Wells shone light on these stories that the mainstream,

1. This is the transcript of a talk given by Sarah J. Jackson, Presidential Associate Professor at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, to journalism students affiliated with Duke University's DeWitt Wallace Center for Media & Democracy on July 1, 2020. This talk was given over Zoom and the transcript has been lightly edited for clarity.

white press was either ignoring or often justifying. We could go through any moment of history and see that there's always been Black folks who have said, "Wait a second. There are these stories that are being left out. There are these representations that are problematic." And what history shows us is that those people were right. the folks who were agitating from within a journalistic practice to say, "Hey. What about this group? What about this idea? Why aren't we covering this story? Why are we always framing it this way? Why do we always depend on these sources?" As history then remembers them, it turns out that their pushes for more just and inclusive journalism are the ones we look back on as the heroic story. I think that's something interesting for us to hold as we think about the current moment as well.

I want to say something also before we get up to the present about the civil rights era as well. I know that when I was in journalism school, one of the things that I learned was this kind of heroic narrative of the role journalists played in the civil rights movement, which was that many Americans where changed by journalism of the period, sort of the hearts and minds argument, when they saw the brutality that was happening on the streets in the South around desegregation protests. They saw the German Shepherds being sicced on children and the water hoses and all that. And there's this argument that this journalistic coverage, and especially the photo journalism and the visual images that people saw on the nightly news, really helped to change and influence folks all the way up to president John F. Kennedy about the real brutality that Black civil rights protesters were experiencing in response to their organizing in the South in the 1950s and 1960s.

That's true, to an extent. But one thing that gets left out of that story that I think is really important for journalists to be self-reflexive about is that while sometimes that was true, there was still an overwhelming and very problematic representation of Black people and Black activism at the core of U.S. journalism. It's a myopic fairy tale to say that journalists were always on the right side of these issues. In fact, if you go back and you look at the journalism at the time, many, many media outlets actually demonized the civil rights movement, demonized Martin Luther King, Jr., argued that their demands were too radical, argued that they should go slower, represented them through conflict frames that really made it seem as if they were on equal footing with the armed police that they were facing during these protests. And that actually sounds similar to some of what we might see from media today.

Later on, in the post-civil rights era, we certainly saw great progress in terms of the integration of newsrooms and of media and a greater diversity of voices. And that is something that is often celebrated. And I think it's important to celebrate that because it's real. But once again, we still need to hold space for the nuance that often that integration wasn't enough, that it stagnated and didn't necessarily change the whiteness of journalistic institutions, that it was often just tokenized voices without more holistic change. Black journalists, post-civil rights era, still faced enormous challenges in doing their jobs in terms of being limited to covering only certain types of stories, covering crime stories, covering sports stories, for example, and not being taken seriously as journalists that could cover things like politics. Add that in that era, we saw several decades of backlash against the progress of the civil rights movement, for example during the Reagan era in the 1980s, where we saw the media and journalists really pick up and spread some of what has come to be understood as really harmful propaganda about Black communities. That includes the stereotype of the welfare queen, that the majority of coverage of Black communities was about crime and conflict, the exclusion of African American stories from public interest news and from mainstream political news unless it was about racial conflict. This is an interesting conundrum because, of course, what we also see, very much so in the 1980s and 1990s, is the holding up by media-makers of supposedly "exceptional" African

Americans like Michael Jackson or Michael Jordan as evidence that we'd overcome racial prejudice and didn't need ongoing policy efforts to ameliorate racism. Again, this probably sounds familiar.

## 2 Journalism Today and Black Lives Matter

I offer all that background to say that these aren't new issues. This issue of diversity and inclusion in journalism as a profession isn't a new issue. And this question of how are African American communities represented isn't a new issue. The question of how does Black activism and protest around racial justice get represented in news is not a new issue. But I think it's promising we are talking about these questions more openly now than any other time I can recall in my life. In the next section of this talk I want to address where we are in this current moment in history. One of the things that I think is really fascinating about the current moment is that we have hit a moment in media culture, where what we saw was... do you remember when Obama was running for president? It may be hard to believe today, but when Obama was running for president and when Obama was elected president, there was all this chatter in the media about how America was now "post-racial." And this word post-racial came out of nowhere. And it was like, "Now that enough of the American public will vote for a Black man to be president, we've overcome race." Whatever that means. There was this really strong idealistic discourse in journalism that somehow the white supremacist impulses of much of the country had been erased by the fact that we had a Black president. What we know, of course, is that that was really this exceptionalism framing — tokenism — that allowed the racial status quo in America to go unchallenged, that just like in the '80s and '90s one person's success is not how to honestly measure inequality or people's lived experiences.

What has been really interesting for me to watch as an observer and somebody who studies media is to watch the same journalists who were, in the Obama era, uncritically taking up this narrative about post-racialism, and about racial progress, and about how far we've come — well now, in the wake of the Trump election, and the not just national but global rise of far right and racist political ideology, they seemed to be taken by surprise. Part of that surprise was because of accepting the story that they themselves were telling about America being "post-race." There has been a lot of hand-wringing about how political commentators, and opinion editors and all these media people got 2016 so wrong. Everybody expected something different to happen. And I really think that part of that had to do with the fact of this sort of myopic racial exceptionalism narrative that people allowed themselves to believe about Obama.

Clearly, we now know that that's not true and we're not post-race. It's frankly laughable. I don't think there's any question at this point that that is any longer something that people can rationally think. And so what we've seen then, I would say in the last decade or so, is something really interesting has happened because progress, of course, has continued to happen in newsrooms, in national conversations about race and racism, in social justice spaces. We've seen an increasing power of members of underrepresented groups in newsrooms. We've seen more and more folks like Nikole Hannah-Jones at *The New York Times*, who has risen to a point in her career where she's able to organize an entire issue of *The New York Times* magazine about the centrality of slavery to American experience. We see people like Yamiche Alcindor, who is a White House correspondent doing really great political coverage, when historically we didn't see many Black women even being given the option to seriously cover politics or the White House in that way. So of course, we continue to see progress. And one of the results of this progress is that Black media-makers and Black journalists have been asking their outlets, and their colleagues, and the rest of the American public to really continue grappling with the question of race, and race inequality, and racism.

They've actually been doing this for a very long time. And in some cases, we've found out, editors have silenced these journalists, asked them to change the force of their arguments or angles of their stories. Recently, we saw a whole group of young *New York Times* staffers on the news side come out publicly in response to the decision to run the Tom Cotton editorial and say, "Hey. We were told we weren't allowed to critique the editorial side, even when they ran things about race that were harmful to us, but, we're not going to be silent anymore." But the blowback they faced for speaking the truth was also real. And so that reflects how, as more Black journalists rise to acclaim, these journalists are still facing some of the same limitations and assumptions. A lot of that has to do with the ongoing assumption in the news business that the target audience of U.S. news is a white, middle America, conservative kind of news consumer, which in and of itself flies in the face of what we know about the increasing diversity of U.S. news consumers.

All that to say one of the things that we're seeing then in this moment with the rise of visibility of Black Lives Matter is that, this didn't just happen in 2020; and in fact it didn't just happen in 2014 when Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri. It started in 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Trayvon Martin. That was the first time that the phrase "Black Lives Matter" was used online, but of course Black communities have been organizing against state violence long before that. One of the things I think is really crucial for journalists to understand and do is contextualize this movement, which is to say the Black Lives Matter movement isn't a standalone racial justice movement any more than say the Me Too movement is a standalone feminist movement. There were feminist campaigns and organized movements way before we ever heard of Me Too, just like there were racial justice movements and organizing way before we heard of Black Lives Matter. And so, one of the things that's really important is for journalists to be self-reflexive enough to look back and say, "Okay, how did we cover the civil rights movement? What mistakes did we make? And how can we do better in covering Black Lives Matter? How did we cover the Black Panther Party? What mistakes did we make? How did we cover Black activism in the 1990s, what can we do better?"

Let me tell you, there were a lot of mistakes. How can we do better in covering Black Lives Matter? We have examples of this happening before. There might have been a different name to what was happening, but we have examples of the really important role that journalists can play in either helping the U.S. public make sense of the really complicated and nuanced issues at play here, or falling back onto certain assumptions that frankly are based on racial stereotypes about Black conflict, and about urban disorder and many other things.

Because I think this is so important I want to finish by sharing some best practices. I'm sure these aren't the only best practices, but they're the ones that came to mind most for me, given what I've studied for a long time.

## 3 Journalistic Values and Newsroom Best Practices

Start from a place of not just praising journalism, which we should because journalism is important to democracy and we desperately need it to continue doing its job, but we also need for journalists and journalism institutions to acknowledge where harm has been done. There are some local papers that have started to do this. For example, in Montgomery, Alabama, the *Montgomery Advertiser*'s editorial board apologized publicly for what it called its "shameful" and "careless" coverage of white mob violence that justified and normalized lynching from the

1870s through the 1950s. That's an 80-year period of being complicit in the extra-judicial murder of Black Alabama citizens! That might seem like an extreme example, though it's more common than you might think, but papers all over the country outside of the South have been complicit in villainizing African Americans in various ways and with harmful results. For journalists, and editors and outlets to really come to an honest reckoning with their role, both the good and bad, that is a first step.

Next, it's important for journalists to question how we understand and how we've been taught to understand the concept of objectivity. There was just a great piece in the *New Yorker* recently by Masha Gessen about this — her argument is that in the contemporary media environment many people have confused the ideal of objectivity with sort of a both-siderism, which ultimately lacks what journalist Wesley Lowery calls "moral clarity." Objectivity is not giving equal time to both sides even if one side is violating truth, morals, and the social contract. In this "both-siderism," if we interview people who say that systemic racism is a continued social issue, well then, the bad argument goes that we then need to have someone on that says, "There's no more racism. And actually, black people are better off than white people now." But that is not objectivity. Objectivity as a concept has unfortunately been used to mask assumptions within the journalism industry that protect whiteness, but ideally objectivity is reporting the facts, the truth, with what the Kerner Commission called "compassion and depth." There is no need to report misinformation and disinformation or every bad argument out there as if it should be weighed alongside the actual answers we have to questions about how inequality works. A good journalist offers context that helps the public understand that not all claims should be given the same weight. We have some really great examples of what that looks like. What's valuable here is the kind of contextualization that the norms of truth and moral clarity call for: not just uncritically recording what members of the establishment or those in power say, but offering context, seeking out sources with less power as well, checking to see what the data says, etc.

Here we see a third best practice emerging, which is in how journalists think about sources. For instance, think about using police as sources. Historically, journalists have worked really hard to maintain relationships with elite sources. There's a certain set of sources that are considered to be the sources you want to have in your pocket, you want to be able to call, and they include politicians, and corporate insiders, and police, because these are the people that, for example, if you have a crime beat at your newspaper, you want the police to be friendly with you and let you know when things are going on so you can report them. But one of the problems with that is that in many cases, these relationships have been too close. And these sources are treated as if their narrative and their version of the story is more reliable and more honest than the versions of the story that come from citizens. What we've seen over and over again in these police brutality cases is that often the first reporting, the first narrative that the police report to journalists and the public is just fundamentally untrue. The videos have shown us that. They said that so-and-so was resisting arrest when he wasn't. They said that so-and-so had a gun when she didn't. We know now that the police can be faulty sources and that they have a reason to protect themselves and each other. That doesn't mean don't use them as sources, that means use them as sources but also use witnesses as legitimate sources, community members as legitimate sources, activists and social workers as legitimate sources.

I mentioned the Kerner Commission earlier. In 1968 when the country erupted in unrest following the assassination of Martin Luther King, president Lyndon Johnson had put together the Kerner Commission, which was meant to investigate the reasons for civil unrest and try to prevent it in the future. The Kerner Commission came back with all these reasons for Black uprisings that would sound very familiar today: disenfranchisement from voting, poverty, joblessness, homelessness, all these things that are still social issues today. But one of the striking things the Kerner Commission said was that, in fact, a lot of this unrest was the responsibility of journalists because Black communities felt that they weren't being heard and that their stories weren't told unless they did something that fit into some kind of narrative about Black criminality or conflict. And so the Kerner Commission said, "Along with the country as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and a white perspective. That is no longer good enough. The painful process of readjustment that is required of the American news media must begin now. They must make a reality of integration — in both their product and personnel. They must insist on the highest standards of accuracy — not only reporting single events with care and skepticism, but placing each event into meaningful perspective. They must report the travail of our cities with compassion and depth." In this moment, we can heed the same call, this question of compassion and depth. You can report professionally and still treat people and their stories and their communities with compassion and depth, don't just swoop in and swoop out without knowing anything about the community, don't ignore community members, instead take into consideration their histories and pain, think about how media coverage might negatively affect folks as you're reporting on them and their experiences and about how to do better.

Those are three best practices. Another best practice is that white journalists should stand with their Black colleagues. As I mentioned earlier, it's the case that Black journalists, for generations, have been pushing these issues and have been trying to make some change about language in newsrooms, about sensationalism, about framing, about the exclusion of certain sources and the reliance on other sources. But at the same time, the folks who have been doing this have not always had the most welcoming or friendly environment and culture within these institutions. But collectively, with solidarity, news staff can push to make sure that news orgs are practicing what they preach, that they have fair hiring and promotion practices, that they have an environment and culture that's welcoming to everyone. Continuing to stand with Black journalists and other journalists of color will make a difference in terms of who gets to tell us these stories and under what conditions.

Fifth: especially in covering activism, reject individualistic narratives that ignore collective organizing. What I mean by this is that one of the critiques that is often justifiably made of journalists in their retrospective coverage of the civil rights era is that they spend a lot of time focusing on and telling stories of individuals, which is why we all know Martin Luther King and we all know Rosa Parks. But part of the problem with that sort of framing of these stories is that it ignores that it was thousands of ordinary people who were organizing for change and whose voices were being reflected in those demands. So many regular people risked their lives for the right to vole and for desegregation that it's a real shame we don't have a better collective understanding of how activism works. Similarly, I would say in this moment, while it might be tempting and there might be compelling figures to tell stories about, it's important to know how these figures fit into the larger space in which these events are occurring. These stories aren't just about one case of police brutality, or one police officer, or one victim of police brutality, or one organizer, although those organizers I think their stories are important to tell and they make good sources, but it's in fact about communities, and those communities have deep collective histories and members of those communities have been organizing and reacting for a long time. I was recently in conversation with Alicia Garza, who people often refer to as a "founder" of the Black Lives Matter movement, and I myself made the mistake of referring to her that way. She immediately corrected me that she is a "co-creator" of the Black Lives Matter

Global Network, which is a specific organization, and an organizer in many capacities, but that she sees herself as part of a legacy and community of Black activism that is much bigger than just this moment. It's important to tell this history and holistic story.

And last. Is this part of my fifth point or a sixth one? You decide. So much of the way that journalists have been trained to cover activism and social movements is through the lens of crime. Many of the conventions of covering crime or covering conflict migrate to the coverage of social movements: "Disruption to the social order is bad. Who is on this side? Who is on that side? Was it a scuffle? What sensational happened? Ooooh look a photo of something on fire." A lot of the sort of, "If it bleeds, it leads logic," is applied to coverage of activism and protest. We know this approach isn't even useful for covering a crime, but it's *certainly* not useful for covering social movements, because what that approach does is it tends to erase and make invisible social issues and their solutions. It erases why people are collectively doing what they're doing by focusing on sensational images or individual actors. It really fails to inform the American public about what is at root in social movements, which is in fact questions of democracy and American progress. Social movements are about progress, activism is about demanding change that theoretically will make us better, right? Why do we cover it like crime? If we're going to understand how change happens in a society, we have to understand the roots of why people are demanding change. If we're so focused on a building burning or an individual story that we can't tell the story that answers the questions, "Why are there 10,000 people in the streets, and what have their experiences been? What is the history here? What are their demands? What is the social context?" we really fail to give people the information they need to make informed decisions about whether to support or not support a movement, about whether they think change needs to happen, about how progress works.

I see this as crucially important in thinking about the ideal of democracy itself. Journalists are crucial to democracy, but their crucialness lies in telling stories with nuance, with depth, holistically, and not falling into shortcuts, or stereotypes, or overly simplistic frames or sensationalism. That's the value of journalism to democracy. And with that, I'll close.

**Sarah J. Jackson:** Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania (United States)
sarah.jackson@asc.upenn.edu; https://www.asc.upenn.edu/people/faculty/sarah-j-jackson-phd
Sarah J. Jackson studies how media, journalism, and technology are used by and represent marginalized publics, with a focus on how communication arising from Black, feminist, and activist communities contribute to US progress. Her first book, *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press* (Routledge, 2014), examines the relationship between Black celebrity activism, journalism, and American politics. Her co-authored second book, *Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (MIT Press, 2020), focuses on the use of Twitter in contemporary social movements. As a 2020 Andrew Carnegie Fellow, she is working on a third book on the political power and industry innovation of African American media-makers. She is an associate editor of *Communication Theory* and serves on the advisory boards of the Center for Critical Race and Digital Studies and the Social Science Research Council's MediaWell initiative.

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News" – *peer-reviewed*
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11176

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# "A Nose for News": From (News) Values to Valuation

Juliette De Maeyer*

Submitted: June 17, 2020 – Accepted: August 23, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

"News values" — that is, the set of criteria that journalists use to assess newsworthiness — are a central concern for journalism studies. Since Galtung and Ruge's seminal piece (1965), scholarship about news values has repeatedly attempted to define and refine a list of qualities that facts and events should possess to become news stories. This article outlines the limitations of news values research: a proliferation of lists of news values complicates the matter instead of offering an explanation, researchers often have to rely on other factors or on an unsatisfactory gap between ideal and practice to explain what journalists actually do, and such research does not account for another way in which journalists and scholars explain news selection — through the "nose for news" metaphor. Consequently, the article discusses how John Dewey's theory of valuation offers a good way to revisit the news-values conundrum. Through an exploration of metajournalistic discourse about the "nose for news" between 1863 and 2010, it shows that Dewey's theory of valuation converges with how journalists think about newsmaking.

**Keywords**: Journalism; valuation; Dewey; nose for news; news values.

* Department of Communication, University of Montreal (Canada); juliette.de.maeyer@umontreal.ca; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6482-5365

## 1 Introduction

How do events become news? This question is at the heart of journalism studies scholarship concerned with "news values" — that is, the set of criteria that journalists use to assess newsworthiness. Since Galtung and Ruge's seminal piece (1965), studies have repeatedly attempted to define and refine a list of qualities that facts and events should possess to become news stories — the criteria themselves being inferred from the way in which journalists describe their work, or from content analyses of news reports. As a result, studies have come up with lists of qualities: to become news, events must be timely, unexpected, unambiguous, consonant, familiar, meaningful, positive or negative, and so on.

In this article, I describe several limitations of such a list-of-news-values approach. As an idealized set of criteria, news values need constant caveats to factor in the practical constraints of journalism. Unsatisfied with the list of values, journalism studies scholars seem to be in a perpetual need of updating it, proposing new values to be included in the list, new ways to observe them empirically, or alternative factors that also weigh into the news-selection process. All this conspires to make news values complicated, unstable, and unsatisfactory. Moreover, lists of news values do not seem to correspond to the other way in which journalists describe their work: they simply say that they use their "nose for news." Finally, the discussion around news values in journalism studies reproduces the broader (and fruitless) "problem of values," (Spaulding, 1913) a puzzle that has divided philosophers for more than a century: are values a quality that things possess, or something that the human mind creates?

## 2 News Values Research

The field of journalism studies usually credits Walter Lippmann (1922/1998) with being the first to articulate the problem of selecting the news among the (too) many events that take place in the world, and with discussing how the "raw material" of events acquire various levels of "news value" (1922, p. 348). But it is Galtung and Ruge's "The Structure of Foreign News," an article published in 1965, that usually holds the title of foundational study of news values. In an attempt to elucidate news selection, the two scholars identified a list of twelve factors: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, personification, and negativity. They argued that the more an event satisfies these criteria, the more likely it will be reported as news.

### 2.1 A Proliferation of Lists

From then on, the list of factors stood at the core of what journalism studies means by "news values." Following Galtung and Ruge's own acknowledgment that the list was not complete (1965, p. 64), numerous studies have extended, refined, revisited, and/or criticized the famous list of values. Efforts to do so have aimed at extending the list's limited scope beyond international news (the focus of the original study), at updating it to take the alleged novelty of changing realities into account (and particularly the digitization of journalism that started in the late 1990s), or at including broader forces such as ideology and culture. In a tendency that is quite typical of journalism studies' emphasis on change (rather than continuity), researchers even periodically revised the revisions. As a result, the state of our collective disciplinary knowledge about news values now resembles a list of lists, each more sophisticated or simpler, more current and/or thorough than its predecessors. The entry about news values in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* describes a "proliferation" of lists of news values, "many of which overlap with each other in terms of the aspects of newsworthiness they deal with and only differ in their labeling/naming practices" (Caple, 2018, p. 10).

The initial list, as well as its numerous revisions and updates, poses a problem of incommensurability, as the new news values that are added to the mix sometimes speak to vastly different aspects of newsmaking (Caple & Bednarek, 2016). They describe apparent qualities of events or people, some elements pertaining to the requirements of journalistic writing (such as style, brevity, clarity), others to business models and market conditions. To those already radically different aspects, we could add what Brighton and Foy (2007) have categorized as news values research that takes a "broader approach" — that is, one that seeks to incorporate "areas such as ideology, cultural conditioning, technological determinism and others" (p. 6). The news-values literature alternately characterizes news values as something newsworkers can explicitly articulate or as something they are unaware of (often resulting from broader forces such as ideology, culture, or professional routines) that need to be reverse-engineered.

A well-known example of the broader approach and of implicit news values is perhaps Gans's (1979) authoritative ethnographic account of American newsmaking in the 1970s. In *Deciding What's News*, Gans describes a set of "enduring values," which he groups into eight clusters: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership. Taken together, these values "[affect] what events become news" (Gans, 1979, p. 41), but they function at an implicit level: they constitute a "paraideology" — a term that Gans uses to underline that this aggregate of values is different from a "deliberate, integrated and more doctrinaire set of values usually defined as ideology" (Gans, 1979, p. 68).

As these enduring values work at an implicit level, Gans turns to another category to explain how newsworkers make "news judgments." He calls these "considerations" — that is, "unwritten rules journalists apply" (p. 73) to select which stories to pursue and publish. They include concerns about "substantive considerations" that evaluate story content, "product considerations" that speak to the "goodness" of stories in terms of format and medium, and "competitive considerations" that emphasize rivalry among news organizations. Those three categories in turn lead to a description of more specific rules. Among many other factors, a story is more likely to be selected, written, and published if it involves people highly ranked in governmental and other hierarchies, if it has an impact on the nation and national interest or an impact on a large number of people, or if it is significant for the past and future. Also at play are the particular format requirements of each medium, the sheerly "interesting" (p. 155) character of a story, and the overall balance between stories published in a same issue or edition. I can name only a handful of these unwritten rules because Gans's in-depth ethnographic work resists synthesis. Its rich nuances can leave the reader somewhat puzzled: among all those implicit "enduring values" and many unwritten "considerations," what exactly explains how events become news?

In an attempt to reduce such complexity to something more manageable, some authors have tried to circumscribe the concept of news values. Strömbäck et al. (2012), for example, make a distinction between news values understood as "cognitive and normative concepts that refer to what journalists believe should constitute the news" and all the other factors that come into play — such as "format considerations, audience interests, resources, source considerations" (Strömbäck et al., 2012, p. 719). Similarly, Caple and Bednarek (2016) identify three categories: they distinguish (1) (real) news values from (2) concerns related to writing, and from (3) another catchall category, called "selection factors," that encompasses "*any* factor impacting whether or not a story becomes published," such as commercial pressure, availability of reporters, or deadlines (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 438, emphasis in original).

When looking at these different taxonomies of news values, a certain amount of confusion ensues. The fact that there are so many different taxonomies of news values suggests that the notion of news values itself is confused. In that regard, news values constitute a prime example of journalism studies' failure to provide a coherent and (relatively) durable body of knowledge that illuminates the phenomena it is supposed to study — rather, the theory of news values seems to obscure how events actually become news.

### 2.2 Are News Values a Good Explanation?

A theory is a "plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena." Just as John Dewey often liked to think with common dictionary definitions (see below), I am referring here to the first definition given by the *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* — but this is also in line with one of the meanings often given to theory by sociologists (Abend, 2008), that of "a general proposition (...) which establishes a relationship between two or more variables" (p. 177). That is exactly the aim of the list of news values, which makes an explicit relationship between the qualities that an event possesses and the likelihood it will become news. Or, in Galtung and Ruge's (1965, p. 71) classic formulation: "the more events satisfy the criteria mentioned, the more they will be registered as news."

But is the list of news values a good explanation? Is the relationship between the two variables satisfactory? It does not seem so. In addition to the need for regular updates, journalism studies scholars constantly have to find workarounds to explain news selection. They have to resort to something *else* to explain how events become news, as if the explanatory power of values weren't enough. Quite often, this takes the form of arguments that contrast ideal and practice: in their day-to-day performance of newswork, journalists are faced with many different practical constraints that force them to deviate from the ideal news values. These practical constraints include many things that can cause "fluctuations," such as

> the availability of resources and time, and subjective, often unconscious, influences, such as a mix of the social, educational, ideological and cultural influences on journalists, as well as the environment in which they work, their position in the workplace hierarchy and the type of audience for whom journalists are producing news (Harcup & O'Neil, 2017, p. 1483).

It is quite honorable for scholars to acknowledge the limitations of the theories and concepts they use, but in the case of news values one is left to wonder whether the theory ever worked in the first place. For a theory that supposedly emanates from practice (as news values are inferred from how journalists describe their work, or from content analyses of news reports), it does not constitute a very robust explanatory framework of the said practice.

Even scholars who adopt the news-values framework empirically show that its explanatory power is limited. For example, in her ethnographic study of newsmaking from a sociolinguistic perspective, Cotter (2010) first argues that news values "function as guidelines for decision-making and are invoked, unconsciously or explicitly, at every step of the news process" (Cotter, 2010, p. 67). She draws on a taxonomy of news values defined by journalists themselves, and comes up with the following list of news values: importance, impact, relevance, proximity, and timeliness. Her fascinating account of editorial meetings empirically shows how journalists and editors make decisions and argue on the grounds of these values. But it *also* shows that some decisions are taken following rationales that completely escape the determined list of news values, such as when an editor defends a story because the lede sounds good (p. 98), or when another argues for page-one prominence because of his childhood attachment for the main protagonist of a story (p. 104).

That empirical reality takes a more nuanced and complicated path than the one suggested by the theory is not surprising. But are those instances exceptional? Acknowledging the discrepancy between news content (what is actually published) and the criteria of newsworthiness (news values), Strömbäck et al. (2012) argue that there is a consistent gap between the "normative" importance of events properties and the "actual" importance of events that have become news stories. It is a difference between ideal and practice, or between what journalists think *should* be and what they actually do. Just as with other key notions of journalism studies (such as objectivity), news values can then be understood only as distant ideals, always negated by the harsh conditions of real-life newswork. This is a rather pessimistic view of newsmaking: one in which journalists are constantly dissatisfied, torn between an ideal that they can never really fulfill and a reality driven by those many "other factors" that weigh into the news production process.

### 2.3 News Values and the Nose for News: Competing Explanations?

Aside from the list of news values, there is another explanation as to how journalists transform events into news stories: they follow their "nose for news." The metaphor appeared in the professional discourses in the late 19th century, when journalism started to professionalize and to articulate standards. It became a part of the mainstream journalistic vocabulary in the US by the 1930s, and still is today (Mirando, 1992; Vos & Finneman, 2017; Parks, 2019). The phrase suggests an innate ability to determine what news is: journalists just recognize news when they see it. They describe the "journalistic gut feeling" as something physical: it is "part of your spinal cord," "in the back of your head," "something like a feeling" (Schultz, 2007, p. 199).

The nose for news and the list of news values are competing explanations that coexist in professional discourses. Their differences should not be put down to a caricatural dispute between journalism scholars and professionals (the former having a taste for theory and abstraction that makes them prone to typologizing news values, the latter favoring more concrete, embodied explanation, the nose for news). Lists of news values remarkably close to those proposed by researchers have appeared in journalism textbooks — often written by professionals — since the late nineteenth century. And as Parks (2019) has shown in his analysis of textbooks, those values (prominence, proximity, timeliness, magnitude, unusualness, human interest) have been remarkably stable over more than a century. Moreover, the scholarly literature also acknowledges the more intuitive aspect of news selection. Quite notably, although Gans's (1979) whole enterprise is to objectively describe all the values, factors, and "considerations" that come into play when newsmakers select stories, he also recognizes that news judgment is "partly a matter of feel" (Gans, 1979, p. 171) and that journalists "act on the basis of quick, virtually intuitive judgments, which some ascribe to 'feel' " (p. 82).

Although the two explanations may coexist peacefully in the professional and academic literature, they nevertheless suggest a different vision of the newsmaking process. Notably, they differ in the agency left to newsworkers. The "nose for news" gives a lot of leeway to journalists who are the sensorial machine through which events (somewhat mysteriously) become news, while the list of news values gives newsworkers a rather weak or mechanical agency, as they supposedly have only to apply the list of criteria to do their job (even leading to attempts to auto-

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11176

mate the act of assessing newsworthiness, see Diakopoulos, 2008). Moreover, the metaphorical nose make it looks like news selection is an individual matter (a nose is not something one can share), whereas the news values approaches envisions journalism as a collective behavior: the news values can be shared and taught — in textbooks, as shown above, but also in the many processes of professional socialization (Singer, 2004).

Few scholars have taken the "nose for news" metaphor seriously or studied it directly, dismissing it as "somewhat magical" (Cotter, 2010, p. 77) or "murky" (Zelizer & Allan, p. 96). As a result, we do not know whether there's a connection between the nose for news and the lists of news values. Some studies argue that the nose for news is how journalists have "internalized" news values (Cotter, 2010) — which suggests, implicitly, that the list of news values exists somewhere externally and that journalists need to ingest, interiorize, and apply it. This way of framing the relation between news values and the nose for news leads to another issue, which is the focus of the next section: where exactly do news values come from? Do they spring from objective qualities of events, or are they subjective judgments made by journalists?

### 2.4 Where Do Values Come From, Anyway?

The question of the exact origins of news values refers to a broader "problem of value," one that has stirred debate among philosophers and social scientists for a long time. The problem can be expressed in many different ways, but it often takes the form of a dichotomy between what belongs to/springs from things and what belongs to/springs from the human mind, as in this classic formulation by Spaulding in 1913, to which Dewey provided a response:

> Is Value (1) something which is ultimate and which attaches itself to "things" independently of consciousness, or of an organic being with desires and aversions, or (2) is it a characteristic which a thing gets by its relation to the consciousness of an organic being, or to an organic being with desires and aversions? (Spaulding, 1913, p. 168).

This "problem of value" also preoccupies journalists. In their study of metajournalistic discourses found in newspapers, periodicals, journalism trade publications, and journalism textbooks between 1870 and 1930, Vos and Finneman (2017) show how journalists oscillate between explanations that put the emphasis on internal causes (news judgment is a special skill that journalists have) and external forces (news judgment is based on qualities that events possess, but also on the economic value of the news and/or estimations of the public interest).

Journalism studies scholarship does not always explicitly connect its attempts at defining news values to broader philosophical and ontological debates, but it nevertheless reproduces the two poles of the problem. Caple and Bednarek (2016) name these two options the "material perspective" and the "cognitive perspective." According to the former, news values exist "in the actual events and people who are reported on in the news, that is, in events in their material reality," whereas the latter holds that news values "exist in the minds of journalists" (2016, p. 435). These differing conceptualizations also go with different methodological emphases, they argue: the material perspective usually takes the form of content analysis, whereas cognitive perspectives favor ethnographic methods.

Note that this is a spectrum more than a dichotomy, as no study of news values simplifies the question to the extent that it attributes news values purely to things of the world or purely to the minds of journalists. More often than not, news-values research opts for a nuanced (but unsteady) middle ground and attributes importance both to external and internal origins. When it comes to nuances, I also want to stress that the internal/cognitive pole is rarely presented in terms of pure subjectivity — taken to the extreme, it would mean that events become news only because of journalists' individual whims and moods. Rather, "in the mind of journalists" is understood against the strong social constructivist background that underlies most journalism studies scholarship: news values are created by journalists as a social group, they belong to the realm of conventions and norms, and they are constructed in discourse (for a focus on such discursive perspective, see Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Caple & Bednarek, 2016).

To some extent, the "problem of value" highlights some enduring ontological and epistemological tensions that exist within journalism studies scholarship: on the one hand, there is a tradition that seeks to determine what qualities events of the world must possess to become news stories (that is the literature on news values that I have described above). On the other hand, many classic works have embraced a social-constructionist perspective (e.g., Molotch & Lester, 1974; Tuchman, 1978) and argue that events do not really exist in and of themselves and that they are (at least partly) constructed by journalists (and all the forces that speak through them). As a result, looking for "qualities" that events would possess does not make much sense. Just as the discussion on objectivity is too often posed on the basis of a fruitless distinction between subject and object (Martine & De Maeyer, 2019), I argue below that Dewey's pragmatism helps us escape the dichotomous way in which the "problem of value" is formulated.

## 3 Enter John Dewey

This problem of value is exactly what the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) addressed in his theory of valuation. Executing a "flank movement" (Muniesa, 2011), Dewey proposed to radically redefine the terms of the problem. We need to shift away from value (or values), he argues, and instead understand valuation as an action.

The work of John Dewey is at the same time central and strangely evanescent in media and communication scholarship. His philosophy "with" communication — a phrase used by Rakow (2019) to underline the extent to which communication is everywhere in Dewey's work, rather than an object among others — makes him a key thinker of the field. But the limited ways in which Dewey has been used in media and communication scholarship pales in comparison to the sheer vastness of his work, and large parts of his philosophy remain either unexploited, misunderstood, or little known (see Rakow, 2019, for a reappraisal of Dewey's thought in communication studies).

In journalism studies, familiarity with Dewey does not extend much beyond two landmark events: the so-called Dewey-Lippmann "debate" and the public journalism movement in the 1990s. The idea of a debate between John Dewey and Walter Lippmann has been famously introduced into the field by James Carey, who considered Dewey one of the founding fathers of the field (Munson & Warren, 1997). In Carey's narrative, Dewey and Lippmann incarnate antagonist positions on the role of media and public opinion in democracy. Since then, the so-called debate has been commented upon, debunked, and revisited countless times (see, e.g., Allan, 2012; Bybee, 1999; Russill, 2016; Trudel, 2016; Schudson, 2008), but it still serves as a familiar anchoring point in journalism and mass communication research to secure the epistemological grounds for political differences about the public (Rakow, 2018)

The second arena in which journalism studies has been drawing on Dewey's work is in the realm of public and/or civic journalism. Public journalism is a reform movement put forward in the late 1980s and the 1990s by American journalists (Merritt, 1998) and scholars (Glasser, 2000; Rosen, 2000). It sought to reimagine journalism to better integrate, reflect, and promote civic engagement and public life. Dewey was hailed as one of the key influences on public journalism (Perry, 2003). The movement drew heavily on Dewey's conception of public life and democracy — one that he famously articulated in his 1927 *The Public and Its Problems*. Since then, Dewey is regularly evoked by researchers trying to explore the civic, public, or conversational quality of journalism (see, e.g., Coleman, 2007; Compton, 2000; Kunelius & Renvall, 2010; Min, 2016).

Some studies have explored how other aspects of Dewey's work matter for journalism studies, whether the subject is journalism ethics in a post-truth era (Stroud, 2019), the indeterminacy of sourcing practices (Hutter & Farias, 2017), or the relationship between journalists and academics (Trudel & De Maeyer, 2017). But due to the centrality of the Dewey-Lippmann debate and Dewey's status as an inspirational figure of public journalism, it is mostly only a part of Dewey's work that has found an echo in mainstream journalism studies: his conception of public life and public participation, as articulated in *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey, 1927). I propose to explore another facet of his work, the theory of valuation.

## 4 Reading Dewey against the "Nose for News": Notes on Methods and Corpus

The first objective of this article is to revisit news values through the lens of John Dewey's theory of valuation. As one of the issues highlighted above is the inability of news-values theory to account for the idea that journalists decide what is news through an embodied, intuitive, and felt experience, the second objective of this paper is to read Dewey against metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016) about the "nose for news." In other words, I have tried to take the metaphorical "nose for news" seriously. In the remainder of this paper I argue that Dewey's theory of valuation is actually quite compatible with the idea of a nose for news. To do so, I propose a close, interconnected reading of two kinds of texts: Dewey's work about valuation and a series of documents that present a partial snapshot of metajournalistic discourses about the "nose for news" between 1868 and 2010.

Since Dewey's career was long, and his work is impressive in size, my take here is therefore obviously incomplete. *Theory of Valuation*, first published in 1935, is undoubtedly the key volume to consider, but my reading also draws on *Experience and Nature* (1925), *Some Questions about Value* (1944), *Further as to Valuation as Judgment* (1943) and *Valuation Judgments and Immediate Quality* (1944). My understanding was also crucially informed by the work of Bidet, Quéré, & Truc (2011), Frega (2006), De Munck & Zimmerman (2015), and Muniesa (2011). All references to Dewey in this paper are to *The Collected Works of John Dewey, 1882–1953: The Electronic Edition*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston and Larry Hickman. The volumes of the collection are divided into sets called *The Early Works, 1882–1898* (EW); *The Middle Works, 1899–1924* (MW); *The Later Works, 1925–1953* (LW); and *Supplemental Volume, 1884–1951* (SV). I will therefore use these acronyms, volume numbers, and page numbers for citations.

In exploring metajournalistic discourses about the "nose for news," I purposely favored historical depth (in a modest attempt to rebalance journalism studies' usual emphasis on novelty). Drawing on the plain-text search features of digitized collections, I compiled newspaper articles and journalism textbooks that contain the expression "nose for news." For newspaper articles, I queried *newspapers.com* and the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America*, and for journalism textbooks, *Hathi Trust* and *Archive.org*. My explorations gathered 94 documents

(40 textbooks and 54 newspaper articles), published between 1863 and 2010. They are listed in the appendix, and I will from now on refer to them by their number on this list.

These documents are by no means exhaustive and they are certainly biased toward English-speaking publications from the US (although a couple of textbooks published in the UK are included). I treated them as a coherent corpus and did not try to systematically describe how the metajournalistic discourse evolved over the course of a century and a half. Actually, the discourse around the "nose for news" seems remarkably stable (Mirando, 1992; Parks, 2019) in a profession that is always concerned with change, revolutions, and crises.

In the next sections, I first expose the core aspects of valuation theory and how they apply to journalism. Then, I turn to metajournalistic discourse about the "nose for news," and I discuss how they converge with some of the key theoretical principles of valuation theory.

## 5 A Theory of (News) Valuation

*Theory of Valuation* starts with an interesting lexical point: Dewey notes that, in English, "value" has two meanings, one that has an immediate, personal, feeling-like connotation, and the other that refers to a more abstract, relational ordering of things. Valuing designates both "*prizing*, in the sense of holding precious, dear (and various other nearly equivalent activities, like honoring, regarding highly), and *appraising* in the sense of *putting* a value upon, *assigning* value to" (MW: 13, p. 195, emphasis in original). Such linguistic considerations, Dewey continues, points precisely to the problem that he intends to tackle, and he subsequently proceeds to determine how valuation is *both* prizing and appraising.

The movement from prizing to appraisal, called valuation, is the difference between saying "I like this painting" and "This painting is beautiful." It is a shift of focus from an immediate feeling to a shareable proposition that (implicitly) connects the painting to other things. Prizing and appraisal are not fundamentally different in nature; they both exist on the continuum of experience. Their "rhythmic succession (...) suggests that the difference is one of emphasis, or degree" (LW: 1, p. 300). Dewey regularly underlines two dimensions of experience: one is felt and immediate, the other is more intellectual and reflective. He insists that both dimensions are valid, that they should be studied seriously, and that they are contiguous: "ap-praising then represents a more or less systematized development of what is *already present* in prizing" (LW: 15, p. 105, my emphasis). Applied to journalism, considering both prizing and appraising means that the intuitive, immediate "nose for news" is not incompatible with the existence of shared "news values," a more intellectualized horizon of newsworthiness. Both occur in rhythmic alternation to constitute news valuation. The two dimensions should therefore not be too strictly separated:

> [T]he move is typical of Dewey. Just when we think we have grasped the analytic separation of the emotional and the intellectual — as with the too-quick parsing of means and ends — he invites us to wonder, "Are they separate or are they complementary?" (Stark, 2011, p. 327).

Dewey's insights further help us to better understand some aspects of news valuation: (1) Prizing is not a sheer mental state or an indecipherable emotional response, but it must be understood as an activity. (2) Appraisal is not reducible to the application of rules, norms, or conventions, as it is a process that involves inquiry. (3) Appraisal exists on an ends-means continuum.

### 5.1 Valuation Is an Activity

Prizing (expressed by this and other words such as "liking," "caring for," "looking out for," "tending," "cherishing," and "enjoying") is not a mental state, Dewey says, but rather an activity, and it must be taken in its behavioral sense (LW:15, p. 102). As an activity, prizing is manifest in the efforts one makes to call into existence or maintain what is prized, and those efforts are what we can empirically observe. In prizing what is newsworthy, in smelling a good story, journalists are on a path to actively calling news into existence.

Here, Dewey also discusses valuation in terms of desire and interests. Desire means the prizing and caring for that occurs when something is lacking, when there is "trouble" in an existing situation, when there is "something the matter" (MW: 13, p. 220), or when one wants to conserve something that is threatened. Interest, in turn, is the maintenance of those desires over a longer time span (LW: 15, p. 103). In Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, desires and interests are not the internal contemplation of the pictures in our heads: they are oriented toward action and they must be understood contextually and ecologically, in experience. Desire is an "active relation of the organism to the environment" (MW: 13, p. 203); it makes us do things. This characterization is typical of Dewey's ecological philosophy, which sees mind, body, and world as generative of one another through their ongoing interactions.

Desires also depend on the particular situation in which they arise. Desires for news that arise when reporters and their "nose for news" are on the hunt for a story will differ if the reporters work for a monthly feature magazine or a 24-hour rolling-news TV channel, if they operate in a big urban center or in a small, regional community. Trying to understand news valuation outside of its experiential contexts, from a disembodied list of values, does not therefore make much sense. The situated, contextual quality of valuation also has empirical consequences: as desire/valuation depends on the situation, its adequacy "depends upon its adaptation to the needs and demands imposed by the situation" (MW: 13, p. 205).

### 5.2 Appraisal Involves Active Inquiry

If prizing is the *felt* dimension of valuation, appraisal is more *reflective* and abstracts away from immediate feeling to establish relations and connections. When we do this, we engage in another central piece of Dewey's theory of knowledge and truth: inquiry, the concept Dewey puts forward to underline that intelligence is not something that we have, but something that we use, in relation to our environment. Inquiry is not a rare intellectual phenomenon reserved for deep thinkers; it happens all the time, in everyday life. It is practical. Consequently, value judgments are practical judgments, too (Frega, 2006). Their function is to determine a course of action in answering this question: what is it *better* to do?

When we pass from "I like this painting" to "This painting is beautiful," or from "I smell a news story here" to "It should be on Page One," are we merely applying norms? Are we mechanically applying conventions? No, we aren't, says Dewey, as appraisal is an active inquiry, grounded in experience. Affirming the contrary

> is equivalent to denying that any element of intelligence enters into any form of practice; to affirming that all decisions on practical matters are the arbitrary products of impulse, caprice, blind habit, or convention. Farmer, mechanic, painter, musician, writer, doctor, lawyer, merchant, captain of industry, administrator or manager, has constantly to inquire what it is better to do next. Unless the decision

> reached is arrived at blindly and arbitrarily it is obtained by gathering and surveying evidence appraised as to its weight and relevancy (LW: 12, p. 162–163).

Considering value judgments to belong to the broader category of practical judgments, embedded in specific situations, also has another consequence: there is no (simple) separation between the act of judging and the object of judgment, since valuation is part and parcel of the situation. This may seem obvious to anyone that has ever been a protagonist in a news story (and a point that has been amply made by researchers in the social-constructivist tradition): the news valuations that journalists make are not outside of the events themselves; rather, they become part of the situation, potentially transforming it.

### 5.3 The Ends-Means Continuum

Moreover, valuations are practical judgments that imply a relation of means and ends, causes and consequences. The relation between means and ends is also a classical problem in philosophy. Can we define the things that are "good" (the things we value) and that could become the goals we pursue (the ends)? How do these things relate to the means necessary to achieve them (are bad means acceptable when the end is good?)? Dewey notes that an easy — but misleading — breakdown could be made here: ends relate to prizing (what we ultimately desire), whereas means relate to appraisal (the calculations we make to assess what needs to be done in order to attain the ends). This separation is absurd to Dewey. The end does not exist a priori; it takes shape in a course of action: "It is simply impossible to have an end-in-view or to anticipate the consequences of any proposed line of action save upon the basis of some, however slight, consideration of the means by which it can be brought into existence" (MW: 13, p. 222). Means and ends exist together, form a continuum, and have a "thoroughly reciprocal character" (MW: 8, p. 37).

Reconceptualizing means and ends in this way also has consequences for our theory of news valuation: there are no "ideal values" on the one hand and "practical constraints" on the other hand. The ends-in-view (what is pursued and desired — be that to inform the public, to get a lot of page views, or to influence public opinion) are inseparable from the means by which to achieve them. In editorial meetings, journalists and editors do not merely discuss the ends; their news valuation also implies a consideration of the means (Do we have a source? Is there a reporter available? Can we send them there? Will it make the deadline? Do we have pictures? Will it sell?).

Finally, if the account that I have made above seems to put the emphasis on valuation as an individual phenomenon at a microlevel, this is entirely my doing: according to Dewey's ecological view, no individual action is separated from its environment and from interaction. Everything is always social. In *Theory of Valuation*, elucidating how valuation works at an individual level is only the first step toward understanding the conditions of social theory (which are the topic of the last chapter). Valuations are "rules of methodic procedure in the conduct of the investigations," and as such they can be "personal" (individual) and/or "associated" (collective) (MW: 13 p. 242), but there is no fundamental difference between the individual and the collective. Ending the book with a plea for more "cultural anthropology," Dewey recognizes that an "adequate theory of human behavior" cannot be formed "considering individuals apart from the cultural setting in which they live, move, and have their being" (MW: 13, p. 248). But this is not an afterthought: his whole philosophy is devised to think the individual and the collective in the same movement.

## 6 Metajournalistic Discourses About the Nose for News

In short, Dewey proposes a shift from value(s) to valuation, considered as an action. This action comprises both prizing (an immediate, felt dimension) and appraisal (an intellectual dimension), it moves along an ends-means continuum, and it is always situated. In line with Dewey's ecological perspective, valuation is relational and brings together mind, body, and world. All this is fairly abstract, and journalists certainly do not go about their job worrying about the "ends-means continuum" or the rhythmic succession of prizing and appraisal — that is, they do not frame their activity in these terms. In the next sections, however, I show how valuation theory provides a conceptual framework that is actually quite compatible with metajournalistic discourse about the nose for news.

### 6.1 The Instinct for News

As is obviously suggested by the nasal metaphor, when news articles and journalism textbooks talk about the nose for news they often emphasize an instinctive and natural ability. This is congruent with the "prizing" pole of news valuation: news is something journalists feel, something they intuitively grasp. In line with Dewey's description of prizing as immediate, the ability to sniff out news is characterized as rapid. It is "a quick guess" (57, 58), a "quick, practically instantaneous appreciation of what is news" (48).

The nose for news is also something "natural" (91) and "innate" (83): it "comes as naturally as blue birds and robins in spring and pansies and tube roses in summer" (37). To emphasize such natural quality, animal analogies abound. The documents are full of references to dogs— be they bird dogs (57, 74) or drug-sniffing dogs (86). But reporters and editors are compared to other animals, too: the lynx with its precise vision (44), the camel with its ability to absorb lots of water (37), and even the "newshawk, press card in hat, sniffing out a story and disappearing into the wings screaming 'Stop the presses' " (76). In addition to having a nose for news, the editor who inhabits this strange menagerie must also possess "horse sense" (39).

Not only are the animal metaphors amusing — especially when the texts are literally about animals, such as the famous case of the beer-drinking donkey (35) or the story about a reporter who embarks on a quest for news helped by Ace, a very cute six-week-old puppy (87) — they also imply that having a nose for news is an activity. As a matter of fact, "instinct" (42, 46, 57, 58, 70, 90) is not something that animals or humans contemplate in their minds, but rather something they act upon. This is particularly clear when the documents portray noses for news picking up on a scent: along with the dog analogies and explicit reference to hunting (44, 48), the metaphor suggests that newsworthiness is not a scent that one just whiffs: it is to be followed. It also connotes an end-in-view and an always-revisable course of action: other scents may come up or obstacles may appear.

The instinctive quality of having a nose for news also speaks to an important question: Is it innate or can it be acquired? Are journalists "born or made" (38)? The debate was particularly active in the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century (38, 41, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 52, 55, 58, 59, 62, 65), which corresponds to a period of professionalization (Vos & Finneman, 2017) when journalism schools started to pave the way toward more formalized education. The "born or made" question looks like another dualism that Dewey would reject. Certainly, a part of valuation is felt and immediate, but that does not mean that journalism comes down to sheer impulses that cannot be cultivated. To explain more broadly how some aspects of experience are immediate, Dewey relies on the notion of habit — that is, our capacity to appreciate things directly (be it from an aesthetic or moral point of view), grounded in all our past inquiries, individual and collective (for a discussion of habit and impulse, see *Human Nature and Conduct*, 1922; MW: 14).

### 6.2 The Active Nose for News

Activity is also connoted in another way: the news articles and the journalism textbooks often relate anecdotes of journalists in the field. The value of news, in other words, is not something that newsworkers devise theoretically and then act upon. Rather, it is something that emerges in action, which is evident in the numerous accounts of how specific news stories were found — or failed to be found, as in the recurring and edifying stories of cub reporters who miss obvious stories (52, 53, 53, 59, 68, 75). The fact that the nose for news is somewhat mysterious or strange (40, 70, 74, 89, 93) does not prevent journalists from explaining how it works, only with a case-based approach. A nose for news is something that can be understood through an accumulation of anecdotes: "Many an old newspaperman would summarize by saying that a reporter must have a 'nose for news.' He would cite case after case where successful journalists obtained stories when others had failed, attributing it all to a congenital news-finding ability" (75).

In Dewey's ecological view, valuation happens in experience, which implies an active relation to the environment. Mind, body, and world are generative of one another through their ongoing interactions. How journalists talk about the nose for news also emphasizes that it is a bodily experience. Of course, the sense of smell is often at the forefront: journalists smell out news stories (65) or they know they have a story "the instant it touche[s] [their] nostrils" (41). An article from 1986 explicitly reflects on newswork as a craft of smell:

> I couldn't help but think how closely smell resembles my job. Reporters are said to "have a nose for news," or at least the good ones have, and then, of course, there's the line about "sniffing out a news story." Often a good investigative piece comes about simply because something doesn't "smell" right (something smells fishy?) (86).

Other senses are also involved. There is the overall "news sense" or "sense of news" (42, 93), an overarching sense that makes a journalist "know what is news when he sees it, hears it, smells it, tastes it, feels it" (71). In addition to the nose, eyes and ears are also important (1, 46, 67, 82): "reporters needed two related traits: an eye for detail and an ear for a quote" (90). The whole sensorium is used when making the news. Again, this tends toward the "felt" dimension of experience, but it also highlights that sensing the news is a bodily experience in which journalists are connected to their environment: there must something to smell and something to see. The news is co-constituted by journalists and by the world that they smell and feel.

### 6.3 News Values Are Relational

So far, what I have exposed about the nose for news speaks to the "prizing" pole of news valuation, what is immediately felt and intuitively grasped. But the other pole — that is, the (collective) intellectual effort of grasping what is valued in relation with other things (and other people) — also stands out. A relational view of news valuation is quite explicit in the documents that highlight the *relative* value of news. A good city editor must "be able to recognize on the instant the *relative* value of news" (39), and a good reporter "must not only know a news item but he must know the *relative* value of the same" (44, my emphasis). The relative value can be determined by critically evaluating one news story against other news stories, and against the judgment of other newsworkers (notably the editor) to determine "how much value one piece of news has when compared with another piece of news that comes in at the same time" (48). As any practical judgment of valuation, it takes place in a specific situation, and the adequacy of the valuation can be understood only in relation to this context. It is not about comparing all news items against a general idea of their worth, but it is a question of examining it in relation to pieces of news that come in *at the same time*.

Comparing news stories against each other also means to have a sense of proportion and perspective, a "mental yardstick" (74) to "place the proper value on a news item" (39). The "price-tag" (74) put on news then has a very material resonance: it is the "size of the headline" (74), "how much it is worth in space; how prominent a headline to put over it" (44). The means-ends continuum involved in news valuation therefore may contain broader ends-in-view (such as informing the public or revealing hidden truths), but also a spatial calculation: how much space on a page, how long a segment, how big a headline? The material, practical constraints are not an afterthought of news valuation, but rather an integral part of it.

The shift from reporter's intuition to conscious evaluation of news stories' relative importance is similar to the shift from "I like this painting" to "This painting is beautiful." It involves a comparison (that can be explicit or implicit) between the items that are valued. In making such comparisons, journalists reflectively judge the importance of a potential story by finding points of comparison between stories but also between the story and all the elements of news-making (notably what the news values literature has described as constraints in terms of format or medium).

What is interesting is that the relational aspect happens roughly at the same time as the instinctive impulses that I have described above. Prizing and appraisal are not distinct phases. They can happen together or at least in very quick succession. When reporters sniff out a story, they *already* think about it in relational terms: How important is it in comparison with other stories? How much space is it going to occupy? Will the editor like it?

The texts also illustrate how appraisal is necessarily collective, as having a "nose for news" is a quality that both reporters and editors must possess. While the nose metaphor hints at something individual, the process of determining the value of a news item is definitively collective: reporters and editors define newsworthiness together. To some extent, the texts that I have analyzed also constitute a moment of collective appraisal: they are examples of newsworkers deliberating publicly about newsworthiness.

## 7 Discussion: Empirical Inquiry into News Valuation and Its Limitations

The theory of valuation helps us find a way out of several deadlocks in which news values research seemed to be stuck. It does so largely by redefining the problem. If we focus on news valuation as an action and wonder how values are *formed*, then there is no need to come up with a list of universal news values (a kind of finality that does not sit well with Dewey's pragmatism). If we consider the situatedness (Vannini, 2008) of valuation as well as the ends-means continuum, then there is no need to resort to the discrepancy between ideal and practice to understand how journalists work: their judgments of value *are* practical, which does not mean that they are simplistic or that they do not critically pursue an end-in-view. Valuations are not the application of mere conventions, which would almost completely deprive newsworkers of agency: they imply an active (and collective) process of inquiry.

Dewey's philosophy has been criticized for an optimism that sometimes seems to set aside big structural constraints and inequalities (see Rakow, 2019, for an introduction on Dewey on race and gender, though), but it is also what I fundamentally like about it: it imagines the conditions in which people can thrive, in which they can exert their intelligent judgment. The fact that news valuation accounts for the immediate and felt dimension of prizing seems particularly important as journalism is often a thankless job. In the midst of economic gloom and a bleak post-truth media environment, valuation theory accounts for the *thrill* of a good news story, the exhilaration of newsworthiness. In that regard, this paper also hopes to contribute to a growing body of research that takes emotions and affect into account during the study of journalism (Le Cam & Ruellan, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). As Dewey shows, recognizing that news valuation has to do with feelings does not mean attributing it to some mysterious, irrational subjectivity that escapes inquiry. On the contrary, because the felt dimension is part of any experience, we need a vocabulary and conceptual tools to account for it.

Redefining the problem in different terms paves the way for new empirical questions that I hope future research will address. These are numerous, but I want to highlight a few that could also put to the empirical test potential limitations of the theory:

First, what does the rhythmic alternation of prizing and appraisal that happens in news valuation look like? Dewey's theory states that these are not fundamentally distinct phases. They can happen simultaneously or in very quick succession. If the difference between prizing and appraisal is only one of degrees or emphasis, I would suggest that we need to pay attention to our analytical focal point to better account for news valuation as a whole. Many ethnographic studies of newsmaking have actually already highlighted instances of appraisal: we see it at play when Gans (1979) pinpoints the different "considerations" that matter in news selection, or when Ryfe (2012) describes the (sometimes conflicting) views of reporters and editors over what they should cover. Inquiries informed by the theory of valuation would still aim to understand those moments of collective deliberation, when rationales for news selection are articulated and when what resembles rules emerges — but they would also try to systematically connect these moments to the other pole of news valuation: to the intimate, felt, and instinctive "nose for news." Noting that the two aspects exist is not enough. A Deweyan line of questioning would run as follows: How are they connected? How do newsworkers constantly pass from one to the other?

I have underlined that valuation is not the mere application of conventions, rules, or norms, but that does not mean that conventions, rules, or norms do not exist, nor that other constraints never impinge on action. Dewey proposes an interesting distinction between practical judgments (which requires free, active inquiry) and technical judgments (which do not require any form of deliberation because they assume that the ends are predetermined, so one has only to choose the means by which to attain them). Surely, in making the news, journalists go through many of these technical judgments when they do not have the freedom to inquire into mutually determined means and ends because the ends are already determined. Future studies could focus on exploring this distinction: when is journalism a process of actual valuation, which presupposes an open-ended situation and free inquiry, and when is it only the accumulation of "technical judgments" — or "constrained labor," in the words of Sennett (2008, p. 288) — that is shaped by conventions, norms, traditions, and other constraints? I see this as an interesting reformulation of the question of journalistic autonomy in a context of multiple economic and material constraints. We have many examples that show how the different decisions that shape newsmaking do not form free inquiry in the sense of the pragmatist question that defines practical judgments ("what is *better* to do"). Instead, we see quasi-automatic decisions, routine coverage, shovelware and clickbait, or Tuchman's (1978) strategic rituals. Dewey's vocabulary tends to accentuate how individuals can seize a form of freedom and actualization in action: it is about desire, intelligent inquiry, and the conditions in which experience can become fulfillment. But experience is not always fulfilling, and Dewey's optimism should not incite us to deny that newswork is sometimes constrained, that it may be an accumulation of mere technical judgments, that the desires and ends-in-view that are pursued might not be those of reporters who want to inform the public about important matters but rather those of the media conglomerate, of the private equity firm, of the algorithm that sells ads, of audience metrics. In that context, an interesting empirical question arises: When is there enough wiggle room for actual news valuation, which implies a form of collective and free inquiry into what is better to do?

The question of ends-in-view seems particularly open-ended to me, and, because of the situatedness of valuation, it is one that can be solved only empirically. If valuation arises when there is desire, when there is something that is lacking, an absence, some kind of trouble, something incomplete (all those things coming together to form provisional ends-in-view), then what exactly are newsworkers endeavoring to do? Here, one can imagine many different answers, big and small: to inform the public, to fill the news hole, to be better than the competing news organization, to be the first on a scoop, to sell a lot of copies or ads, to expose injustice, to influence public opinion, to perform well in terms of metrics... One could also wonder whose desires and whose ends-in-views are pursued in each case. There is no a priori distinction between economic success and normative beliefs about the role of journalism; all these things matter if they are "translated into the meaning and import of what actually happens" (LW: 1, p. 311). Refusing to give prominence to some explanations (be they economic, political, ideological, or normative) does not mean discounting structural forces. Rather, it suggests that many different things can matter, and that the import of one and the same thing can change according to the situation. For example, the weight and the meaning that news organizations give to something as seemingly objective as audience metrics varies widely (Christin, 2020).

Taking the emotional and felt dimension into account should not, however, make us forget that there is also a form of economic rationality at stake in news valuation. News is a hybrid good, with both a price-tag and a symbolic/public worth. Works in economic sociology (Helgesson & Muniesa, 2013; Kjellberg & Mallard, 2013) have highlighted how valuation is a useful concept for thinking about worth beyond price and market-based calculation. However, these are still part of the equation, and they certainly translate into the meaning and import of newsmaking. Future research could therefore try to understand how more traditional conceptions of value, as something calculable (in terms of price, of advertising revenue, of changing business models), play a role in the process of news valuation. In other words, the news-valuation framework refuses to prioritize pricing over prizing and appraisal, but pricing is still part of what counts (Starks, 2011). This seems particularly interesting as journalism has undergone many important changes in terms of how it is priced and sold—from the emphasis on objectivity and mass audiences in the twentieth century to the quest for new business models after the digital revolution at the turn of the twenty-first century; but, over the same period, news values have remained remarkably stable (Parks, 2019).

Finally, I am aware that my emphasis on dynamic and situated action may leave the readers with a feeling of empty relativism: if everything can count, depending on the situation, then nothing counts. Surely, we have discarded the list-of-news-values approach, but does that mean that we will never find relatively consistent patterns of social action? Is every case of newsworthiness unique? Certainly not. Again, I want to point to the idea of ends-in-view. Dewey insists that ends are never final, and are always reciprocally determined by means, but that does not mean that ends-in-view cannot be shared or that some ends-in-view might consistently matter in news valuations. In that regard, an empirical description of news valuations might very well find out that at least some of the time, ends-in-view overlap with some of the values of the lists that I have spent so much time criticizing above: timeliness, unexpectedness, and proximity probably stand among the ends-in-view that regularly drive newsworkers.

Finally, contra the idea that pragmatism leads to some extreme form of relativism, future research could delve into the question of commensurability. This is in line with one of the core questions that preoccupies valuation studies and some areas of economic sociology (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Stark, 2011): can we compare different orders of worth? Valuation theory offers an opportunity to think about what journalists do in comparison to other ways of determining worth. I see no reason why we should presume that journalists are exceptional: the formation of values among newsworkers is not radically different from other valuations. So, instead of coming up with an endless list of rules that narrowly apply to journalists and editors, we might try to understand how events become news, by using a vocabulary and a conceptual toolbox that can also describe other valuations — notably those of the public. Future research could therefore try to explore how news is valued by members of the public, and the extent to which those valuations overlap (or do not overlap) with the "nose for news" valuations. This is the horizon that Dewey always aims at (and which is explicitly addressed throughout his work): studying valuation means understanding what we hold dear, but also what holds us together.

## References

Abend, G. (2008). The meaning of "theory." *Sociological Theory*, *26*(2), 173–199. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2008.00324.x

Allan, S. (2012). Journalism and its publics: The Lipmann-Dewey debate. In S. Allan (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism* (pp. 60–70). London: Routledge.

Beckert, J., & Aspers, P. (2011). *The Worth of Goods: Valuation and Pricing in the Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2017). *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organizations Create Newsworthiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bidet, A., Quéré, L., & Truc, G. (2011). Ce à quoi nous tenons: Dewey et la formation des valeurs. In *La formation des valeurs* (p. 5–64). Paris: La Découverte.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Brighton, P., & Foy, D. (2007). *News Values*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Bybee, C. (1999). Can democracy survive in the post-factual age? A return to the Lippmann-Dewey debate about the politics of news. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, *1*(1), 28–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/152263799900100103

Caple, H. (2018). News values and newsworthiness. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.850

Caple, H., & Bednarek, M. (2016). Rethinking news values: What a discursive approach can tell us about the construction of news discourse and news photography. *Journalism*, *17*(4), 435–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914568078

Carlson, M. (2016). Metajournalistic discourse and the meanings of journalism. *Communication Theory*, *26*(4), 349–368. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12088

Christin, A. (2020). *Metrics at Work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Coleman, R. (2007). Picturing civic journalism: How photographers and graphic designers visually communicate The Principles of Civic Journalism. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, *8*(1), 25–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884907072418

Compton, J. (2000). Communicative politics and public journalism. *Journalism Studies*, *1*(3), 449–467. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700050081777

Cotter, C. (2010). *News Talk: Investigating the Language of Journalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Munck, J., & Zimmermann, B. (2015). Evaluation as practical judgment. *Human Studies*, *38*(1), 113–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-014-9325-1

Dewey, J. (2003). *The collected works of John Dewey, 1882–1953*, edited by J. A. Boydston & L. Hickman (2nd release, electronic ed.). Retrieved from: http://pm.nlx.com/xtf/search?smode=simple

Diakopoulos, N. (2008). An algorithmic nose for news. *Columbia Journalism Review*. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/an-algorithmic-nose-for-news.php

Frega, R. (2006). *Pensée, expérience, pratique: Essai sur la théorie du jugement de John Dewey*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news. *Journal of Peace Research*, *2*(1), 64–91. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/423011

Gans, H. (1979). *Deciding What's News: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Glasser, T. L. (2000). The politics of public journalism. *Journalism Studies*, *1*(4), 683–686. https://doi.org/10.1080/146167000441385

Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2017). What is news? *Journalism Studies*, *18*(12), 1470--1488. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193

Helgesson, C.-F., & Muniesa, F. (2013). For what it's worth: An introduction to valuation studies. *Valuation Studies*, *1*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3384/vs.2001-5992.13111

Hutter, M., & Farías, I. (2017). Sourcing newness: Ways of inducing indeterminacy. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *10*(5), 434–449. https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2017.1326969

Kjellberg, H., & Mallard, A. (2013). Valuation studies? Our collective two cents. *Valuation Studies*, *1*(1), 11–30. https://doi.org/10.3384/vs.2001-5992.131111

Kunelius, R., & Renvall, M. (2010). Stories of a public: Journalism and the validity of citizens' testimonies. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, *11*(5), 515–529. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884910373533

Le Cam, F., & Ruellan, D. (2017). *Émotions de journalistes: Sel et sens du métier*. Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble.

Lippmann, W. (1998). *Public Opinion*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. (Original work published 1922).

Martine, T., & De Maeyer, J. (2019). Networks of Reference: Rethinking Objectivity Theory in Journalism. *Communication Theory*, *29*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qty020

Merritt, D. (1998). *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News is Not Enough* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Min, S.-J. (2016). Conversation through journalism: Searching for organizing principles of public and citizen journalism. *Journalism*, *17*(5), 567–582. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884915571298

Mirando, J. A. (1992). *Journalism by the Book: An Interpretive Analysis of News Writing and Reporting Textbooks, 1867–1987* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg.

Molotch, H., & Lester, M. (1974). News as purposive behavior: On the strategic use of routine events, accidents, and scandals. *American Sociological Review*, *39*(1), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.2307/2094279

Muniesa, F. (2011). A flank movement in the understanding of valuation. *The Sociological Review*, *59*(s2), 24–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02056.x

Munson, E. S., & Warren, C. A. (1997). *James Carey: A Critical Reader*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Parks, P. (2019). Textbook news values: Stable concepts, changing choices. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *96*(3), 784–810. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018805212

Perry, D. K. (2003). *The Roots of Civic Journalism: Darwin, Dewey, and Mead*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Rakow, L. F. (2018). Family feud: Who's still fighting about Dewey and Lippmann? *Javnost - The Public*, *25*(1–2), 75–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1423945

Rakow, L. F. (2019). *John Dewey: A Critical Introduction to Media and Communication Theory*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Rosen, J. (2000). Questions and answers about public journalism. *Journalism Studies*, *1*(4), 679–683. https://doi.org/10.1080/146167000441376

Russill, C. (2016). Dewey/Lippmann redux. *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication*, *7*(2), 129–142. https://doi.org/10.1386/ejpc.7.2.129_1

Ryfe, D. M. (2012). *Can Journalism Survive? An Inside Look at American Newsrooms*. Malden: Polity Press.

Schudson, M. (2008). The "Lippmann-Dewey Debate" and the invention of Walter Lippmann as an anti-Democrat, 1985–1996. *International Journal of Communication*, *2*(0), 12. Retrieved from: https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/343/229

Schultz, I. (2007). The journalistic gut feeling. *Journalism Practice*, *1*(2), 190–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512780701275507

Sennett, R. (2008). *The Craftsman*. New Haven-London: Yale University Press.

Singer, J. B. (2004). More Than Ink-Stained Wretches: The Resocialization of Print Journalists in Converged Newsrooms. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *81*(4), 838–856. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100408

Spaulding, E. G. (1913). The problem of values. *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, *10*(6), 167–168.

Stark, D. (2011). What's valuable? In J. Beckert & P. Aspers (Eds.), *The Worth of Goods: Valuation and Pricing in the Economy* (p. 319–338). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strömbäck, J., Karlsson, M., & Hopmann, D. N. (2012). Determinants of news content. *Journalism Studies*, *13*(5–6), 718–728. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.664321

Stroud, S. R. (2019). Pragmatist media ethics and the challenges of fake news. *Journal of Media Ethics*, *34*(4), 178–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2019.1672554

Trudel, D. (2016). "The outlawry of war" ou l'autre débat Dewey-Lippmann. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, *41*(1). https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2016v41n1a2802

Trudel, D., & De Maeyer, J. (2017). L'unité de l'enquête et le pipeline de la connaissance: Alliances entre journalistes et universitaires au prisme de la comparaison historique. *Sur le journalisme=About Journalism=Sobre jornalismo*, *6*(2), 42–57.

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Vannini, P. (2008). Situatedness. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Vol. 2, p. 815). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Vos, T. P., & Finneman, T. (2017). The early historical construction of journalism's gatekeeping role. *Journalism*, *18*(3), 265–280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916636126

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2020). An emotional turn in journalism studies? *Digital Journalism*, *8*(2), 175–194. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1697626

Zelizer, B., & Allan, S. (2010). *Keywords in News and Journalism Studies*. New York, NY: Open University Press.


## 8 Appendix

Untitled articles are identified by their first words.

1. "Items," *Vernon County Censor*, 1868-07-29
2. "The Washington Correspondents," *The New Orleans Crescent*, 1869-02-09

3. “Don Platt dined,” *Quad-City Times*, 1870-04-21
4. “Song of the shears”, *The Richmond Palladium,* 1872-01-06
5. “The Cincinnati Convention,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, 1872-04-25
6. “Song of the shears” (illustrated), *Wyandot County Republican*, 1872-05-16
7. “Evidently the Associated Press,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1872-10-01
8. “San Francisco Letter,” *Arizona Citizen*, 1873-03-01
9. “A Couple of Questions,” *Arizona Citizen*, 1873-03-08
10. “Letter from Our Cincinnati Correspondent,” *New National Era*, 1873-05-08
11. “Country Newspapers,” *Lexington Weekly Intelligencer*, 1873-06-04
12. “The solomn indifference,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1874-04-04
13. “The newspaper reporter,” *The Dallas Daily Herald*, 1874-05-14
14. “A Card from Henry Macrery,” *Nashville union and American*, 1874-07-02
15. “Floral Mill,” *Pioche Daily Record*, 1874-07-17
16. “Some one with a nose for news,” *The Democratic Press,* 1874-08-27
17. “Arrested for riotous conduct,” *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 1874-10-27
18. “In the business again,” *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, 1874-12-29
19. Wingate, Charles F., *Views and interviews on journalism*, New York: F.B. Patterson, 1875
20. “Colonel Denman W. Shannon,” *The Dallas Daily Herald*. 1875-01-16
21. “Sine Die,” Knoxville *Whig and Chronicle*, 1875-03-17
22. “Belmont chronicle,” *Belmont Chronicle*, 1875-09-09
23. “The Evening Mail,” *The Dallas Daily Herald*, 1876-05-19
24. “Whisky,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1876-09-26
25. “A reporter with a nose for news,” *New-York Tribune*, 1876-12-01
26. “Few men have a good nose for news,” *The New Orleans Daily Democrat*, 1877-05-27
27. “If our New York contemporaries,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1877-07-22
28. “Local Laconics,” *Daily Press and Dakotaian*, 1877-09-01
29. “Metropolitan journals and editors,” *Alexandria Gazette*, 1878-01-09
30. “Local Department,” *The Eaton Democrat*, 1878-02-14
31. “Pen and Scissors,” *The Plymouth Republican*, 1879-02-20

32. "A fated city," *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, 1879-02-21
33. "Cincinnati Newspaper Men," *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 1879-02-26
34. "Understand the Bible thoroughly," *The Inter Ocean*, 1879-04-25
35. "A Beer-drinking Donkey," *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 1880-01-14
36. "Berkshire County," *Connecticut Western News*, 1880-08-11
37. "The nose for news comes as naturally," *The Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), 1883-03-10
38. Camp, Eugene, "Journalists: born or made?" A paper read before the Alumni Association of the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1888-03-27
39. "City editors in session," *Sioux City Journal*, 1897-01-26
40. Munson, Augustus J., *Making a country newspaper*, Chicago: The Dominion company, 1899
41. "Prof. Fuller C. Weed's School of Journalism," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 1900-05-13
42. Ralph, Julian, *The making of a journalist*, New York: Harper, 1903
43. Pulitzer, Joseph, *The School of Journalism in Columbia University: The power of public opinion*, New York: Columbia University, 1904
44. "News gathering and welfare of city," The Tennessean, 1906-03-18
45. "The Nose for News," *The Baltimore Sun*, 1908-02-02
46. *Modern journalism, a guide for beginners*, London: Sidgwick, 1909
47. Chamberlain, Winthrop Burr, *The need and the scope of schools of journalism in our universities*, Minneapolis: The University Press Club, 1909
48. Hadlock, Edwin H., *Press correspondence and journalism*, San Francisco: The United Press Syndicate, 1910
49. "Now we have it! Reason fur Mutt's long nose! He has 'nose for news'," *The St. Louis Star and Times,* 1910-09-03
50. Ross, Charles Griffith, *The writing of news, a handbook with chapters on newspaper correspondence and copy reading*, New York: Holt, 1911
51. Shuman, Edwin L., *Practical journalism; a complete manual of the best newspaper methods*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912
52. Fowler, Nathaniel C., *The handbook of journalism; all about newspaper work*, New York: Sully and Kleinteich, 1913
53. "The Nose for News", *The Chattanooga News*, 1913-03-20
54. "Have You the 'Nose for News?'," *The Sacramento Star*, 1913-04-13

55. "175 mile speech heard by crowd in M. U. auditorium," *The Evening Missourian*, 1914-05-20
56. Glass, Dudley, *Writing for the press*, Atlanta: Webb and Vary, 1915
57. "The Nose for News," *The Sun*, 1915-10-13
58. "An interesting contributor," *The Time-Tribune* (Scranton, Pennsylvania), 1915-10-14
59. Seitz, Don Carlos, *Training for the newspaper trade*, Philadelphia, London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1916
60. Lee, James Melvin, *Opportunities in the newspaper business*, New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1919
61. Sinclair, Upton, *The brass check, a study of American journalism*, Pasadena: The author, 1920
62. "Nose for news is scouted as mythical freak," *The Journal and Tribune* (Knoxville, Tennessee), 1921-11-23
63. Talcott, William, *The newspaperman*, New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1922
64. "A nose for news," *The Mt Sterling Advocate*, 1922-08-22
65. Rolt-Wheeler, Francis, *The news-hunters*, Boston: Lothroop, Lee & Shepard Co, 1926
66. "Follow Your Nose for News Is Advice for Student Writer," *The Oklahoma News*, 1936-12-17
67. "A nose for news — and a stomach for whiskey," *Daily News* (New York), 1940-05-09
68. "The junior reporter club," *The Evening Standard* (Uniontown, Pennsylvania), 1943-05-05
69. Mansfield, F. J., *The Complete Journalist*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman And Sons, Limited, 1944
70. "If you aren't born with a nose for news, you won't get one," *The Gazette* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa), 1947-05-23
71. Campbell, Laurence and Wolseley, Roland, *News Men At Work*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949
72. "Phone in Those News Tips!," *Desert News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 1949-04-08
73. National Association of Journalism Directors, *A course of study in high school journalism,* Osseo, Minn.: Osseo Press, 1953
74. "MAHONEY — 'As I See It'," *Alabama Journal*, 1957-11-19
75. Berry, Thomas Elliott, *Journalism today, its development and practical applications*, Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1958
76. "Machines To Replace Nose For News?," *The Orlando Sentinel*, 1961-06-08

77. "WGAL Newsman Pat Bange Developed A 'Nose For News'," *Sunday News* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania), 1967-02-12
78. "Being Nosey Asset To Reporter," *Petaluma Argus-Courier*, 1969-07-22
79. "There's a new breed," The Gazette (Montreal, Canada), 1969-09-25
80. Solomon, Louis, *America goes to press*, New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1970
81. "How is your nose for news?," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 1978-12-18
82. Line, W. C., *News writing for non-professionals*, Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979
83. Pawlick, Thomas, *Exploring careers in journalism*, New York: R. Rosen Press, 1981
84. Presson, Hazel, *The student journalist and 21 keys to news reporting*, New York: R. Rosen Press, 1982
85. Adams, Julian, *Press Time*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985
86. "Sniff Survey Is a Gas, Mainly," *Times-Press-Recorder* (Arroyo Grande, California), 1986-10-10
87. "View from Aguanga," *The Californian*, 1987-07-02
88. York, Ivor, Basic TV reporting, Oxford: Focal Press, 1997
89. Mulligan, Joseph F. and Kevin T. Mulligan, *The Mulligan guide to sports journalism careers*, Lincolnwood, IL.: VGM Career Horizons, 1999
90. Fedler, Fred, *Lessons from the past*, Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000
91. Parks, Peggy, *The news media*, San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000
92. Itule, Bruce D. and Anderson, Douglas A., *News writing and reporting for today's media*, Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003
93. Rosenauer, Kenneth Lee, *Storycrafting : a process approach to writing news*, Ames, IA : Blackwell Pub, 2004
94. Ross, Ron and Cormier, Susan Carson, *Handbook for Citizen Journalists*, Denver: National Association of Citizen Journalists, 2010

**Juliette De Maeyer:** Department of Communication, University of Montreal (Canada)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6482-5365
juliette.de.maeyer@umontreal.ca; https://juliettedm.wordpress.com/
Juliette De Maeyer is an Associate Professor at the Department of Communication, University of Montreal (Canada). She studies the intersection of journalism and technology, with a particular interest for the materiality of newsmaking and for historical approaches. Her work was published in scholarly journals such as *Communication Theory*, *New Media and Society* and *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, as well as in *The Atlantic* and *The Nieman Lab*.

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News" – *peer-reviewed*
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11178

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# Making Peace with Metrics: Relational Work in Online News Production

Angèle Christin[*] Caitlin Petre[†]

Submitted: June 17, 2020 – Accepted: August 23, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

How do workers make peace with performance metrics that threaten their professional values? Drawing on Viviana Zelizer's concepts of relational work and "good matches," we focus on the case of online news production and analyze efforts to align audience metrics with journalistic values. Whereas existing research on web metrics tends to frame editorial production and audience data as "hostile worlds" of professional and market forces that cannot be reconciled, we show that journalists rely on relational work to make metrics acceptable within organizations. Drawing on ethnographic material, we identify five key relational strategies: moral boundary-drawing between "good" and "bad" metrics, strategic invocation of "best-case scenarios," domestication through bespoke metrics, reframing metrics as democratic feedback, and justifying metrics as organizational subsidies. We then turn to cases of failure and document a process that we call overspelling, which can coincide with organizational breakdown. We conclude by discussing the concept of "failed matches" and the indirect relationship between metrics and markets in online news production.

**Keywords**: Journalism; metrics; relational work; Zelizer; matching.

* Department of Communication, Stanford University (United States); angelec@stanford.edu; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7437-2013

† School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University, Brunswick, NJ (United States); https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7846-9659

## 1 Introduction[1]

In recent decades, economic sociologists have shifted focus from a structural definition of "the economy" primarily centered on markets, firms, and networks, to more cultural approaches analyzing the multiple meaning-making and evaluative activities involved whenever economic transactions take place. A growing literature, sometimes labeled the "(e)valuation perspective" (Lamont, 2012; Stark, 2009), examines the conflicts and negotiations that take place between economic calculations of "value" and other — artistic, moral, intimate, etc. — definitions of "values." Of particular interest in this vein is Viviana Zelizer's approach (Zelizer, 1994, 1997, 2007, 2010), which challenges previous scholarship that conceptualized the realms of economic and intimate transactions as incommensurable "hostile worlds." Instead, Zelizer argues that social actors engage in complex forms of relational work to establish "viable matches" between monetary transactions and social relations.

In this article, we draw on the Zelizerian framework and the (e)valuation perspective to analyze a different topic: contemporary news production, and specifically the question of how web journalists make sense of — and make peace with — traffic metrics. Journalists are now exposed to copious quantitative data about the preferences and behavior of online readers (Anderson, 2011a; Christin, 2020; Petre, 2015). In the early stages of the adoption of web analytics software programs, many journalists and experts sounded dire warnings about the potential of audience metrics to diminish news quality (e.g., Carr, 2014; Fischer, 2014; Herrman, 2012; Shire, 2014). Yet such concerns have grown more muted in recent years, as metrics have become more solidly institutionalized and taken-for-granted in newsrooms. We argue that Zelizer's framework — in particular her concepts of relational work and "matching" — provide a helpful lens to understand how and why such a shift took place.

Drawing on ethnographic material and secondary literature gathered from a range of web newsrooms between 2011 and 2020, we examine how journalists sought to reconcile audience metrics with their professional values and editorial priorities. We identify five main relational strategies — moral boundary-drawing, strategic invocation, domestication, reframing metrics as democratic feedback, and justifying metrics as organizational subsidies — through which journalists aimed to make peace with metrics. In so doing, they sought to transition from a "hostile worlds" perspective, in which metrics and journalistic professionalism were seen as fundamentally incompatible, to "good matches" in which tensions between journalism's civic and commercial value were perceived to be neutralized. Yet we also find that sometimes "bad matches" prevailed, in which disagreements arose within news organizations about what metrics signified. Often, such cases took the form of what we call an "overspelling" of metrics, in which the connection between metrics and financial revenue was made too explicit, typically by managers. We argue that managerial failure to create relational matches between metrics and journalistic values can lead to low newsroom morale, resistance, and in extreme cases, organizational collapse. These failed instances raise important questions about the structural determinants of "good" versus "bad" matches in organizational settings.

By putting the evaluation framework to work on the case of journalism, we offer a novel perspective on the evolution of the field of online news with respect to metrics. We conclude by emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary theorization at the crossroads between economic sociology, evaluation, and algorithmic technologies of quantification.

---

1. The two authors contributed equally and are listed alphabetically.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11178

## 2 From Markets to Metrics

We begin this analysis by introducing the Zelizerian framework in economic sociology and delineating how it can shed light on the concrete effects of audience metrics in web newsrooms. Specifically, we argue that bringing the evaluation perspective to the question of technologies of quantification, in the case of online news and beyond, opens several new avenues of research, which we turn to in the rest of the article.

### 2.1 Moralized Markets and the Zelizerian Perspective in Economic Sociology

Over recent decades, the subfield of economic sociology has witnessed several important developments. First, against the rhetoric of individual rationality and market efficiency that shapes economics as a discipline, economic sociologists have revived the Polanyian idea that economic activities are "embedded" within social structures, most notably social networks and organizational forms (DiMaggio & Louch, 1998; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Granovetter, 1995). Second, several frameworks have emerged that focus on the moral and cultural foundations of economic activities. These approaches, sometimes grouped together as the "(e)valuation perspective" (Lamont, 2012), pay closer attention not only to the structural and social determinants of economic exchanges but also to the complex repertoires and modes of evaluation mobilized to make them meaningful and acceptable for participants (Beckert & Aspers, 2011; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Stark, 2009; Vatin, 2009).

Of particular interest in this context is the work of economic sociologist Viviana Zelizer (1994, 1996, 1997, 2007, 2010). Through in-depth historical analyses of a wide range of cases involving economic transactions — from the transformation of child insurance in the late nineteenth century to the study of contemporary court cases involving intimate relationships and monetary exchanges — Zelizer makes several important contributions to our understanding of the moral foundations of market processes (Ossandón & Zelizer, 2019). Against existing accounts (both Marxist and neoclassical) that describe market activities and social connections as "hostile worlds" that cannot and should not be mixed, Zelizer shows that economic activities are not merely "embedded" within social structures: instead, these activities are themselves profoundly social, cultural, and moral. To make sense of these dynamics, Zelizer introduces the concept of "relational work," through which she analyzes social actors' cultural and moral efforts to create "good matches" between existing economic transactions and social relations. According to Zelizer,

> In all economic action (...) people engage in the process of differentiating meaningful social relations. For each distinct category of social relations, people erect a boundary, mark the boundary by means of names and practices, establish a set of distinctive understandings that operate within that boundary, designate certain sorts of economic transactions as appropriate for the relation, bar other transactions as inappropriate, and adopt certain media for reckoning and facilitating economic transactions within the relation. I call that process relational work (Zelizer, 2012, p. 145).

A particularly salient type of relational work is "earmarking," the process through which people make fine-grained distinctions between different origins and uses of money depending on the social interactions and settings they are tied to. For instance, Zelizer shows how money coming from women's wages is often framed as "pocket money" in domestic exchanges (Zelizer,

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11178

1994); she also analyzes other cases ranging from bribes to wedding donations where special "monies" are carefully earmarked and distinguished from other sums that are not endowed with the same meanings.

The Zelizerian framework has been implemented in a variety of empirical cases involving market exchanges and social connections (Bandelj, 2020), including healthcare (Reich, 2012, 2014), organ donation (Healy, 2010), reproductive goods (Almeling, 2007), the fashion industry (Mears, 2011a & 2011b), and everyday economic transactions (Wherry et al., 2019). Based on this literature, we identify two areas for further research. First, most existing studies focus on "good matches," analyzing how people and organizations successfully connect monetary transactions and social relations through relational work. Fewer instances of research explore "bad matches," or cases where such relational efforts fail or are absent (Fourcade, 2012; Reich, 2014, p. 10; Bandelj 2020, p. 266).

A second set of questions regards the domain of application of the Zelizerian perspective. So far, Zelizer's relational approach has primarily been applied to cases involving explicit monetary transactions: there has been little research about non-monetary phenomena. With few exceptions (Fourcade & Kluttz, 2020; Kiviat, 2019), scholars have not relied on the evaluation framework to analyze how people and institutions make sense of digital technologies of quantification. Yet a growing number of market and monetary exchanges are now mediated through metrics, algorithms, and analytics of all sorts, often grouped under the umbrella term of "big data" (boyd & Crawford, 2012). More broadly, one could argue that money is only *one* instantiation — admittedly an important one — of the broader category of metrics and numbers (Espeland & Stevens, 1998). What can we gain by applying the Zelizerian framework to the case of online metrics? And what can this tell us about the relational efforts that take place to render digital technologies of quantification acceptable? We explore this question by focusing on the case of audience analytics in web newsrooms.

### 2.2 Metrics in Web Newsrooms

As journalism commercialized in the early twentieth century, journalists' professionalization project increasingly centered on the establishment of structural and symbolic divisions in news organizations between the "hostile worlds" of commercialism, on the one hand, and journalistic professionalism, on the other (Salcetti, 1995). In 1904, Joseph Pulitzer drew a clear division between the business and professional sides of news:

> Few men in the business office of a newspaper know anything about the principles of journalism… There is an obvious difference between a business and a profession. An editor, an editorial writer or a correspondent is not in business. Nor is even a capable reporter. These men are already in a profession, though they may not admit it or even realize it… The man in the counting-room of a newspaper is in the Newspaper business. He concentrates his brain (quite legitimately) upon the commercial aspects of things, upon the margin of profit, upon the reduction of expenses, upon buying white paper and selling it printed — that is business. But a man who has the advantage, honor and pleasure of addressing the public every day as a writer or thinker is a professional man (pp. 656–657).

Pulitzer's framing of the differentiation between the newspaper employees in the "counting-room" and those in the newsroom has proved remarkably durable, both over time and across news organizations that are otherwise quite distinct from one another. The most familiar contemporary manifestation of the commercialism/professionalism division is the (sometimes literal) "wall" that is meant to separate the business and editorial sides of newspapers — e.g., newsroom staff at the *Chicago Tribune* famously took different elevators from their business-side counterparts (Merritt, 2005).

Journalists have also reinforced the division through their discursive practices, perhaps most notably by evincing a profound lack of interest in their audiences. Classical studies of print newsrooms documented how journalists ignored the reports of marketing departments and the feedback of their readers, dismissing most letters to the editor as "insane" (Darnton, 1975; Gans, 1979; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002; though see Nadler 2016). Instead, they placed far greater weight on the opinions of their colleagues and editorial supervisors, who were thought to have an understanding of journalistic professionalism that, unlike market research on audience demographics and preferences, was uncontaminated by the concerns of the business office (Gans, 1979).

Yet as news production and consumption largely moved online over the past three decades, the relationship between journalists and their audiences has evolved (Boczkowski, 2005). In contrast to their print-era counterparts, web newsrooms became increasingly saturated with flows of data about the behavior of their online audiences (Anderson, 2011a; Napoli, 2011; Usher, 2013). Often called "audience metrics" or "web analytics," audience data in web newsrooms began with relatively basic server metrics — most notably pageviews — before becoming increasingly complex as the demand and market for web analytics grew. Throughout the 2010s, web newsrooms built or licensed sophisticated software programs and analytics dashboards providing a range of fine-grained quantitative information, often in real-time, about online readers. The data provided by these tools varies, but typically includes pageviews and unique visitors, social media metrics, sources of traffic, time engaged, geolocation of readers, pinned tweets and posts, as well as comparison with historical data (Christin, 2018 & 2020; Petre, 2015 & 2018).

Audience metrics are hardly the only way in which commercial considerations have "breached" the wall between the business and editorial sides of contemporary news organizations — for instance, the rise of native advertising prompted similar worries (Carlson, 2015; see also Coddington, 2015). And yet, because colorful, dynamic analytics dashboards are often displayed on large flatscreen monitors throughout newsrooms, audience metrics are perhaps the most *vivid* representation of the encroachment of commercial considerations into the domain of journalistic professionalism. Nor could journalists simply ignore audience data as their predecessors had done — as news organizations were plunged into a revenue crisis in the 2000s, journalists faced intensifying pressure to increase advertising and digital subscription revenue by boosting traffic to their sites.

As these technologies of quantification multiplied in web newsrooms in the United States and elsewhere, the literature documenting their uses and effects in news production also grew. Existing studies analyze the conflicted feelings that journalists have with respect to web metrics; the disciplining aspect of this data, as well as the contests for popularity that they can create in web newsrooms; how these metrics are increasingly used to allocate scarce resources and bonuses to staff writers in a competitive media landscape; the ethical and editorial considerations that go into "following the metrics" as a guide for news production; as well as the distinct uses and interpretations of metrics depending on the team, newsroom, and national setting under consideration (See, e.g., Anderson, 2011a & 2011b; Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Bunce, 2019; Christin, 2018 & 2020; Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Petre, 2015 & 2018; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015; Usher, 2013).

From these studies also emerges an interesting shift over time. Early scholarship on newsroom analytics found that journalists largely perceived audience metrics and journalistic professionalism as hostile worlds. In interviews and ethnographic work from the period when metrics were first introduced, reporters and editors alike were deeply skeptical and critical of metrics because of their perceived connections to market forces and "clickbait" content (Anderson, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). However, later studies documented a growing acceptance of metrics among journalists and editors (Blanchett Neheli, 2018; Hanusch, 2017; Zamith, 2018). Over the course of the 2010s, it appears that metrics became a routinized tool for news production across the globe (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Bunce, 2019; Nelson & Tandoc, 2019). Specifically, journalistic concerns about the impact of metrics on journalism have grown somewhat more muted, as metrics have become more solidly institutionalized and taken-for-granted in newsrooms.

The existing literature tells us relatively little about the concrete strategies that editors and journalists have implemented to reconcile their editorial ambitions and the economic constraints that come with operating in a highly competitive market, which journalists typically experience through the pressure of maximizing traffic numbers. In using the concepts of relational work and "good matches" to explain how journalists seek to bridge the gap between metrics and journalistic professionalism, this article builds on our past work, which has shown that journalists engage in meaning-making efforts to ease conflicts between editorial and click- based modes of evaluation (Christin, 2020), and that analytics companies purposely build ambiguity into their tools to facilitate this meaning-making process, as a means to gain journalists' trust and compliance (Petre, 2018).

## 3 Relational Processes and Successful Matches

This section explores the different kinds of relational processes that editors and journalists implement in order to reconcile the "hostile worlds" of journalistic professionalism and audience metrics maximization. We identify five main types of relational strategies: establishing moral boundaries between "good" and "bad" metrics; the strategic invocation of "best-case scenarios" involving high traffic numbers *and* editorial quality; domestication through bespoke technologies; reframing metrics as democratic feedback; and justifying high traffic metrics as organizational subsidies.

Before introducing these four relational strategies, we provide a brief overview of our data and methods. This analysis relies primarily on two ethnographic studies, conducted independently, of web newsrooms and their uses of web analytics between 2011 and 2015. Christin conducted 101 interviews with journalists, editors, community managers, and data specialists, as well as more than 500 hours of ethnographic observations in a total of eight web newsrooms located in New York and Paris (which included legacy news organizations as well as stand-alone news websites and web magazines). Petre conducted 76 interviews and ethnographic observation at three sites over a period of four years: Chartbeat, a web analytics company that specializes in making metrics tools for editorial use; *The New York Times*; and Gawker Media, then an independent, online-only media company that owned a network of popular blogs. In addition, the two authors monitored the industry and journalistic literature (including social media posts, trade publications, and industry research reports) on audience metrics and their uses in newsrooms from 2011 to 2020 — a pivotal period in the adoption of web analytics in online news production. For the purpose of this analysis, the authors reexamined their ethnographic material and secondary data, drawing on abductive methods (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Based on this data, we identify five key relational processes that editors and journalists have deployed in order to render audience metrics acceptable and meaningful within web newsrooms. All but one of these five relational strategies involved efforts to establish symbolic distance between audience data and economic pressure, instead seeking to reposition (some) metrics as being highly compatible with journalistic professionalism. The fifth strategy, which justified focusing on traffic metrics because this could serve as a form of organizational subsidy, took a different tack. Rather than reframing metrics as non-market signals, this strategy acknowledged the connection between metrics and commercialism, yet normatively justified it using the language of journalistic professionalism. Each of these strategies represents a facet of what Zelizer identifies as "relational work," in the sense that editors and journalists worked hard to match metrics with specific sets of meanings and social relations.

### 3.1 Drawing Moral Boundaries Between Good and Bad Metrics

As mentioned above, the early period of metrics' introduction into newsrooms was marked by the notion that that traffic data and high-quality journalism were necessarily at odds — or, to borrow Zelizer's term, that they represented the "hostile worlds" of economic profit and journalistic professionalism. For example, David Carr (2014), the late *New York Times* media columnist, wrote that the growing prevalence of metrics in newsrooms was leading to the proliferation of informational "empty calories" like slideshows, quizzes, and listicles, concluding that "journalism's status as a profession is up for grabs." Contributing to this perception was the fact that one of the first metrics to take root in newsrooms, pageviews (sometimes referred to as "clicks"), had originated in the decisively profit-oriented field of online advertising. This cemented the discursive and conceptual connection between metrics and the profane world of money.

Relational work was thus needed to break the association between traffic data and professional degradation. Journalists, editors, and technology specialists achieved this goal by drawing clear moral and symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) between acceptable and unacceptable metrics. More precisely, actors in the field actively distinguished between "good" and "bad" metrics and their related uses. For instance, Chartbeat, a third-party analytics company launched in 2009, established such boundaries (and bolstered its business in the process) by making the case that *its* metrics were compatible with journalistic professionalism, while other metrics were not. Chartbeat's real-time analytics dashboard pointedly omitted pageviews; instead, it was centered around what the company called "engagement metrics," such as the amount of time audiences spent reading a particular article and the percentage of readers who read multiple articles on a news site (Petre, 2018). As Tony Haile (2014), Chartbeat's erstwhile CEO, put it in an article he wrote for TIME magazine, reorienting the news industry's focus away from measuring clicks and toward measuring readers' engagement would bring about a new "attention web" where "quality makes money." For journalists who saw metrics as an inevitable feature of the digital newsroom but fretted about their impact on journalistic content, the promise of engagement or attention metrics held a special appeal. Indeed, Chartbeat's self-branding around "engagement metrics" paid off handsomely for the startup, which gained hundreds news industry clients and tripled its revenue between 2014 and 2017 (Saroff, 2017).

This type of boundary-drawing was echoed within web newsrooms, where journalists and editors also established moral distinctions between different kinds of metrics. Most of them explained that pageviews and unique visitors were "dumb" metrics, whereas they saw other metrics as more meaningful. For instance, Upworthy, a digital media company whose mission was to spread "important" or uplifting content on social media, announced in 2014 a bespoke metric called "attention minutes": "We think adding attention minutes to the arsenal of metrics that publishers look at will accelerate the drive toward quality." Along similar lines, journalists we interviewed explained that they cared about the number of "retweets" that they got on Twitter, mentioning that Twitter was a "useful addition to their lives" and that "it meant a lot" whenever prestigious journalists in other newsrooms retweeted their articles, whereas they did not care much about the number of pageviews that their article attracted. Editors often reinforced this view by downplaying the meaningfulness of pageviews, explaining that readers and Facebook users often had "shitty" taste, but assigning deeper meaning to alternative measures, such as Twitter metrics and "most emailed" metrics.

Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this tendency to draw boundaries between "good" and "bad" metrics is the trend towards so-called "impact metrics," which aim to apply the tracking affordances of digital content to measure outcomes more central to journalistic professionalism and journalists' civic mission. With a grant from the Columbia Journalism School, journalist-developers Michael Keller and Brian Abelson (2015) created a tool called "Newslynx," which was designed to aid in "tracking, categorizing, and assessing indicators of impact aside from audience reach," such as legislative reforms or community actions that might result from news stories. In a similar vein, journalism scholars have examined efforts by foundation-funded news organizations to track their impact and contributions to democracy (Konieczna & Powers, 2017; see also Tofel, 2013). While such efforts are commendable, it is worth noting that these alternative regimes of measurement have mainly been rolled out at nonprofit newsrooms that are, at least to some extent, shielded from the harsh realities of the commercial publishing market by foundation or university funding (but see Benson, 2017). This seems to indicate that, boundary-drawing efforts notwithstanding, most audience metrics *do* still retain a powerful tie to economic pressures.

The creation of moral boundaries between "good" and "bad" metrics evokes Zelizer's "relational work" in the sense that, like people making fine-grained distinctions between appropriate and less-appropriate forms of monetary transactions depending on the context (distinguishing for instance between cash and check whenever they pay a doctor), journalists and editors seek to carefully distinguish between metrics that are or are not appropriate to assess journalistic quality. In such a framework, "clicks" are seen as an inadequate metric, whereas time engaged, concurrent visitors, or impact metrics are described as more valuable.

### 3.2 Strategic Invocation of "Best-Case Scenarios"

In line with the disregard of editors for pageviews and the "shitty" taste of the audience, scholars have found evidence of a persistent gap between reader interest, as measured by traditional traffic metrics, and journalists' judgments of newsworthiness, as measured by the placement of stories on news websites (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). This misalignment was an early driver of wariness toward metrics, as some journalists, particularly at more traditional legacy publications, feared that the take-up of metrics would force them to produce content about cats, celebrities, and other purportedly vapid topics.

To counter this narrative, proponents of newsroom analytics relied on a second relational strategy to make metrics acceptable within news organizations: in both internal and external communications, they highlighted instances of "best-case scenarios," where stories that met the traditional journalistic criteria for importance and newsworthiness *also* attracted high traffic. For instance, although the *Times* restricted reporters' access to metrics as a matter of newsroom policy for several years, editors would share select data points with reporters about stories they felt merited praise. A reporter who had worked extensively on a multi-story feature about the war in Afghanistan explained that her editor had gone out his way to show her traffic figures for the series: "[He] called me into his office and was like, 'Look how well this did!' " Similarly, at a New York web magazine, a managing editor explained:

> Hopefully everything we do is thoughtful. But long-form pieces can go places that a shorter piece can't. The most successful long-form piece we did was Emma's, she started covering that beat almost like a newspaper reporter would have, eventually she wrote a 10,000-word essay that then became a central element of her book. It was great for us: the readers were really interested in it, it was wildly successful in terms of traffic. That's the best-case scenario.

This kind of strategic invocation of carefully selected examples promoted the idea that metrics could actually reinforce the production of editorially ambitious journalism. Compare this with the comment of the homepage editor working for the same web magazine: "There are things that are enormously popular but that won't do for TAP 1 [the top of the website's homepage]. Like our advice column [a column that gives facetious advice about sex, relationships, and family life], it's very smart and fun, but it's not something that people need to read in order to become informed citizens of the world." The contrast between these two comments indicates that traffic numbers would take very different meanings and moral valence depending on the kinds of articles under consideration. In this kind of "best-case scenario," clicks were seen as meaningful because readers were truly "interested" in the long-form, highly researched story that Emma had put together. Whereas, in the case of the advice column, high traffic metrics were not seen as particularly meaningful: readers clicked because it was "fun" but these stories did not have enough editorial value to be promoted on top of the homepage.

In *The Social Meaning of Money*, Zelizer (1997) contests the idea that "a dollar is a dollar is a dollar," because people rely on "earmarking" and create different kinds of money for different relationships, situations, and contexts. For instance, people can distinguish between a gift and a bribe by adding a ribbon on a nicely written envelope. Similarly, this shows that a click does not necessarily equal another click: a pageview for one article can signify something entirely different than a pageview for another, even though the metric is the same. Thus, journalists and editors "earmarked" metrics in the same way that people can earmark money.

Interestingly, the "best-case scenarios" invoked above, in which articles achieve both high traffic *and* brand-boosting prestige, have analogues in other fields of cultural production. In the fashion industry, for example, most models pursue either high-paying but "cheesy" commercial work in catalogues and showrooms, or low-paying, prestigious jobs in fashion magazines. Only a lucky few hit what Mears (2011b) calls the "occupational jackpot": lucrative and prestigious advertising campaigns for luxury fashion brands. In journalism, stories that are successful both in terms of economic capital and cultural capital are similarly rare. But editors tout these "jackpot" examples to assert that there is no inherent tension between traffic and editorial values.

### 3.3 Domestication Through Bespoke Technologies

The third relational strategy we identify is the domestication of metrics through in-house technologies. As noted above, third-party analytics tools like Chartbeat and Google Analytics have become fixtures in all manner of newsrooms around the world. But a select group of well-resourced news organizations with high cultural capital went a step further: in addition to subscribing to a range of third-party tools, they also tasked in-house teams with developing homegrown analytics products. For example, in 2012, the *Guardian* rolled out Ophan, its bespoke real-time analytics tool; the *Times* followed suit in 2016 with a tool called Stela.

Neither tool was unprecedented in terms of technological features: both display many of the metrics common to third-party tools, such as page views, social shares, and time spent reading. As one news article on Ophan noted, "It's a bit like Chartbeat or Parse.ly, or many other analytics platforms at its core" (Woods, 2015). Yet the fact that Ophan and Stela were created specifically by and for staffers at each news organization helped to domesticate metrics within these newsrooms, rendering them less threatening to journalists' professional self-understanding than otherwise similar third-party tools. Each tool was developed after an extended period of consultation and user-testing with journalists in the newsroom. This process served not only as a way to facilitate a journalist-friendly user-experience, but also to pre-empt the feelings of resentment and alienation that the implementation of metrics could provoke among writers.

For instance, the *Guardian* emphasized that all members of the team that built Ophan had editorial backgrounds, and none were data scientists (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). In a promotional post about the tool, the *Guardian*'s communications department wrote that all of Ophan's features were "tied to a genuine need in the newsroom," which ensured that the tool "offered a vision of how data could be integrated meaningfully into editorial action, supporting journalists and journalism rather than threatening it" (Guardian Comms, 2015). Explicitly contrasting Ophan to third-party analytics tools, the *Guardian* touted it as "a peerless example of disruptive technology emerging *from within* a legacy newsroom" [emphasis added]. For its part, Stela was designed not only to make metrics easier to digest for *Times* journalists, but also to "match the look and feel of the Times brand" by employing the paper's signature typeface (Wang, 2016).

For traditional news organizations seeking to develop a "culture of data" (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016), the symbolic potency of homegrown analytics tools helped to do the work of building social trust in metrics. Here we argue that the development of in-house analytics programs serves as a ritual strategy to reassure journalists that market forces in the guise of metrics have been "tamed" and adapted to fit the local newsroom culture, even though the actual dashboards provided by such bespoke technologies may not differ significantly from off-the- shelf tools.

Such a domestication process in turn is a form of relational work because of the carefully crafted meanings and forms of newsroom "buy-in" typically associated with in-house analytics. Here one could compare in-house metrics with the use of "special monies" or tokens in bounded social communities — for instance campuses, prisons, or churches. By relying on alternative monies that are not the legal tender, communities usually seek to control the meanings associated with commercial exchange (Zelizer, 1994). Similarly, by developing in-house analytics, newsrooms with clear organizational boundaries try to control the narrative of how metrics relate to professional norms among their employees.

### 3.4 Reframing Metrics as Democratic Feedback

The fourth relational strategy emphasizes the connection between audience metrics and the journalistic mission to serve a democratic public. In this reframing, metrics are a valuable, albeit imperfect, representation of that public's informational needs and desires. This line of argument points out that journalism is a non-insular profession — one that seeks, above all else, to communicate with an audience. This echoes earlier wishes publicized by peer-production advocates, who saw in the internet a unique opportunity to redefine the respective roles of writers and readers in the "networked public sphere" (Benkler, 2006). As journalism blogger Jay Rosen (2006) wrote: "The people formerly known as the audience are simply *the public* made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable. You should welcome that, media people." Journalism scholars have argued that this "heteronomy" of the journalistic field in turn may be its key characteristic (Schudson, 2005; see also Ananny, 2018): the press is often labelled the "fourth power" of democracies because it interacts with and informs a broadly defined public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). Such a perspective in turn complicates the connection between metrics and markets by adding a link between metrics and publics (Anderson, 2011a). As journalism scholar Nikki Usher (2010) argued: "If used properly, SEO and audience tracking make newsrooms more accountable to their readers without dictating bad content decisions — and it can help newsrooms focus on reader needs. What is a story if it is never read?"

Unsurprisingly, this democratic and public-driven framing was often invoked by web editors and journalists throughout the 2010s whenever they talked about audience metrics. Throughout our fieldnotes and interviews, journalists explained that they wanted their articles to be read. The discourses of top editors and managers in news organizations sometimes explicitly echoed these individual discourses. For instance, *The New York Times*'s 2014 internal "Innovation" report, which chronicled the paper's challenges adapting to the digital age and proposed a series of remedies, employed a similar framing (Benton, 2014). The report's authors — all of whom were *Times* staffers — acknowledged that the traditional "wall" between the advertising and editorial sides of the organizations should remain intact. Yet they argued that other groups of business-side staffers, such as those focused on metrics-driven "consumer insight," could productively work with *Times* journalists. Such collaborations would not threaten the *Times*'s journalism, the report contended, because the two groups had a "shared mission" of serving *Times* readers.

For news organizations, traffic numbers necessarily represent two things at once: market forces, obviously, since a website's number of unique visitors or pageviews correlates with advertising revenues and subscriptions, but also journalistic impact on a broadly defined public. To the extent that metrics can be framed as facilitating the fine-tuning of that communication, they are rendered more compatible with journalistic professionalism. This multi-faceted aspect of audience metrics clearly echoes Zelizer's argument, contra Simmel, that money is not a standardizing force but instead can take a variety of "social meanings" depending on the context (Zelizer, 1994). When journalists emphasize the democratic aspect of audience metrics, they make the symbolic complexity of metrics explicit, disconnecting them — temporarily — from purely commercial imperatives.

### 3.5 Justifying Metrics as Organizational Subsidies

All the strategies analyzed above seek to sever (or at least weaken) the perceived connection between metrics and market forces, instead positioning metrics as highly compatible with journalistic professionalism. Yet this argument was not always the easiest to make. Indeed, the lists of "most-viewed" and "most-shared" articles that became ubiquitous on news websites throughout the aughts showed unmistakably that there was a substantial "gap" between the type of content favored by audiences and that which journalists considered most newsworthy (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). Although there is some evidence to support the claim that prioritizing "good" metrics, such as engaged time, could bring these two categories of content into closer alignment, the gap persisted.

The fifth relational strategy we identify reflects this reality. While the other kinds of relational work all sought to downplay the tension between metrics and journalistic professionalism or even deny its existence, the fifth strategy instead *acknowledges* the tension and seeks to provide a normative justification for it. In this view, traffic metrics are professionally justifiable because they serve as organizational subsidies: the often frivolous content rewarded by most metrics can underwrite a site's production of the kind of news that journalists considered more serious and worthwhile. This was made clear by Jill Abramson, executive editor of the *Times* from 2011–2014: "In my years [as executive editor], I used to laugh that everything you agreed to in terms of lighter or more advertising-friendly content would be because we needed that advertising revenue to support the Baghdad Bureau" (Snyder, 2017). Similarly, AJ Daulerio (2012), then the editor of *Gawker.com*, launched an experiment: each day, a different *Gawker* writer would be the site's designated "traffic whore," whose sole job would be to "offer up the posts they feel would garner the most traffic." This rotating duty would then allow the rest of the staff to "spend time on more substantive stories they may have neglected" in their attempts to "hit some imaginary [traffic] quota." In these cases, editors and journalists presented metrics within a broader framework of cross-subsidization within the news organization: they argued that, by producing some quantity of low-quality editorial content attracting high traffic numbers, the websites would be able to "afford" high-quality editorial content that may not necessarily be popular online.

Of course, these cross-subsidization dynamics are not new in journalism. In fact, there are many historical precedents for the framing of popular content as a subsidy for more prestigious forms of journalism: the "bundling" of print newspapers meant that ads placed in some sections furnished the budget for less advertising-friendly ones such as international news. For instance, the *New York Times* launched its Home, Garden, and Living sections in the 1970s for expressly this purpose. A 2017 *Times* internal report drew on this historical parallel in arguing for an expansion of the paper's digital service journalism, which would include meditation guides and cooking tips:

> In all likelihood, we will need a modern version of the 1970s features expansion: devoting newsroom resources to new areas, primarily to attract subscribers and engage new readers (which in turn will attract advertisers). There would be nothing wrong or new about doing so. The success of the 1970s features strategy helped The Times afford great investigative journalism and foreign correspondents stationed around the world. The 1970s features sections also produced troves of wonderful journalism on their own (*The New York Times*, 2017).

By drawing a connection between the *Times*'s contemporary digital strategy and the Watergate era, widely considered a professional high point for U.S. journalism, the report's authors sought to reassure their colleagues: while digital formats and metrics were new, they did not need to be seen as threatening, because producing popular content as a subsidy for "important" content has been a long-established and professionally acceptable approach at the *Times*.

Such a justificatory move in turn is slightly different from most of the earmarking and relational strategies analyzed by Zelizer in the case of monetary transactions. Here, editors and journalists claim to take a "realist" (one could say cynical) approach, arguing that metrics clearly exemplify commercial pressures, and, relatedly, that journalism is a business. In Zelizer's vocabulary, such an approach could fall under the "nothing but markets" perspective, according to which all social relations involving monetary transactions are in fact exchanges on competitive markets (Zelizer, 2010). In this view, maximizing traffic numbers is a key — perhaps the only — solution for enabling news organizations to publish quality journalism online.

Thus far we have argued that, whereas the initial introduction of metrics into newsrooms provoked anxiety and skepticism insofar as the data represented a breach of the "wall" between the business and editorial sides of commercial news organizations (Coddington, 2015; Nelson & Tandoc, 2019), several relational strategies emerged throughout the 2010s to reconcile journalists with metrics. Analytics firms, news executives, and journalists performed relational work in an attempt to reframe metrics as compatible with journalistic professionalism. Yet such "good matches" between metrics and "quality" journalism often proved fragile. Over the past decade, several instances have arisen in which circuits broke down due to failed relational strategies or because relational work was absent altogether. In the next section we examine one such process, which we call overspelling, showing how it could lead to organizational breakdown.

## 4 Failure: The Consequences of Overspelling

The process that we analyze as "overspelling" occurred when the association between metrics and money went from being implicit to being explicit. In this respect, overspelling bore some resemblance to the organizational subsidy strategy discussed above, but with a crucial difference: in cases of overspelling, metrics were not normatively justified as facilitating the production of high-quality journalism. Instead, overspelling occurred when the profit-generating potential of journalists' activities was plainly spelled out and incentivized through metrics for its own sake. Overspelling could succeed in boosting traffic in the short-term, as reporters scrambled to meet traffic targets by any means necessary. But it could also backfire. Whereas successful matching strategies enabled journalists to incorporate metrics into their editorial work without injuring their self-conception as autonomous professionals, overspelling could contribute to low morale, staff defection, and, in extreme cases, complete organizational collapse. Here we examine two cases of overspelling: one in New York, the other in Paris.

### 4.1 Gawker Media

In 2019, the private equity firm Great Hill Partners purchased the Gizmodo Media Group (formerly Gawker Media) from Univision for an undisclosed sum and renamed it G/O Media. During its years as an independent media company, Gawker Media's founder and owner Nick Denton had been famously fixated on traffic, so the company's longtime editorial staffers were accustomed to having their job performance evaluated in part based on metrics. However, despite Gawker Media's reputation as heavily metrics-focused, editorial leaders at the company's websites had consistently engaged in relational work (including moral boundary-drawing and reframing traffic as an organizational subsidy) to establish matches between metrics and traditional conceptions of journalistic value.

By contrast, the executives installed by Great Hill Partners showed little interest in performing relational matching work. Rather than emphasizing "good" metrics like time spent reading,

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11178 

Jim Spanfeller, the Great Hill-appointed CEO, focused on pageviews, telling G/O Media's editorial leadership early in his tenure that he expected them to quadruple the metric (Greenwell, 2019). The tension came to a head when Great Hill leadership instructed *Deadspin*, G/O Media's site that focused mainly on sports but also covered politics and culture, to tone down its irreverent point of view and limit its coverage to traditional sports stories. These changes were recommended on the logic that they would make the site more broadly appealing and thus result in the kind of rapid traffic growth Great Hill Partners sought.

Several *Deadspin* editorial staffers chafed at the proposed changes in coverage and the new pageview growth target, seeing these demands as evidence that Great Hill Partners was looking for a "quick cash out" at the expense of the distinctive style they believed had made Gawker Media sites valuable to begin with, both financially and journalistically (Greenwell, 2019; Petchesky, 2019). In a post she wrote after submitting her resignation, Megan Greenwell (2019), *Deadspin*'s executive editor, wrote that Spanfeller "believed he could simply turn up the traffic (and thus turn a profit), as if adjusting a faucet, not by investing in quality journalism but by tricking people into clicking on more pages." Greenwell's replacement, Barry Petchesky, was quickly himself fired for resisting Great Hill's approach. In a *New York Times* op-ed, Petchesky leveled a similar critique: "The new owners come in, slash staff and costs and turn a once-proud publication into a content mill churning out bland and unimportant stories that no one wants or needs to read... Everything you liked about the web will be replaced with what the largest number of people like, or at least tolerate enough to click on and sit through three seconds of an autoplay ad" (Petchesky, 2019). Within days of Petchesky's firing, *Deadspin*'s entire editorial staff had quit the site in solidarity.

It is important to emphasize again that, as former Gawker Media staffers, *Deadspin*'s writers and editors were not hostile to the idea of using metrics to inform editorial decision-making. In fact, both Greenwell and Petchesky pointed out that *Deadspin* covered topics that were not strictly sports-related in part *because* these stories performed well in terms of traffic. But Great Hill Partners made the relationship between content and traffic seem too explicitly transactional. In dispensing with relational strategies that had made it possible for writers to reconcile their professional identities with traffic-boosting activities, the firm alienated the editorial staff. In an ironic turn of events, *Deadspin*'s traffic plummeted soon after the staff's departure, providing a vivid illustration of how attempts to boost traffic without performing relational work can backfire spectacularly.

### 4.2 LaPlace

In Paris, a web magazine we call *LaPlace* (the name was anonymized) started in 2007 as an independent website and was bought in 2011 by a larger media group. Responding to the repeated requests from the new parent company to attract more traffic, *LaPlace*'s top editors sent an email to the staff, entitled "the battle for the audience," in December 2012. In it, they asked staff writers to do their part in bringing more traffic to the website:

> What is at stake today is the role of *LaPlace* as an independent site, in the context of a brutal acceleration of the commercial crisis that touches all the media. (...) We need to realize that growing our audience is vital in this context of crisis. Reaching this goal depends on the behavior and mobilization of each and every one of us (...). Many recent examples show that we have much to gain from being more reactive

> and covering hot news right when it occurs. This is important for the editorial line of the website and in order to win the battle for the audience.[2]

A follow-up email specified that writers would be explicitly evaluated based on traffic from then on:

> You will all be scheduled for individual meetings. We will talk about our goals and see where we stand. (...) The programmers are working on a program that we will use to track these objectives. Every month, the machine (*sic*) will send you a summary of your publications, as well as the total number of articles on the website. The email will also include figures about the evolution of the number of visitors.

Unsurprisingly, *LaPlace*'s staff reacted negatively to these expectations. The staffers drafted a collective email to the management, in which they criticized the top editors' "obsession" with "quantitative goals":

> We received your email entitled "The battle for the audience." We want to be part of this battle. Our work, our team, and the survival of our site depend on it. But your note distressed and surprised us. (...) We refuse to follow quantitative goals regarding our production (number of posts, number of bloggers, etc.). If we have to define goals, we want to talk about it with you and define together the relevant criteria and some realistic objectives. We ask you not to send individual emails with quantitative measurements of each journalist's production. (...) We need to know your editorial goals in qualitative and not quantitative terms for 2013. (...) We have concrete propositions at the editorial level and also regarding traffic numbers. We are available to discuss them with you. We believe that the editorial risk is too high right now. We are being evaluated based on clicks, which mirrors a loss of identity (of the website). This obsession (with metrics) is not only demoralizing; it is also counterproductive.

The staff writers countered with a different picture of *LaPlace*'s role. As they wrote in their response, "*LaPlace* (is) an independent website which invents, innovates, creates, entices, amuses, instructs, inspires, refuses to comply, and bears responsibility for its choices. We need a young, innovative, independent, and different media, now more than ever." Following this conflict between the management and the journalists, most of the staffers left the publication. The newsroom, which had fifteen full-time journalists in 2014, only had four full-time staffers in 2018. Over time, it became a simple "vertical" in the website of its parent company.

In both of these cases, managers engaged in what we call "overspelling." That is, they made explicit the connection between metrics and market pressures when incentivizing journalists to maximize traffic numbers in their daily output. But at both *Deadspin* and *LaPlace*, the strategy backfired, as journalists reacted against this overt commercial assessment of their editorial work. At *Deadspin*, the new managers bluntly and abruptly implemented the new pay-for-performance policy, exhibiting a striking disregard for how the change would be interpreted and accepted by the editorial team. In this case, it appears that the failed match was really a missing one, in the sense that there was no attempt at relational work on the part of the managers to make metrics seem less directly connected to market pressures. The stark and sudden

2. The translation from French is ours.

nature of the change provoked a strong reaction on the part of the staffers, who resigned en masse.

In contrast, at *LaPlace*, the "battle for the audience" email can be read as a discursive attempt to maintain continuity rather than announcing itself as a dramatic break with the organization's past. The email was sent by the site's original founders, who remained in the newsroom as editor-in-chief and president after the sale. In the ensuing backlash, they claimed — perhaps disingenuously — that the email was only intended to make explicit informal norms that already existed in the newsroom. Thus, in this case, there was at least a nominal *effort* towards relational work, but one that failed to forestall newsroom dissent. These two examples give a sense of what "bad matches" look like, and how they can take a variety of forms (Bandelj, 2020, p. 263–265).

## 5 Discussion

Existing work on quantification often emphasizes the clear meanings and lack of ambiguity of numbers, which plays an important role in their diffusion over time. Numbers travel well through time and space, scholars explain, because they typically erase complex contextual features that are hard to translate (Espeland & Stevens, 1998). In the words of historian Sarah Igo, numbers tend to carry a great deal of weight because they are "spare, clear, and direct" (Igo, 2008, p. 247).

Yet our findings complicate the idea that numbers are always "spare, clear, and direct" — or at least, that their meanings are always interpreted that way. We argue that the connection between metrics and market forces is not a mechanical one. This is particularly clear in the case of web newsrooms, where metrics have an ambiguous relationship with market pressures. On the one hand, traffic numbers obviously correlate with economic revenues in a competitive online news market where monetization comes from advertising (itself based on traffic) and, for paywalled sites, subscriptions. Individual journalists in turn depend on the financial well-being of their organizations to ensure their career and monetary prospects. On the other hand, audience metrics are contested symbolic objects, in the sense that they also relate to the public mission of journalism, which is to share content with a broadly defined public.

Given this structural ambiguity of audience data, we find that many relational strategies used in web newsrooms to make peace with metrics work by establishing an added distance and playing up the indirectness of the relationship between metrics and market pressure. Put another way, the relational strategies we identify seek to bring metrics closer to the side of editorial values — or somewhere else altogether. First, when relying on moral boundaries between "good" and "bad" metrics, editors and journalists emphasized that "good" metrics such as time engaged were not as closely related to economic incentives as "bad" metrics such as pageviews. Second, the strategic invocation of "best-case scenarios" involving high traffic and high editorial value implicitly criticized a "clicks for clicks' sake" approach, arguing instead that metrics could only be meaningful when they correlated with highly newsworthy content. Third, prestigious publications like the *Times* and the *Guardian* domesticated analytics by developing in-house tools that carried the imprimatur of the editorial brand. Fourth, reframing metrics as democratic feedback further obfuscated the connection between metrics and market pressures, since editors and journalists explicitly relied on non-market metaphors (e.g., describing metrics as a signal of relevance in the public sphere) to put in place an added layer between metrics and markets.

By contrast, the last two strategies we analyzed maintained a strong connection between metrics and economic pressure. High audience metrics were sometimes justified as a form of organizational subsidy enabling the production of high-quality journalism. In such cases, editors emphasized the economic value of metrics but put it at the service of professional values — namely, "paying" for ambitious editorial projects. Similarly, the cases of overspelling we discussed explicitly highlighted the relationship between metrics and economic pressure. Both G/O Media and *LaPlace* had recently been acquired by larger companies, which were counting on high and rapidly growing traffic numbers from their new acquisitions. The managers of the parent companies did not have any strong emotional attachment to the editorial project and journalistic team of the two publications; they were also larger companies, with a diverse portfolio, and probably had little attention and resources to devote to the relatively small editorial teams of *Deadspin* and *LaPlace*. At *Deadspin*, virtually no effort was made to package and align their message to make it fit the editorial culture of the newsroom and organizational collapse resulted; at *LaPlace*, the original founders' "Battle for the Audience" email vaguely attempted to convey continuity under the site's new owners, but ultimately failed to do so. What occurred at *Deadspin* and *LaPlace* highlights the importance of relational strategies that match metrics with conceptions of journalistic integrity in a way that is persuasive to rank-and-file newsroom staffers: when such strategies are absent or when they fail, the consequence can be organizational implosion — and with it, dramatically lower traffic.

The different relational strategies analyzed above also raise the question of which groups rely on relational work within news organizations. As we mentioned above, Zelizer primarily examined cases of relational work taking place within close interconnected social circles (families, intimate partners, college students, and so on). Interestingly, within news organizations, we found that relational work was hierarchically stratified: editors and top managers were primarily in charge of the relational efforts that were needed to make audience metrics acceptable and non-threatening to journalists and staff writers. This specific role of editors as "bridges" between commercial and editorial concerns in turn stems from the early structure of news organizations in the United States, specifically the creation of a "wall" between editorial and marketing departments that only top editors are allowed to cross (Gans, 1979).

More broadly, one can ask about the generalizability of the relational strategies we identified. As discussed in the literature review, the Zelizerian framework focuses primarily on monetary transactions. Money does not have the same indirectness as audience metrics: money necessarily relates to economic transactions. Yet when people rely instead on earmarking, bringing "special monies" closer to the social end of the spectrum, they create the same kinds of layers and indirectness identified here (Zelizer, 1994). Does relational work systematically end up distancing metrics (including money) from the economic realm? Does its success always depend on how much distance can be created between metrics and markets? Future research should explore these questions by studying the relational strategies surrounding other types of metrics, online and offline, from fitness tracking metrics to financial indicators and productivity rankings.

## 6 Conclusion

Drawing on Viviana Zelizer's framework, this article analyzed how web editors and journalists made peace with audience metrics over the course of the 2010s. We identified five types of relational strategies that were used across web newsrooms in the United States and France: the creation of moral boundaries between "good" and "bad" metrics; the strategic invocation of metrics through "best-case scenarios" involving high traffic numbers that aligned with editorial value; the domestication of analytics through the construction of in-house technological tools; the reframing of metrics as democratic feedback; and the justification of traffic metrics as organizational subsidies. We showed that these relational processes served either to *obscure* the connection between metrics and money (as in the case of delineation and domestication), or to *justify* it (as with framing the pursuit of online traffic as subsidizing high-quality content). When effective, this relational work provided a framework that enabled journalists to accept the presence of metrics without sacrificing their sense of professional self-regard, thus facilitating the institutionalization of traffic data in newsrooms.

Yet not all newsrooms were successful in routinizing metrics and making peace with them. In the second part of the article, we turned to cases of failure that involved overspelling, typically through the creation of pay-for-performance programs where journalistic compensation and promotion were explicitly tied to individual metrics. We examined two cases where overspelling coincided with organizational breakdown: in one case because all the staffers quit the organization, in the other because the staff slowly hemorrhaged as the publication was absorbed into the maws of its new parent company. Based on these cases of failure, we discussed the role of relational work in distancing metrics from market pressures.

Following this first application of the Zelizerian framework to make sense of the uses of audience metrics in online news production, we hope that future studies will further expand on the analysis presented here. First, more work is needed on cases of "bad matches" and their structural determinants (Bandelj, 2020). Our analysis suggests that the outcome of relational work is shaped by broader institutional factors — for instance, changes in media ownership structures and hierarchical dynamics within news organizations. Future research should further examine which structural characteristics shape how relational strategies are used and whether they succeed or fail. Second, we hope that scholars will apply the (e)valuation approach in economic sociology to analyze the growing role of digital technologies of quantification, at work and elsewhere. Indeed, as market pressures and economic forces become increasingly mediated through digital metrics of all sorts, further research is needed that marries the analytic attention of economic sociologists to the structural and cultural foundations of market dynamics and the careful focus of ethnographers to the material and infrastructural details of digital technologies, which together constitute the daily manifestations of twenty-first-century capitalism.

## References

Almeling, R. (2007). Selling genes, selling gender: Egg agencies, sperm banks, and the medical market in genetic material. *American Sociological Review*, *72*(3), 319–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200301

Ananny, M. (2018). Networked Press Freedom: Creating Infrastructure for a Public Right to Hear. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Anderson, C. W. (2011a). Between creative and quantified audiences: Web metrics and changing patterns of newswork in local US newsrooms. *Journalism*, *12*(5), 550–566. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911402451

Anderson, C. W. (2011b). Deliberative, agonistic, and algorithmic audiences: Journalism's vision of its public in an age of audience transparency. *International Journal of Communication*, *5*, 519–547.

Anderson, C. W. (2013). *Rebuilding the News: Metropolitan Journalism in the Digital Age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Bandelj, N. (2020). Relational Work in the Economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *46*, 251–272. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054719

Beckert, J., & Aspers, P. (Eds.). (2011). *The Worth of Goods: Valuation and Pricing in the Economy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Belair-Gagnon, V., & Holton, A. E. (2018). Boundary work, interloper media, and analytics in newsrooms. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(8), 492–508. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1445001

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Benton, J. (2014). The leaked New York Times innovation report is one of the key documents of this media age. *NiemanLab*, May 15. Retrieved from: https://www.niemanlab.org/2014/05/the-leaked-new-york-times-innovation-report-is-one-of-the-key-documents-of-this-media-age/

Blanchett Neheli, N. (2018). News by numbers: The evolution of analytics in journalism. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(8), 1041–1051. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1504626

Boczkowski, P. J. (2005). *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Boczkowski, P. J., & Mitchelstein, E. (2013). *The News Gap: When The Information Preferences of the Media and The Public Diverge*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

boyd, d., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(5), 662–679. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.678878

Bunce, M. (2019). Management and resistance in the digital newsroom. *Journalism*, *20*(7), 890–905. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916688963

Carlson, M. (2015). When news sites go native: Redefining the advertising-editorial divide in response to native advertising. *Journalism*, *16*(7), 849–865. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884914545441

Carr, D. (2014). Risks Abound as Reporters Play in Traffic. *The New York Times*, March 23. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/24/business/media/risks-abound-as-reporters-play-in-traffic.html

Cherubini, F., & Nielsen, R. K. (2016). Editorial analytics: How news media are developing and using audience data and metrics. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. Retrieved from: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/editorial-analytics-how-news-media-are-developing-and-using-audience-data-and-metrics

Christin, A. (2018). Counting Clicks. Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France. *American Journal of Sociology*, *123*(5), 1382–1415. https://doi.org/10.1086/696137

Christin, A. (2020). *Metrics at Work: Journalism and the Contested Meaning of Algorithms*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Coddington, M. (2015). The wall becomes a curtain: Revisiting journalism's new-business boundary. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation* (pp. 67–82). London: Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315727684/chapters/10.4324/9781315727684-5

Darnton, R. (1975). Writing news and telling stories. *Daedalus*, *104*(2), 175–194. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024337

Daulerio, A.J. (2012). Gawker will be conducting an experiment, please enjoy your free cute cats singing and sideboobs. *Gawker*, January 23. Retrieved from: https://gawker.com/5878065/gawker-will-be-conducting-an-experiment-please-enjoy-your-free-cute-cats-singing-and-sideboobs

DiMaggio, P., & Louch, H. (1998). Socially embedded consumer transactions: For what kinds of purchases do people most often use networks? *American Sociological Review*, *63*(5), 619–637. https://doi.org/10.2307/2657331

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, *48*(2), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101

Espeland, W. N., & Stevens, M. L. (1998). Commensuration as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *24*(1), 313–343. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.313

Ferrer-Conill, R., & Tandoc Jr, E. C. (2018). The audience-oriented editor: Making sense of the audience in the newsroom. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 436–453. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1440972

Fourcade, M. (2012). The moral sociology of Viviana Zelizer. *Sociological Forum*, *27*(4), 1055–1061. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2012.01371.x

Fourcade, M., & Kluttz, D. N. (2020). A Maussian bargain: Accumulation by gift in the digital economy. *Big Data & Society*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951719897092

Fischer, M.C. (2014). The pay-per-visit debate: Is chasing viral traffic hurting journalism? *American Journalism Review*, March 27. Retrieved from: https://ajr.org/2014/03/27/pay-per-visit-debate-chasing-viral-traffic-hurting-journalism/

Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Vintage Books (Random House).

Guardian Comms. (2015). Behind the scenes: Ophan — how the Guardian democratized data. *The Guardian*, December 11. Retrieved from: https://medium.com/@GuardianComms/behind-the-scenes-ophan-how-the-guardian-democratised-data-36cde3967062

Granovetter, M. (1995). *Getting a Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Greenwell, M. (2019). The adults in the room. *Deadspin*, August 23. Retrieved from: https://theconcourse.deadspin.com/the-adults-in-the-room-1837487584

Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. (T. Burger & F. Lawrence, Trans.). Cambridge: MIT Press. (Original work published 1962).

Haile, T. (2014). What you think you know about the web is wrong. *Time*, March 9. Retrieved from: https://time.com/12933/what-you-think-you-know-about-the-web-is-wrong/

Hanusch, F. (2017). Web analytics and the functional differentiation of journalism cultures: Individual, organizational and platform-specific influences on newswork. *Information, Communication and Society*, *20*(10), 1571–1586. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1241294

Healy, K. (2010). *Last Best Gifts: Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Herrman, J. (2012). Infinite feedback will make us crazy. *Buzzfeed News*, March 8. Retrieved from: https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/jwherrman/infinite-feedback-will-make-us-crazy

Igo, S. E. (2008). *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Keller, M. & Abelson, B. (2015). Newslynx: A tool for newsroom impact and measurement. *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 4. Retrieved from: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/newslynx_a_tool_for_newsroom_impact_measurement.php

Kiviat, B. (2019). The moral limits of predictive practices: The case of credit-based insurance scores. *American Sociological Review*, *84*(6), 1134–1158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419884917

Konieczna, M. & Powers, E. (2017). What can nonprofit journalists actually do for democracy? *Journalism Studies*, *18*(12), 1542–1558. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1134273

Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *28*(1), 167–195. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107

Lamont, M. (2012). Toward a comparative sociology of valuation and evaluation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *38*, 201–221. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-070308-120022

Mears, A. (2011a). Pricing looks: Circuits of value in fashion modeling markets. In J. Beckert & P. Aspers (Eds.), *The Worth of Goods* (pp. 155–177). New York: Oxford University Press.

Mears, A. (2011b). *Pricing beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Merritt, D. (2005). Breaching the wall. *Nieman Watchdog*, April 18. Retrieved from: http://www.niemanwatchdog.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Background.view&backgroundid=44

Nadler, A. M. (2016). *Making the News Popular: Mobilizing U.S. News Audiences.* Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Napoli, P. M. (2011). *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nelson, J. L., & Tandoc Jr, E. C. (2019). Doing "well" or doing "good": What audience analytics reveal about journalism's competing goals. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(13), 1960–1976. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1547122

The New York Times. (2017). Journalism that stands apart: the report of the 2020 group. *The New York Times*, January. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/projects/2020-report/index.html

Ossandón, J., & Zelizer, V. (2019). How did I become a historical sociologist? Viviana Zelizer in conversation with José Ossandón. *Sociologica*, *13*(3), 191–196. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/10132

Petchesky, B. (2019). I was fired from Deadspin for refusing to "stick to sports." *The New York Times*, November 11. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/opinion/deadspin-sports.html

Petre, C. (2015). The traffic factories: Metrics at Chartbeat, Gawker Media, and *The New York Times*. *Tow Center for Digital Journalism*. https://doi.org/10.7916/D80293W1

Petre, C. (2018). Engineering consent: How the design and marketing of newsroom analytics tools rationalize journalists' labor. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 509–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1444998

Pulitzer, J. (1904). The School of Journalism in Columbia University: The Power of Public Opinion. *The North American Review*, 41–80. Retrieved from: https://archive.org/details/schoolofjournalioopuliuoft/page/6/mode/2up

Reich, A. (2012). Disciplined doctors: The electronic medical record and physicians' changing relationship to medical knowledge. *Social Science & Medicine*, *74*(7), 1021– 1028. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.12.032

Reich, A.D. (2014). *Selling Our Souls: The Commodification of Hospital Care in the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rosen, J. (2006). The people formerly known as the audience. *PressThink*, June 27. Retrieved from: http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

Salcetti, M. (1995). The Emergence of the Reporter: Mechanization and the Devaluation of Editorial Workers. In H. Hardt & B. Brennan (Eds.). *Newsworkers: Toward a History of the Rank and File* (pp. 48–74). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Saroff, J. (2017). A Chartbeat evolution. *Chartbeat Press*, October 3. Retrieved from: https://blog.chartbeat.com/2017/10/03/a-chartbeat-evolution/

Schudson, M. (2005). Autonomy from what? In R. Benson & E. Neveu. (Eds.), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (pp. 214–223). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Shire, E. (2014). Saving us from ourselves: The anti-clickbait movement. *The Daily Beast*, April 14. Retrieved from: https://www.thedailybeast.com/saving-us-from-ourselves-the-anti-clickbait-movement

Snyder, G. (2017). How the New York Times is clawing its way into the future. *Wired*, February 12. Retrieved from: https://www.wired.com/2017/02/new-york-times-digital-journalism

Stark, D. (2009). *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tandoc, E. C. & Thomas, R. J. (2015). The ethics of web analytics: Implications of using audience metrics in news construction. *Digital Journalism*, *3*(2), 243–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.909122

Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, *30*(3), 167–186. https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914

Tofel, R. (2013). Nonprofit journalism: Issues around impact. *Propublica*. Retrieved from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/propublica/assets/about/LFA_ProPublica-white-paper_2.1.pdf

Upworthy. (2014). What uniques and pageviews leave out (and why we're measuring attention minutes instead). *Upworthy Insider*, February 6. Retrieved from: https://blog.upworthy.com/what-uniques-and-pageviews-leave-out-and-why-were-measuring-attention-minutes-instead-d12c159d5c96?gi=16a0c6bbd9b2

Usher, N. (2010). Why SEO and audience tracking won't kill journalism as we know it. *NiemanLab*, September 14. Retrieved from: https://www.niemanlab.org/2010/09/why-seo-and-audience-tracking-won't-kill-journalism-as-we-know-it-2/

Usher, N. (2013). Al Jazeera English Online: Understanding web metrics and news production when a quantified audience is not a commodified audience. *Digital Journalism*, *1*(3), 335–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2013.801690

Vatin, F. (2009). *Evaluer et valoriser: une sociologie économique de la mesure*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2002). The construction of the public in Letters to the Editor: Deliberative democracy and the idiom of insanity. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, *3*(2), 183–204. https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490200300203

Wang, S. (2016). The New York Times is trying to narrow the distance between reporters and analytics data. *NiemanLab*, July 25. Retrieved from: https://www.niemanlab.org/2016/07/the-new-york-times-is-trying-to-narrow-the-distance-between-reporters-and-analytics-data/

Wherry, F. F., Seefeldt, K. S., & Alvarez, A. S. (2019). To lend or not to lend to friends and kin: Awkwardness, obfuscation, and negative reciprocity. *Social Forces*, *98*(2), 753–793. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy127

Woods, B. (2015). How The Guardian's Ophan analytics engine helps editors make better decisions. *TheNextWeb*, April 13. Retrieved from: https://thenextweb.com/media/2015/04/13/how-the-guardians-ophan-analytics-engine-helps-editors-make-better-decisions/

Zamith, R. (2018). Quantified audiences in news production: A synthesis and research agenda. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 418–435. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1444999

Zelizer, V. A. (1994). *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, V. A. (1996). Payments and social ties. *Sociological Forum*, *11*(3), 481–495. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02408389

Zelizer, V. A. (1997). *The Social Meaning of Money*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, V. A. (2007). *The Purchase of Intimacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, V. A. (2010). *Economic Lives: How Culture Shapes the Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zelizer, V. A. (2012). How I became a relational economic sociologist and what does that mean? *Politics & Society*, *40*(2), 145–174. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329212441591

**Angèle Christin:** Department of Communication, Stanford University (United States)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7437-2013
angelec@stanford.edu; http://www.angelechristin.com
Angèle Christin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Stanford University. She studies how algorithms and analytics transform professional values, expertise, and work practices. Her book *Metrics at Work: Journalism and the Contested Meaning of Algorithms* (Princeton University Press, June 2020) focuses on the case of web journalism, analyzing the growing importance of audience data in web newsrooms in the U.S. and France. She is currently a Visiting Researcher with the Social Media Collective at Microsoft Research New England.

**Caitlin Petre:** School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University, Brunswick, NJ (United States)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7846-9659
https://comminfo.rutgers.edu/petre-caitlin
Caitlin Petre is an Assistant Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at the Rutgers University. She examines the social and material implications of an increasingly data-saturated world, with particular attention to the relationship between digital technologies, knowledge work, and media industries. Using field research methods, she analyzes how new sources of quantitative data interact with long-established approaches to cultural production and the management of media workers.

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News" – *peer-reviewed*
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11154

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# From Movement to Institution: The "Global Fact" Summit as a Field-Configuring Event

Lucas Graves[*] Laurens Lauer[†]

Submitted: June 10, 2020 – Accepted: August 23, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

The last decade has seen the rise of a self-described worldwide "movement" of fact-checking groups which specialize in debunking false political claims and other forms of misinformation. This very heterogeneous movement now spans nearly 300 fact-checking outlets in more than eighty countries, led by their own professional organization. This study charts the emergence and development of this transnational institutional sphere with qualitative and quantitative analysis of the annual summit of fact-checking organizations, Global Fact, as a field-configuring event (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork by two authors as well as comprehensive data on the first six Global Fact meetings, we use shifts in the structure and content of the event to explore processes of structuration; we highlight a shift from a field-building ethic valuing inclusiveness and celebrating diversity to one valuing common practices and standards, marked by new governance mechanisms and increasing interest from powerful outside stakeholders. Ultimately, our data show the fact-checking field negotiating a necessary tension between managing internal diversity and consolidating as an increasingly recognized institutional actor in the domain of public communication.

**Keywords**: fact-checking; institutional fields; journalism.

[*] School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin–Madison (United States); lucas.graves@wisc.edu; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2980-7145

[†] Institute of Sociology, University Duisburg-Essen (Germany); laurens.lauer@uni-due.de; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9550-812X

## 1 Introduction

The new millennium has seen the rapid global proliferation of organizations which specialize in assessing the truth of political claims, media reports, online rumors, and other public texts. As of mid-2020, the growing field spanned 290 active fact-checking organizations in 83 countries, more than 90 percent of which were established in the last decade (Stencel & Luther, 2020). This self-described global fact-checking "movement" first took shape among U.S. journalists in the mid-2000s, and is led by news organizations in many countries. However, the movement also includes independent fact-checking operations as well as those attached to universities and civil-society groups; many leading fact-checkers identify as activists or policy experts more than journalists.

One way to describe this remarkable trend is as the formation of a new, transnational democratic institution. Fact-checking increasingly exhibits characteristics we tend to describe with institutional language: It is a norm-governed social space whose members are oriented to one another, police the borders of their group, engage in typical practices governed by formal and informal rules, and explicitly celebrate and reproduce shared norms and values (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Kluttz & Fligstein, 2016). Crucially, fact-checking fits into the larger, legitimating order of democratic institutions, and its legitimacy is actively recognized by other civil-society actors — foundations, think tanks, NGOs, etc. — as well as by the press, politicians, and the public, though to different degrees in different countries.

Though still incipient, this rapid institutionalization of fact-checking over the last several years has been unmistakable, we argue. Beginning with the first global meeting of fact-checkers in 2014, fact-checking organizations around the world have increasingly become aware of and oriented to one another as a unified organizational field, celebrating their community, sharing best practices, and engaging in active collaborations. They have developed common professional standards and credentialing mechanisms. And they have formed governing structures to take collective decisions as fact-checking draws attention from powerful outside stakeholders like governments and technology companies.

This study charts the development of this global movement with qualitative and quantitative analysis of the annual summit of fact-checking organizations, Global Fact, as a field-configuring event (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). We use shifts in the structure and content of the annual event to highlight growing institutionalization, and to reveal a shift from a field-building ethic valuing inclusiveness and celebrating diversity to one valuing common practices and standards. Our data show fact-checkers negotiating a necessary tension between managing internal diversity and consolidating as an increasingly recognized institutional actor in public discourse.

## 2 Literature Review: From Interpretive Communities to Field-Configuring Events

This article investigates the role played by an annual conference, called Global Fact, in establishing fact-checking as an increasingly coherent and stable institutional field, or actor. We draw mainly on the literature of field-configuring events, discussed below, but begin with a brief review of the conceptual tools available in the sociology of news to study professional gatherings. It is also worth noting that we refer to fact-checkers as constituting a movement, a community, and a field in different contexts; all three labels apply, in ways that relate precisely to the processes of structuration considered here.

The influential framework of journalists as "interpretive communities" (Zelizer, 1993 & 2009) offers a clear invitation to study professional meetings alongside trade journals, awards, memoirs, and other spaces for "metajournalistic discourse" (Carlson, 2016) where journalists engage in collective meaning-making about their craft. The concept was imported from anthropology and literary studies as a deliberate alternative to more rigid criteria of the sociology of the professions — one affording a view of subtler shifts in journalistic values and practice that take shape in "shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events" (Zelizer, 1993, p. 219). Informed by this work, professional gatherings have provided valuable data for studies of major new currents within journalism, such as the "storytelling" movement (Schmidt, 2019) and data journalism (Anderson, 2018). Because of this emphasis on adaptation by a well-defined occupational community, though, the framework has less to say about how a conference like Global Fact structures a new area of practice — one bringing together heterogeneous actors with no shared history, working in different political and media systems.

The framework of "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) draws attention to precisely this question of how new occupational identities take shape and solidify, in part through community meetings that allow face-to-face interaction. Concerned primarily with learning, the concept rests on the sense of belonging promoted by exchanges among practitioners facing common practical challenges; communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). The framework suggests a progression through five ideal-typical stages of community development (Erik Andriessen, 2005) that begin with recognition and trust-building and culminate in adaptive communities whose members work together for mutual advantage. The "communities of practice" notion has recently been applied to specialized areas of practice in journalism, such as online newsrooms (García-Avilés, 2014; Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010) and ethnic media (Matsaganis & Katz, 2014); Meltzer & Martik (2017) suggest that it may be especially useful at a moment of chronic disruption and rising collaboration in the field. The Global Fact meetings, focused on exchanging practical knowledge and promoting collaboration, invite analysis under this lens.

A more fully developed framework for theorizing the role of professional meetings is that of field-configuring events, "temporary social organizations such as tradeshows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries" (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1026). As the name indicates, FCEs derive from the sociological notion of a field as a "socially constructed arena in which actors are oriented toward one another over a common practice, institution, issue, or goal" (Kluttz & Fligstein, 2016, pp. 186–187). Various strains of field theory agree in conceiving of fields (or institutions) as existing between the level of the individual or organization and the wider society (Bourdieu, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011); a field such as journalism or politics is partly "autonomous," in Bourdieu's term, in that members adhere to an internal order or logic necessary to make sense of their behavior (Bourdieu, 2005).

The FCE lens has been applied often to commercial or industry events, including cultural milestones such as literary awards (e.g. Anand & Jones, 2008), but less widely in professional or public-sector contexts (but see e.g. Hardy & Maguire, 2010). The crux of the concept is that FCEs embody field-level relations and values — "they are structured in conformity with the institutional logic of the field" (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1028) — but also influence the wider field in path-dependent and sometimes unpredictable ways, because of the latitude for individuals (and organizations) to pursue agendas and act creatively in a consequential setting.

These events thus bridge macro- and micro-level processes, and offer a hinge connecting field and network approaches in sociology (Powell et al., 2005).

FCEs offer a promising window onto the formation and evolution of an emerging field like fact-checking, as arenas in which members "become aware of their common concerns, join together, share information, coordinate their actions, shape or subvert agendas, and mutually influence field structuration" (Anand & Jones, 2008, p. 1037). Global Fact has two characteristics which make it an especially promising research site. First, it is a recurring annual event that offers "cross-sectional snapshots of field structure" (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1031) as fact-checking has expanded globally. Second, as developed below, it has what Lampel & Meyer (2008) call a "strong field mandate" as the event that gave rise to the global movement. Global Fact is the far and away preeminent meeting of fact-checkers, many times the size of regional gatherings; for outlets in many countries it is the only opportunity to come together with peer organizations.

## 3 "Global Fact" and the Global Fact-Checking Movement

The fact-checking movement first took shape in an organized way among U.S. journalists in the mid-2000s. It emerged as a response to so-called "false balance" in conventional political journalism, a long-standing critique sharpened by failures in reporting on the Iraq War. Three full-time outlets founded by veteran national reporters — FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, and *The Washington Post*'s Fact Checker — led a wider turn toward fact-checking in U.S. newsrooms, helping to evangelize the practice as a legitimate form of objective journalism. Significantly, perhaps the earliest direct reference to a "fact-checking movement" came at a 2007 conference that brought practitioners together for the first time to articulate their mission and their common concerns. Leading U.S. fact-checkers have been highly oriented to one another as a small but prominent subfield of political journalism, both in daily routines and in meta-journalistic discourse; before Global Fact, these outlets frequently came together at domestic events with foundation officials and academic researchers interested in the movement (see Graves, 2016).

From 2008 on, fact-checking outlets also proliferated rapidly overseas, often modeled on U.S. sites. Internationally, however, the field has been remarkably diverse. As of early 2020, nearly half of outlets worldwide were not attached to newsrooms; many are projects of civil-society groups focused on good governance or building democratic institutions, and some have emerged from popular movements, such as the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine, Egypt's Tahrir Square uprisings, and the India Against Corruption movement. Other outlets stress their in-house academic or policy expertise, hiring researchers rather than reporters. (As the founder of an Indian fact-checking site argued at the 2015 Global Fact, journalists are not necessarily "the most comfortable with facts" [field notes, 2015].) One way to organize this variety is to conceive of the movement as bridging three adjacent institutional fields — journalism, academia, and civil society — whose influence combines to different degrees in individual organizations (Graves, 2018).

The Global Fact conferences played a pivotal role in the development of fact-checking as a self-conscious global movement, which arguably began with the first meeting, in 2014. The conferences are run by the Poynter Institute, a nonprofit, U.S.-based journalism training center which is also the home of PolitiFact. The idea came from PolitiFact founder Bill Adair, who planned, programmed, and led the first two meetings of what was initially called the "Global Fact-Checking Summit," held in London in 2014 and 2015 with funding from several charitable foundations. The first event included about 50 attendees in a cramped seminar room at the

London School of Economics, with a simple, unformatted agenda that fit easily on a two-page Word document. As discussed below, the small, informal gatherings that year and the next focused on fact-checkers getting to know one another and identifying common concerns.

From 2016 the conference became the responsibility of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), established by the Poynter Institute with a large outside grant announced at the end of the second summit. Taking the name Global Fact, the event moved to spacious venues in Buenos Aires (2016) and Madrid (2017) to accommodate a rapidly growing global community. (Google became a sponsor in 2016 and hosted the summit on its Madrid campus the next year.) The agenda expanded to cover a growing number of themes and activities in a more structured way, from debates over emerging topics to organized workshops to discuss the future of the community. The meetings also began to include more external guests, but retained a familial atmosphere celebrating the annual reunion.

The summits in Rome (2018) and Cape Town (2019), finally, represent highly structured events that serve an increasingly diverse group of fact-checkers, interested outsiders, and specialists from related fields. The lengthy, elaborate conference booklets (46 and 40 pages long, respectively) now include descriptions of the scores of fact-checking projects in attendance. Besides the usual networking events, participants increasingly have to choose, in advance, from a wide range of activities including thematic panels, practical trainings, and coordination meetings; some sessions are limited to private groups. However, a number of headline assemblies, panels, and community events bring the entire community together.

The table below gives a picture of the growth of Global Fact in terms of the number of attendees and other measures.

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATTENDEES | 56 | 70 | 106 | 186 | 222 | 252 |
| FACT-CHECKERS | 38 | 56 | 82 | 135 | 161 | 163 |
| ORGANIZATIONS | 43 | 54 | 69 | 117 | 138 | 145 |
| COUNTRIES | 22 | 32 | 41 | 52 | 60 | 55 |
| DAYS / HOURS | 2 / 810 | 2 / 1065 | 2 / 1270 | 3 / 1395 | 3 / 2552 | 3 / 2420 |

Table 1: Growth of Global Fact

## 4 Method

The analysis presented here draws on comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data covering the first six Global Fact conferences, which took place June 8-10, 2014, in London; July 22-24, 2015, in London; June 8-10, 2016, in Buenos Aires; July 5-7, 2017, in Madrid; June 20-22, 2018, in Rome; and June 19-21 in Cape Town. As noted above, over this period the conference grew from a small, informal gathering to a highly structured event with 250 attendees divided across four parallel tracks. We witnessed these changes firsthand while attending the conferences as part of separate ethnographic research projects studying the global fact-checking movement. The present study grew out of conversations that began at the conference itself, as we compared notes on changes in the content and how these reflect wider developments in the field.

To document these changes, we conducted a systematic content analysis of both the theme and the format of every session and, where applicable, each individual presentation across the six conferences, totaling 145 hours of event-time. Two principal data sources were used to carry out this analysis: a complete record of the formal agenda of each event, as provided by the IFCN; and ethnographic field notes about the content of individual sessions, formal and informal discussions, and community-building events such as dinners and awards. Field notes from at least one of us cover nearly every session in the initial conferences; this share declined as the number of parallel tracks increased, but we coordinated during the last two conferences to maximize coverage. (Only Graves attended London 2014, and only Lauer attended Madrid 2017.) In addition, we had access to copies of approximately half of the actual presentations given as well as to video and/or audio records of many sessions. We were also able to attend some closed sessions, with only IFCN board meetings and a private session for Facebook partners completely off limits.

These records were used to map each conference onto a spreadsheet representing every session on the agenda in terms of time-on-stage for individual participants and their respective organizations. In this way, for example, a four-person panel discussion lasting one hour comprises four 15-minute spreadsheet entries, each recording common session-level data (title, format as listed, format as coded, and whether it was open or closed) as well as individual participant-level details (name, organization, presentation title as listed, presentation theme as coded, and presentation length). All results were analyzed in terms of conference-minutes, giving a more fine-grained view of changing themes. This approach bridges presentation- and session-level coding, necessary because some session formats include multiple themes while others (i.e. panel discussions) were defined as having a single theme. It also accommodates parallel tracks, which simply add to total conference-minutes. (For instance, the 2019 meeting took place over three 8-hour days but included more than 40 hours of conference-time.)

The same data were used to develop codebooks and code the conferences separately for theme and format. In each case, we agreed on a preliminary set of definitions and then used an iterative, two-stage process to refine the codebook: First, each of us independently coded every session across all six events, making notes to flag edge cases and other potential problems or points of interest. Then, we jointly reviewed all of the coding, discussed discrepancies, and revised definitions as needed, initiating the next round. (While this resembles intercoder reliability testing, the goal in this case was to drive collaborative analysis as much as to test consistency; ultimately, all codes were agreed on by both of us.) Over a period of three months, this sequence was followed first for theme and then for format, each requiring at least five rounds of revision and re-coding before we were satisfied with the resulting categories and applied them consistently. While coding for theme and format was carried out separately, one important insight yielded by this process is that the two sets of definitions are necessarily related; judgments about the primary thematic content of a session may depend on contextual details such as whether it emphasized discussion among participants, whether was a private meeting, whether it was a breakout session, and so on.

The thematic codebook spans seven major thematic categories and numerous subcategories, listed below in the sequence they were applied during coding, beginning with the most distinct and specific themes. An "other" category, "Agenda-setting," was used to capture emerging themes. Two additional top-level categories captured sessions without a distinct thematic focus: "Community" relates to various aspects of community maintenance, and

"Projects & Experiences" covers presentations designed to "tell the story" of an organization or initiative, a common feature of the Global Fact conferences.

| Theme<br>*Subtheme* | Definition |
|---|---|
| **(Tech)nology** | Primary focus is explicitly on technology or technology-related issues, falling into two subcategories: |
| *(I)nitiatives* | Related to technologies used or developed by fact-checkers, such as automated fact-checking efforts |
| *(P)latforms* | Related to major platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, etc. |
| **Impact** | Primary focus is on evaluating or enhancing impact of fact-checking efforts, e.g. on audiences or on politicians: |
| *(A)udience* | Related specifically to academic audience research |
| *(P)ractical* | Related to other initiatives to track or improve the impact of fact-checking |
| **(Fund)ing** | Primary focus is on securing financial support for fact-checking organizations or efforts, e.g. a Q&A with a foundation official or a primer on crowdfunding efforts |
| **Method** | Primary focus is on core principles and methodology used in fact-checking: |
| *(S)tandards* | Related specifically to formulating or applying common standards to govern fact-checking, such as the IFCN's Code of Principles |
| *(P)ractical* | Related to best practices for verification and other basic elements of fact-checking, e.g. tips for live fact-checking |
| **(Collab)oration** | Primary focus is planning, managing, or reviewing voluntary international collaborations among fact-checking organizations |
| **(Disinfo)rmation** | Primary focus is on the spread of online mis- or disinformation as an issue, e.g. knowledge-sharing about sources and vectors of false news stories |
| **Education (EML)** | Primary focus is on educational and media literacy initiatives, e.g. incorporating fact-checking into the classroom |
| **Agenda-setting (AS)** | Focus is on raising new issues of concern to the fact-checking community |
| **(Comm)unity** | Describes sessions dedicated to building or managing the community of fact-checkers, falling into three subcategories: |
| *(G)overnance* | Focus is specifically on governance and collective decision-making, e.g. meetings of the IFCN board |
| *(N)etworking* | Focus is on building and celebrating the fact-checking community, e.g. awards ceremonies |
| *(R)emarks* | Applied to opening and closing remarks exclusively |
| **Projects & Experiences (P&E)** | Primary focus is introducing or telling the story of a fact-checking organization or project in a holistic way, without emphasizing an explicit theme |

Table 2: Thematic Codebook

The format codebook comprises six distinct session formats, listed in the sequence applied during coding. The features associated with each format should be understood as describing an ideal type; not every feature was present in every case. (For instance, a panel discussion typically includes a designated moderator, but a session clearly organized around back-and-forth discussion of a common theme qualified even without a moderator.) As noted, the conference became more explicitly structured each year, with a number of recurring formats used on the formal agenda. (For this reason, the first two events were the most difficult to code.) However, labels were not always applied consistently in conference agendas; our analysis took listed formats into account but did not treat them as decisive.

| Format | Definition |
|---|---|
| Show & Tell | Features a series of short presentations (5 to 10 minutes) about any subject; presenters sign up in advance (as in an "open mic"). Typically used by fact-checking organizations to introduce themselves or share specific initiatives. Always open. |
| Panel / Q&A | Features discussion of a specific, named issue of importance by a small number of participants who remain on-stage together. Typically has a designated moderator and audience questions. May include prepared presentations. Main room, always open. |
| Workshop / seminar | Features joint elaboration of a practical issue, often soliciting input from attendees, who are positioned as participants or students. Breakout session, always open. |
| Meeting / assembly | Features strategic discussion by attendees gathered as members of a specific community, often with expectation of attendance. May be closed. |
| Conference remarks | Features opening and closing remarks by the conference organizers; an assembly addressed to all conference-goers. Main room, always open. |
| Presentation | Features a prepared presentation by an individual or a team. Includes keynote presentation and "featured talks" as well as smaller presentations outside the context of an organized thematic discussion. Always open. |

Table 3: Format Codebook

## 5 Analysis

Data yielded by the coding process described above were used to produce a series of charts tracking changes in content and format over the six Global Fact conferences. We considered these high-level views of the evolving event in light of our qualitative field notes on the tone and priorities of each meeting, and of the literature on how communities of practice and field-configuring events develop over time. The resulting analysis highlights three primary roles of the annual meetings in structuring the wider world of fact-checking; while they are offered in rough sequence, these should be understood not as rigid stages in a life cycle, but rather overlapping sets of priorities. (Fig. 1 presents an overview of this thematic analysis.)

### 5.1 Building and Maintaining Community

The Global Fact conferences feature a pronounced inclusiveness towards even fundamental differences in the backgrounds and methods of the fact-checkers present. This stands out in the early meetings in particular. The first two meetings, London 2014 and 2015, began with a lengthy round of introductions by the diverse participants, many from backgrounds in academia, policy, or activism, rather than journalism. As organizer Bill Adair explained in 2015, "The whole idea is just to give you a flavor of this movement," after giving an informal award to the participant who made the longest trip. (This became a recurring tradition.) Similarly, the final lunch break at the first meeting featured "5-minute talks" for organizations to share ideas or projects; from 2015 these "Show and Tell" sessions became a primary part of the agenda, used for new organizations to introduce themselves to the community. Organizers also surveyed attendees' backgrounds and shared the results during opening remarks to highlight the size and diversity of the global movement.

Given this diversity, a primary thread of the first conferences in particular is to stake out common ground in terms of shared self-understandings and concerns. In keeping with a core premise of communities of practice (Wenger, 2011), this community-building takes place primarily through discussion of common techniques and challenges at a practical level. Sessions focused on trading best practices — how to fact-check live events, how to track campaign promises, how to respond to political attacks, etc. — make up fully one-third of conference minutes (METH-P) at the first two summits. Beyond core methods, two other basic, related challenges are how to secure funding, and how to track and increase the impact of one's work; these themes (FUND and IMPACT) account for close to 25 percent of the agenda over the first three years of the summit. Discussing impacts also offers a way to affirm a common mission of holding power accountable (for instance, one 2014 session focused on celebrating "How fact-checking upsets the status quo.")

It is crucial to note that basic differences in how these organizations work emerged frequently in practical sessions, leading to discussions about whether it is obligatory to call the person being checked, whether ratings systems are useful, and so on. However, the emphasis in these early conversations is on familiarizing one another with different approaches, rather than on establishing a correct approach to fact-checking (field notes, 2014/15). For example, a panel in London 2014 featured a debate on the "Pros & Cons of Rating Systems"; despite the debate format, and passionate arguments on both sides, the session emphasized common ground and celebrating different approaches (field notes, 2014). Efforts to reconcile differences don't always succeed, of course. For instance, a reporter for France's *Le Monde* complained privately about all of the activists at the 2015 conference, vowing never to return; she never did (field notes, 2015).

### 5.2 Professionalization and Governance

Perhaps the most distinct change visible in the six years of Global Fact data is a marked turn toward professionalization and governance that began in 2016. These parallel shifts emerge in the thematic analysis as well as in new session formats, like assemblies and closed meetings. It is important to note that conceptually these two strands can be hard to tease apart; markers of professionalization, such as formal standards and credentialing mechanisms, may themselves be read as a form of governance. More broadly, the conference itself acts as a governance mechanism to the extent it structures the interactions that reflect and shape the evolution of the field; indeed, this is implicit in the notion of a field-configuring event (Lampely & Meyer, 2008). However, as detailed below, sessions focused *explicitly* on taking collective decisions and governing as a community of fact-checkers become a regular feature in later conferences, once the community begins to professionalize and to engage more consequentially with outside stakeholders such as governments and platform companies.

The clearest indicator of the field's professionalizing impulse can be seen in the thematic data: Sessions focused directly on developing, promulgating, or managing fact-checking standards (METH-S) first appear with the third conference, in 2016, and claim 1-2 hours of every subsequent meeting. However, incipient signs of this shift were evident at the 2015 conference, in a rising concern with the "quality" of fact-checking documented by both authors. In his opening remarks, conference organizer Bill Adair (2015a) identified this as a basic challenge facing the community, highlighting the "need to focus on the quality of our journalism" and calling for "a thorough discussion of best practices" (field notes, 2015/07). In order to plant the seeds for this discussion and draw attention to sites practicing "weaker journalism," Adair commissioned one of this paper's authors to conduct a comparative study of fact-checks by six different outlets around the world (see Adair, 2015b); results were presented at the conference and used to raise the question of whether the field needed professional standards (field notes, 2015/07).

At the 2016 conference this concern became explicit: One track of a conference-wide workshop focused specifically on "Fact-checkers' standards." During that session, participants discussed the "pros and cons" of devising a single, global standard for fact-checking, and reviewed potential criteria for such a standard, including nonpartisanship, a corrections policy, and transparency with regard to funding, method, and sources; the conference ended with a proposal for a working group to explore the issue, coupled with injunctions to protect diversity by limiting standards to "broad principles" focused on "becoming better as a movement" (field notes, 2016/06). Again, Adair's opening remarks set the stage for this focus, stressing the need for fact-checkers to remain impartial and base their verdicts on thorough research: "It's time to make sure we push our journalism to the next level," he declared. Another sign of professionalization can be read in the increased focus on professional training; a presentation designed for new fact-checkers, delivered by veterans of the movement, outlined core fact-checking principles (such as fairness, transparency, and independence) and reviewed basic methodological steps for choosing claims to check and finding trustworthy sources (field notes, 2016/06).

The IFCN moved quickly to formalize standards in the wake of Global Fact 3, releasing the first version of the Code of Principles in September 2016 with 35 signatories (Kessler, 2016. The new standard gained heft when Facebook announced its third-party fact-checking program, which is limited to signatories (Mosseri, 2016). The three subsequent Global Fact meetings have all included sessions — sometimes closed — dedicated to the Code of Principles, which has 85 verified signatories as of mid-2020. For example, Global Fact 4, in Madrid, included a private "stitch and bitch" session for signatories to discuss the credentialing process, as well as a public presentation on lessons of the first year (field notes, 2017/07). The next year's conference featured a workshop on how the Code of Principles works, while Global Fact 6, in Cape Town, offered a well-attended workshop to discuss ongoing changes to the standard and the credentialing system, which were subsequently voted on and went into effect in March, 2020 (field notes, 2018/06 and 2019/06). The Code of Principles comes up frequently in other contexts at the conference and structures various activities of the fact-checking community; for instance, some competitive IFCN grants are only available to signatories.

Beyond the Code of Principles, a secondary indicator of the professional turn can be read in the pronounced increase of technology-themed sessions, many of which relate to technical standards that require — and reinforce — a degree of consistency in formats and methods. The Technology code first appears at the second conference, in 2015, claiming about 8 percent of the agenda in minutes; this rises slightly in 2016 and then nearly doubles to cover roughly 15 percent across the three subsequent meetings. The bulk of those sessions (TECH-I) focus on various technologies to automate aspects of fact-checking by standardizing the output of different fact-checking organizations in a machine-readable way. The organizations leading these efforts are also early signatories and proponents of the Code of Principles, and have linked methodological and technical standards as part of a larger professionalizing project (see Graves & Anderson, 2020).

As noted, a rising emphasis on governance accompanies — and is implicated in — the professionalizing tendency reflected in the conference agenda. Sessions with a primary focus specifically on collective decision-making (COMM-G) first appear in our thematic data for the third conference, in 2016. In a pattern we noted repeatedly while coding, a theme which was very clearly defined and easy to apply in later meetings required some discussion in the first instance: We applied the label to a small working group charged with considering an "International Fact-Checking Day" and other potential initiatives to promote public interest in fact-checking, and to a conference-wide session in which groups previously assigned to work on different specific issues reported out to the community.

The governance theme did not surface explicitly at the 2017 Global Fact, but appears as the most frequent code by far in the fifth and sixth meetings, accounting for 31 and 22 percent of conference minutes, respectively. The format and focus of these later sessions embody the central idea of collective decision-making very distinctly. For instance, the 2018 Global Fact featured a closed meeting of all current signatories of the Code of Principles; both conferences also included closed meetings of the IFCN Advisory Board, a seven-member leadership group charged with overseeing the credentialing process and advising "on all other decisions that have an international relevance for fact-checkers."[1] Both conferences also featured a number of regional assemblies to facilitate strategic discussions among organizations confronting choices specific to their part of the world; for example, at the 2018 Global Fact, European fact-checking organizations assembled to consider whether and how to work with (or accept money from) European institutions, and then met with representatives of the European Commission in a closed session.

### 5.3 Thematic Enrichment and Emerging Tensions

From the fourth conference (Madrid, 2017) on, the topics and issues addressed at Global Fact widen significantly, reflecting the broadening scope of activities fact-checkers are involved in both individually and collectively. One vehicle for new approaches is the "Show & Tell" sessions, which increasingly highlight projects that debunk viral rumors and images, reflecting a wider turn in the field discussed below (field notes, 2018/19). In a striking example, the French newspaper *Liberatión*, one of the earliest fact-checking outlets in Europe, used a Show & Tell at Rome 2018 to unveil a complete redesign and rebranding centered on answering everyday questions from citizens rather than checking high-profile political claims. New issues emerge even more clearly in featured talks and panel discussions, which increasingly include outside stakeholders and introduce a growing array of narrow topics, from health-related fact-checking to Russian disinformation. Even as the total number of designated themes coded rises each year, the agenda-setting code (AS) — our "other" category, used for miscellaneous or emergent topics — also claims about 10 percent of conference minutes in the last two years.

As well as the growing number of countries represented at Global Fact, particularly in Asia and Africa, this thematic enrichment reflects external developments that reoriented the field of fact-checking. Most importantly, a sharp rise in international concern with the effects of online disinformation after the 2016 U.S. presidential election sparked new interest in — and opportunities for — projects that focus on debunking "fake news" and viral images or rumors, as opposed to political claims. (One immediate outcome was Facebook's third-party fact-checking program, which pays fact-checkers to debunk misinformation on the social network.) Accordingly, three major related themes appear for the first time at the 2017 Global Fact and account for 17 percent of conference minutes across the last three meetings: Disinformation (DISINFO), Platforms (TECH-P), and Education & Media Literacy (EML).

The new opportunities and pressures for the field appear most clearly in debates about tech platforms like Facebook, Google, or WeChat, as well as direct exchanges with their representa-

1. The IFCN Advisory Board was initially appointed in December, 2016; from 2020, members will be voted on by signatories to the Code of Principles. Board members also met, off of the formal agenda, at the 2017 Global Fact conference, in Madrid (field notes, 2017/07). The description of the board's duties is from *International Fact-Checking Network Transparency Statement* (n.d.).

tives, who began to appear onstage in 2017. Many discussions have focused on Facebook's third-party fact-checking program, which has grown to include partners in 80 countries and become a major source of funding for the community. These encounters can be quite heated; for example, an onstage Q&A with a Facebook executive in 2018 brought pleas for help from partners in South America whose work made them the target of vicious, coordinated harassment campaigns. A session with a Google engineer provoked complaints from fact-checkers in Eastern Europe who felt neglected in the search engine's efforts to promote fact-checking (field notes, 2018).

Debates about how the community should work with platforms or governments arguably mark a return to the open-ended discussions of the first meetings, as fact-checkers sound out a shared self-understanding and identity in light of increasing diversity and rising stakes. For instance, the 2019 Global fact featured a contentious, conference-wide debate about competing visions for the IFCN — as an advocacy organization representing the community, or merely as a loose network sharing resources and ideas. At the same time the event includes more formats explicitly designed to promote community and connection among fact-checkers, like "flash meetings" (first introduced in 2017), regional assemblies, and community prizes (both debuted in 2018). Notably, the community has an increasingly developed shared history — often invoked through references to previous Global Facts — that promotes reflexive discussions about how to adapt to new circumstances.

## 6 Discussion

Taken together, data on the content and format of the first six Global Fact conferences tell a remarkably clear story of diverse organizations first recognizing themselves as members of a new occupational sphere, then identifying common features and shared priorities, strengthening external boundaries and internal status markers, and ultimately confronting the wider set of issues that come with increased relevance. This sequence accords broadly with literature that assigns field-configuring events (FCEs) a pivotal role in the formation of new institutional fields (Anand & Jones, 2008; Schüßler & Sydow, 2015) and suggests an evolution from field-defining concerns "such as setting standards, defining practices, and codifying key vocabularies" to a field-maintenance role focused on reinforcing boundaries and affirming dominant logics (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1029). However, the case of Global Fact highlights the particular demands of codifying dominant values in a diverse, growing transnational field; it also indicates how event-level structures help to resolve these tensions, and offer a kind of scaffold for more permanent field-level governance mechanisms.

One way to distill the event data analyzed in this paper is by noting what kinds of questions are being addressed, implicitly and explicitly, through the evolving Global Fact agenda. As shown, the first two conferences (London, 2014 and 2015) focus overwhelmingly on elemental questions for defining this new sphere: who the fact-checkers are, what they do, why it matters, and how to pay for it. Just four themes account for about 70 percent of conference minutes across the two meetings: Impact (IMPACT), Method (METH-P), Funding (FUND), and Projects & Experiences (P&E), associated with groups introducing themselves to the community. (The comparable figure for the last two conferences is under 25 percent.) In addition, only at the London meetings, the opening remarks (another 120 minutes) included introductions from every group present. Field notes from both of us record that the tone of these initial meetings was emphatically welcoming and celebratory; practitioners discuss how they work in

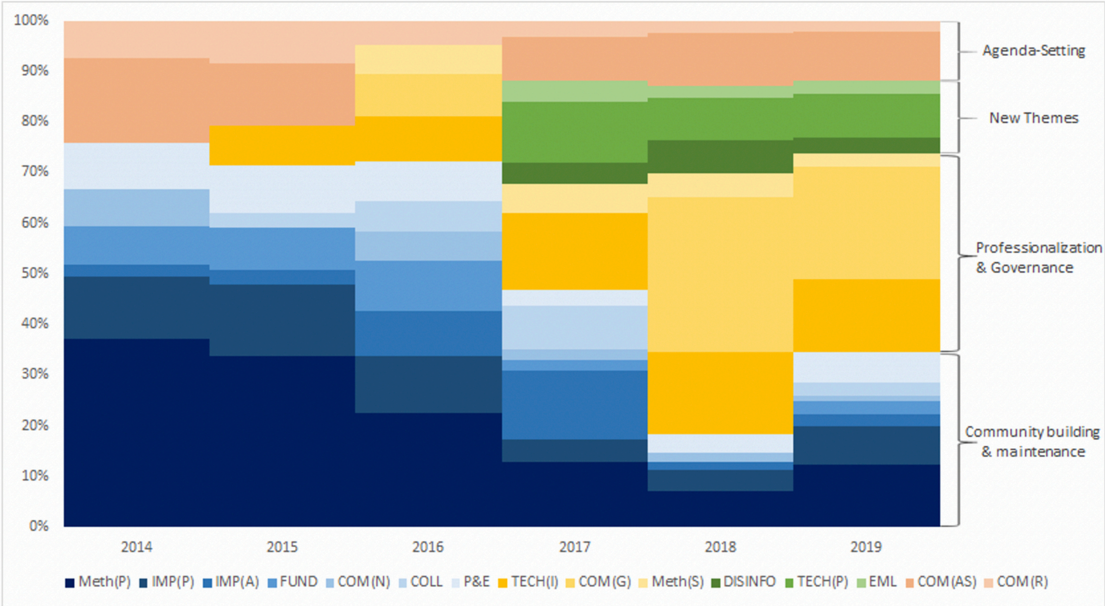


*Figure 1. Major thematic clusters across six Global fact conferences (% event time)*

order to share ideas and marvel at the range of approaches, rather than to consecrate one authoritative vision for fact-checking (see also Graves, 2018).

The agenda for the third Global Fact conference (Buenos Aires, 2016) formally raises two very different questions, with explicitly normative overtones, that will remain important through subsequent meetings. The first is how fact-checking *should* be conducted, with the corollary of who qualifies as a *legitimate* fact-checker. The IFCN's Code of Principles is one of the first concrete outcomes of Global Fact meetings, and formal standards become a permanent part of the agenda from 2016, in sessions dedicated to promulgating the new Code but also, almost immediately, to critiquing and revising it. From the outset, even advocates of the Code acknowledge the challenge of devising basic standards given the diversity of political environments fact-checkers operate in, and this drives the revisions to the Code discussed in the 2018 and 2019 meetings.

The second new question is what fact-checkers, constituted as a community, should collectively *do* — what decisions they should take together, through the IFCN and otherwise, in areas from establishing standards to launching formal collaborations to partnering with technology companies. The Governance theme first appears in 2016 and rises to constitute more than one-quarter of all conference minutes across the last two meetings. It also increasingly corresponds to specific meeting formats, such as closed meetings and regional assemblies, that reflect the emergence of increasingly articulated governance structures within the community. It is the rising prominence and relevance of the international fact-checking field after the events of 2016 — the new ways they *matter* to outside actors, especially in the government and technology worlds — that necessitates increasingly consequential decision-taking (such as the debates about whether to work formally with EU institutions) and lends new authority and wider jurisdiction to the community's incipient mechanisms of governance, such as the IFCN's advisory board and the credentialing process for the Code of Principles.

The rising global stakes around fact-checking continually draw focus back to those two core questions, of what qualifies as legitimate fact-checking and what collective decisions the community should take. Increased consequence also introduces a third question that characterizes the later meetings: What else do we need to be paying attention to? As the community grows, gains resources, and becomes involved in a widening array of activities, pressure grows on the agenda to cover emerging, high-profile issues from disinformation and "deep fakes" to media literacy initiatives and health communication. This helps to account for the rapidly diversifying array of Global Fact themes over six years, and the continued importance of the "agenda-setting" code assigned to miscellaneous new topics. (These may develop into recurring themes, as disinformation and media literacy did previously.)

In this way, Global Fact has been the primary venue for establishing, affirming, and contesting institutional logics in the new field of fact-checking. How members of the field collectively assign value can be read in standards formally articulated at the event (even to the extent that verified signatories of the IFCN Code attend closed meetings, have voting privileges, enjoy special eligibilities, etc.) but also in conference programming, awards, and so on (e.g., in the sudden rise to prominence of debunking viral images and texts rather than evaluating political claims). The event itself also reveals a shift in the dominant attitude — perhaps an aspect of what White (1993) calls institutional "style" — from simply *celebrating* diversity to *managing* it. We emphasize "managing diversity" because the abiding differences in how different kinds of organizations, working in very different domestic circumstances, understand and practice fact-checking cannot easily be erased or papered over. Some research points to growing isomorphism in the US context (Lowrey, 2017) but there is limited evidence of this globally (see e.g. Graves, 2018; Humprecht, 2020). This persistent organizational diversity gives rise to an inherent institutional tension or contradiction (see Farjoun, 2002) as the field responds to the imperative to standardize and professionalize.

At the same time, this is not a case of "organizing diversity" by sustaining competing valuation schemes at the firm level in order to navigate uncertainty and achieve organizational goals (Girard & Stark, 2002; Stark, 2009). Rather, managing diversity highlights how the increasingly differentiated and structured nature of the conference itself works through these contradictions in an ongoing way. For instance, the growing variety of session formats in the later meetings recognize multiple forms of attachment to the event, and thus membership in the community; the same organization may participate in one session as an IFCN signatory and another as an Asian or European outlet, while the opening plenary tallies the total number of fact-checkers attending and celebrates the global movement. Similarly, even as signatories to the Code of Principles gain elevated status, "Show & Tell" sessions ritualize the celebration of diverse organizations and projects that characterized the first meetings. Awards ceremonies do the same thing; while such "tournament rituals" reproduce or reconfigure field values by elevating winners (Anand & Jones, 2008; Anand & Watson, 2004), they also bring together members of the field nominally as equals. These structured formats and activities help resolve the paradox of accommodating a pluralistic fact-checking field even as the event itself has been the primary vehicle for promulgating a unifying standard.

These dynamics point to another illuminating feature of Global Fact as a field-configuring event with an unusually strong "field mandate" (Lampel & Meyer, 2008, p. 1028). As noted at the outset, the crux of the FCE concept is that these key events bridge micro-scale interactions and macro-scale processes, and thus offer a unique window onto structuration and field evolution (Lampel & Meyer, 2008; Schüßler & Sydow, 2015). In the case of Global Fact, this structuring influence on the wider field takes shape in part through increasingly explicit governance structures developed at and for the event. The most important of these is the IFCN itself, which was a product of the second Global Fact; what began as a loose network of fact-checkers has become a professional organization that sets field standards, runs the credentialing process, distributes funding, manages training and exchange programs, and often speaks for fact-checkers in dealings with foundations, technology firms, and governments.

Our analysis thus illuminates how a field-configuring event such as Global Fact helps to manage the tensions inherent in a heterogeneous field negotiating increased prominence and relevance in the world. Finally, it also raises the question of the local effects this international event has as diverse participants — from Australia's public broadcaster, to Balkan NGOs, to watchdog site Rappler in the Philippines — carry practices, discourses, and network resources back to their respective national contexts. A transnational field like fact-checking may be imagined as a relatively weak layer superimposed on stronger, more deeply structured institutional fields in specific countries. At the same time, it can exert unusually far-reaching influence, as shown by the worldwide spread of the Code of Principles. Further research should explore the unique role of FCEs in developing transnational institutions.

## References


Adair, B. (2015a). *Fact-Checking Conference Opening Remarks by Bill Adair*. Duke Reporters' Lab, July 23. http://reporterslab.org/at-the-global-fact-checking-summit-a-call-to-look-ahead/

Adair, B. (2015b). *Study Explores New Questions about Quality of Global Fact-Checking*. Duke Reporters' Lab, August 11. https://reporterslab.org/category/fact-checking/

Anand, N., & Jones, B. C. (2008). Tournament Rituals, Category Dynamics, and Field Configuration: The Case of the Booker Prize. *Journal of Management Studies*, *45*(6), 1036–1060. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2008.00782.x

Anand, N., & Watson, M. R. (2004). Tournament Rituals in the Evolution of Fields: The Case of the Grammy Awards. *Academy of Management Journal*, *47*(1), 59–80. https://doi.org/10.5465/20159560

Anderson, C. (2018). *Apostles of Certainty: Data Journalism and the Politics of Doubt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (S. Emanuel, Trans.). London: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2005). The political field, the social science field, and the journalistic field. In E. Neveu, R. D. Benson (Eds.), *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (pp. 29–47). Cambridge, Ma: Polity.

Carlson, M. (2016). Metajournalistic Discourse and the Meanings of Journalism: Definitional Control, Boundary Work, and Legitimation. *Communication Theory*, *26*(4), 349–368. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12088

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, *48*(2), 147–160. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101

Erik Andriessen, J. H. (2005). Archetypes of Knowledge Communities. In P. Van Den Besselaar, G. De Michelis, J. Preece, & C. Simone (Eds.), *Communities and Technologies 2005* (pp. 191–213). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-3591-8/_11

Fligstein, N., & McAdam, D. (2011). Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields. *Sociological Theory*, *29*(1), 1–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01385.x

García-Avilés, J. A. (2014). Online Newsrooms as Communities of Practice: Exploring Digital Journalists' Applied Ethics. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *29*(4), 258–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2014.946600

Girard, M., & Stark, D. (2002). Distributing Intelligence and Organizing Diversity in New-Media Projects. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *34*(11), 1927–1949. https://doi.org/10.1068/a34197

Graves, L. (2016). *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Graves, L. (2018). Boundaries not drawn: Mapping the institutional roots of the global fact-checking movement. *Journalism Studies*, *19*(5), 613—631. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1196602

Graves, L., & Anderson, C. (2020). Discipline and promote: Building infrastructure and managing algorithms in a "structured journalism" project by professional fact-checking groups. *New Media & Society*, *22*(2), 342—360. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444819856916

Hardy, C., & Maguire, S. (2010). Discourse, Field-Configuring Events, and Change in Organizations and Institutional Fields: Narratives of DDT and the Stockholm Convention. *Academy of Management Journal*, *53*(6), 1365–1392. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.57318384

Humprecht, E. (2020). How Do They Debunk "Fake News"? A Cross-National Comparison of Transparency in Fact Checks. *Digital Journalism*, *8*(3), 310–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1691031

Kluttz, D. N., & Fligstein, N. (2016). Varieties of Sociological Field Theory. In S. Abrutyn (Ed.), *Handbook of Contemporary Sociological Theory* (pp. 185–204). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32250-6_10

Lampel, J., & Meyer, A. D. (2008). Field-configuring events as structuring mechanisms: How conferences, ceremonies, and trade shows constitute new technologies, industries, and markets. *Journal of Management Studies*, *45*(6), 1025–1035. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2008.00787.x

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Lowrey, W. (2017). The Emergence and Development of News Fact-checking Sites. *Journalism Studies*, *18*(3), 376–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1052537

Matsaganis, M. D., & Katz, V. S. (2014). How ethnic media producers constitute their communities of practice: An ecological approach. *Journalism*, *15*(7), 926–944. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913501243

Meltzer, K., & Martik, E. (2017). Journalists as Communities of Practice: Advancing a Theoretical Framework for Understanding Journalism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *41*(3), 207–226. https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859917706158

Mosseri, A. (2016). Addressing Hoaxes and Fake News. *About Facebook*, December 15. https://about.fb.com/news/2016/12/news-feed-fyi-addressing-hoaxes-and-fake-news/

Powell, W. W., White, D. R., Koput, K. W., & Owen-Smith, J. (2005). Network Dynamics and Field Evolution: The Growth of Interorganizational Collaboration in the Life Sciences. *American Journal of Sociology*, *110*(4), 1132–1205. https://doi.org/10.1086/421508

Schmidt, T. R. (2019). *Rewriting the Newspaper: The Storytelling Movement in American Print Journalism*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Schmitz Weiss, A., & Domingo, D. (2010). Innovation processes in online newsrooms as actor-networks and communities of practice. *New Media & Society*, *12*(7), 1156–1171. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809360400

Schüßler, E., & Sydow, J. (2015). Organizing Events for Configuring and Maintaining Creative Fields. In C. Jones, M. Lorenzen, & J. Sapsed (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Creative Industries* (pp. 284–300). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199603510.013.029

Stark, D. (2009). *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stencel, M., & Luther, J. (2020). Annual census finds nearly 300 fact-checking projects around the world. *Duke Reporters' Lab*, June 22. https://reporterslab.org/annual-census-finds-nearly-300-fact-checking-projects-around-the-world/

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9910886021002121

Wenger, E. (2011). *Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Science Foundation (U.S.). https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/11736

White, H. (1993). Values Come in Styles, Which Mate to Change. In R. Michod, L. Nadel, & M. Hechter (Eds.), *The Origin of Values* (pp. 63–91). New York: Aldine de Gruyer.

Zelizer, B. (1993). Journalists as interpretive communities. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *10*(3), 219–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039309366865

Zelizer, B. (2009). Journalists as interpretive communities, revisited. In S. Allan (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism* (pp. 225–234). London: Routledge.

**Lucas Graves:** School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin–Madison (United States)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2980-7145
lucas.graves@wisc.edu; https://journalism.wisc.edu/news/staff/lucas-graves/
Lucas Graves is Associate Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin–Madison who studies how news and news organizations are changing in the contemporary media ecosystem. Dr Graves has been at the forefront of research on the fact-checking movement in the United States and around the world. His book *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism* came out in 2016 from Columbia University Press. His work has appeared in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the *Nieman Journalism Lab*, and *The New York Times* as well as prominent academic journals. Between 2017 and 2019 Dr Graves was Senior Research Fellow and Acting Head of Research at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford.

**Laurens Lauer:** Institute of Sociology, University Duisburg-Essen (Germany)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9550-812X
laurens.lauer@uni-due.de; https://www.uni-due.de/soziologie/lauer_research.php
Laurens Lauer is a researcher with a focus on global and comparative studies of new media phenomena at the Institute of Sociology, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. His dissertations focuses on the worldwide spread of political fact-checking initiatives. In this context, he studied six fact-checking organizations in four countries and analyzed their embeddedness in different media-political environments.

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News" – *peer-reviewed*
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11177

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# Disrupting the News

Elizabeth Hansen*

Submitted: June 17, 2020 – Accepted: September 4, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

Disruption has become a popular shorthand explanation among news media executives and thought leaders for describing the massive business model and innovation challenges facing the incumbent producers of news. Yet the focus on digital disruption to the traditional business model of news obscures deeper changes in the values guiding journalistic practice. This essay unpacks disruptions to the landscape of news production and the practice of journalism with an attention to the institutional logic of digital media innovations. The digital values of openness and rationalization, visible in the adoption and use of metrics and analytics, crowds and engagement, and algorithmic distribution, have disrupted both the practices of journalism and the values guiding journalists' work. This essay examines those disruptions in practice and values and outlines their consequences: new values and new identities that reconfigure the journalist/audience relationship and expand the complexity of the journalist role. The stakes of the digital disruption are issues of control and transparency in newswork. Overall, this essay claims, digital disruptions in journalism are issues of control and transparency in newswork. Overall, this essay claims, digital disruptions in journalistic values and practice are both discontinuous breaks from the past and evolutions of long-standing tensions in journalism as an institution.

**Keywords**: Journalism; institutional logics; digital technology; professional identity; institutional change.

* Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School (United States); elizabeth_hansen@hks.harvard.edu; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5329-7600

> *This is the precious work of our organization: We are the storytellers, and we are also journalists. There are more intense challenges ahead of us, other journalists are losing their jobs, we need to transform ourselves into an institution that embraces digital disruption. My belief is that we cannot run scared from the advances of the digital age but instead, we must run toward them, faster, smarter and more open to change than we have ever been in our storied history. If we cannot navigate this journey of transformation, then surely the industry itself cannot thrive, cannot grow and cannot transform, because we are among its most important leaders and the mantle of leadership is upon us.*
>
> —Public Radio Executive, January 2015

## 1 Introduction

Media industry watchers and media executives alike have used the term "digital disruption" as a way to diagnose the ongoing business and innovation crises facing legacy newsrooms (Christensen et al., 2012; Lepore, 2014). "Digital disruption," in both academic scholarship and industry practice, usually connotes a death sentence for incumbents. Although incumbents were once successful, the story goes, when digital change hits, incumbents find their customers and business models displaced by newer, nimbler, more innovative companies who can serve the same customers more quickly and cheaply (Christensen, 1997; J. Gans, 2016).

I heard the term "digital disruption" — and observed the fear and anxiety it provoked — in my fieldwork in public radio in 2014 and 2015. In the public radio context, "digital disruption" operated as both a portent of disaster and a magic remedy. As a portent of disaster, my field informants used "digital disruption" to refer to the collapse of newsrooms in the newspaper industry: audiences shifting from legacy formats to digital ones, and revenue draining away. The fear of disruption was a fear of losing audience and losing revenue:

> *I worry about listeners becoming non-listeners. In the on-demand world, and with the clouding of what is and is not public media, the increased competition is significant. NPR data show that listening to live radio is going down. And commercial radio listening is dropping faster. So, the interesting thing is — new audiences are great, and good to go after them, but current concern is changing behaviors of existing audience that will no longer be our audience. that is a real sign of disruption — your market that you thought you had is diminishing.*
>
> —Public Radio Executive, February 2015

As a magic remedy, "digital disruption" in my fieldwork referred to the need for stations to pay less attention to their radio broadcasts, and instead invest in new technologies, new business models, and new platforms. Podcasting, digital news verticals, digital audio, and email newsletters were all examples of innovations that could potentially save stations from disruption by providing new audiences and new revenue streams.

On the one hand, "digital disruption" when used in this way has done heavy discursive work in the field of journalism. It is a "term of choice" that has helped a variety of established actors navigate a crisis of considerable uncertainty and complexity (Alexander et al., 2016; Lewis, 2012a; Zelizer, 2015). "Disruption" provides a powerful vocabulary of motivation and justification for change (Tavory & Swidler, 2009; Turco, 2012) not just in journalism but in all areas of activity touched by digital technology.

But the use of the term "digital disruption" to describe changes in the field of journalism has also led to an over-focus on business model disruption to incumbent news organization. This focus obscures deeper disruptions in the values and practices that constitute news as a product and journalism as an occupation. In this essay, I will argue that it is these deeper disruptions in the values and practices of journalism, more than the business model disruptions to incumbent producers of news, that are bringing the field to a point of existential crisis.

I employ the theoretical framework of *institutional logics* to understand the disruptive changes in the values and practices guiding news production that have been ushered in by successive waves of digital media innovations. I will argue that the major pattern apparent in the digital disruption of news is a reconfiguring of the journalist/audience relationship to include more openness as well as more rationalization. The openness has come through digital media innovations that allow journalists to interact with their audiences in new ways (through comments sections, through social media, and through practices such as crowdsourcing). The rationalization has come through the use of digital metrics and distribution algorithms to track, measure, and quantify audience behavior. The disruption of news by these digital media innovations is leading to a transformation in the identity of journalists via changes in their core practices and values.

This essay proceeds as follows. I first briefly define the concept of an institutional logic, and argue for its utility in studying digital disruption. I conceptualize the nature of digital media innovations by elaborating their institutional logic, focusing particularly on the values they embed. Using these concepts, I then explore how news practices and journalistic values have been disrupted by digital media innovations. Finally, using those insights, I explore what is at stake in the discourse of "digital disruption" in the news industry, and ask how those stakes shed light on the ongoing changes in the news landscape.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Before outlining the disruptive changes in news, I begin first with a short review of the institutional logics framework and outline the key concepts I will use in this essay.

Institutional logics are "socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, assumptions, values and beliefs by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activity" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 51). An institutional logic, at its core, acts as an organizing principle for a sphere of institutional life. An institutional logic contains taken-for-granted values as well as practices.

Institutional logics in competition and contradiction are what create institutional complexity and provide openings for social change (Seo & Creed, 2002). Indeed, part of the conceptual innovation of institutional logics is to render visible the ways in which institutional spheres are often in contradiction and place conflicting demands on individuals and organizations. This conflict, contradiction — and actors ability to exploit them — are theorized as an engine of institutional change (Battilana & D'aunno, 2009).

For the purposes of this essay, there are two institutional logics in conflict and contradiction that together constitute the phenomena of digital disruption in news. One logic organizes traditional journalism and one logic organizes digital media. Understanding digital disruptions in the values and practices of news production requires analyzing both. I will explain the changes in the logic of journalism throughout the body of the essay as I unpack the phenomena of digital disruption in news. I begin here with explaining the institutional logic of digital media.

Though a full institutional analysis of digital media is far beyond the scope of this essay, I outline two key institutional features of digital media that will help me analyze digital disruption in news.

First, a caveat: most scholars studying the intersection of digital media innovations and journalism have taken a socio-material stance — understanding the ways in which innovations operate as assemblages of technical and social processes and shift practice over time (Christin, 2018; Siles & Boczkowski, 2012). Like their cousins in organization studies (Orlikowski, 2000), many of these scholars are careful to stress that technology is not an independent variable which determines particular outcomes, but rather is deeply engaged with local variations in everyday practice and understandings (Boczkowski, 2005). Acknowledging the socio-material stance, my tack here is somewhat different: I want to analyze the ideological clashes — the clashes over values and assessments of what matters — that constitute the digital disruption of the news in order to understand how journalism is changing and what is at stake in that transformation.

To accomplish that analysis, I employ the framework of institutional logics because it highlights the taken-for-granted values and practices which constitute spheres of activity. Digital media innovations are of course shaped by the choices and valences of their human creators (Petre, 2018). Digital media innovations are also employed differently across different contexts, often with ambiguous and mixed results (Boczkowski, 2005). In focusing here on the institutional logic of digital media and how it shapes the values and practices of other institutional spheres, I am not falling prey to stark technological determinism. Rather, I am asking what can be learned about disruption in news by treating digital media as a semi-autonomous sphere of institutional activity that is in conflict and contradiction with the sphere of journalism.

## 3 The Institutional Logic of Digital Media

What is the institutional logic of digital media? Digital media are built atop the technology of the internet. The early technical choices which shaped the internet and the ethos which animated its early founders encoded the logic of openness and participation into digital media (Greenstein, 2015; J. Zittrain, 2008). The openness of the internet — the ability for any new endpoint to connect to the network — enabled a practice of user participation in digital media that has extended far past the early web (J. Zittrain, 2008). The logic of participation is manifested in the ubiquity of digital media platforms that facilitate the creation and distribution of user-generated content — from social networking sites to blogging software to commenting functions. This "openness" as a part of digital media's institutional logic denotes both the generativity of the internet as an ever-evolving, never-finished socio-technical system and the opportunities for participation that are available at many levels of digital media innovation (J. Zittrain, 2008; J. L. Zittrain, 2006).

The logic of participation in digital media has led to a major loss of the gatekeeping function of other institutions, particularly in journalism. Digital media allows individuals to communicate on the internet directly with each other, and with many others, with very little moderation and without having to own capital-intensive means of publishing. Digital media provides far fewer opportunities for centralized, consolidated informational gatekeeping than in traditional media (Bruns, 2008). But the deluge of digital content produced by mass participation has not meant that the need for moderation is absent (Gillespie, 2018). Instead, the moderation function has migrated from traditional publishers to the platforms that dominate digital media distribution (Gillespie, 2018; Vaidhyanathan, 2018). The severe challenge of moderating digital media at scale is directly related to the volume of de-centralized participation that digital media makes possible.

The other primary feature of the institutional logic organizing digital media is the value of rationalization through the mechanism of digital commensuration. Digital technologies — by rendering all information into a series of zeros and ones — commensurate the offline (i.e. continuous) quantities that are digitized. Commensuration as social process has a long history — and in fact is one of the core functions of bureaucracy (Espeland & Stevens, 1998). However, digital technology in general and digital media in particular have accelerated the pace and scope of commensuration and rationalization in modern life (Zuboff, 2019; Christin, 2018).

The major consequences of the commensurating and rationalizing force of digital technologies is what Zuboff calls the "informating" of everyday life activities (Zuboff, 1985). The uniqueness of digital media is that when human expression is digital, it also rendered "informated." That is, digital media generates a second-order, reflective layer of information about the expression itself (often referred to as "meta-data"). So, for example, when a user posts a personal update to Facebook, the application both records the expression ("I had a baby!") and also information about the expression — the time it was posted, who clicked on it, who liked it, etc.

The quantity and precision of second-order information generated from first-order expression or communication is what distinguishes internet-enabled digital media from other forms of media. By rendering the content and process of communication into a comprehensive digital system of zeros and ones, digital media communications are rendered commensurate, manipulable and measurable.

In summary, the institutional logic of digital media reflects the values of openness, participation, commensuration, and rationalization. Openness and participation are values derived from the early choices of internet network architects who allowed users from any endpoint to connect to the network and to participate in its evolution. Digital media innovations have come to be valued for their openness because their use is not limited to particular parameters beyond an ability to connect to the network. Rationalization is a value derived from the calculability and measurability of digital data: the 0's and 1's that allows users to create numerical explanations as well as efficiencies using digital tools. Digital media innovations are valued for their ability to rationalize: to track, measure and then optimize bits of information and communication.

## 4 Digital Media Innovation and Digital Disruptions

In the next part of the essay, I take a close look at the phenomena which constitute digital disruption in news: the series of digital media innovations which have transformed the production of news and the practice of journalism. Here my focus is mostly on the disruption of news as it has unfolded in the United States and parts of Europe.

One of the hallmarks of disruption in any industry is particular "disruptive innovations" that shift consumer behavior and offer opportunities for entrepreneurs to build different products and business models that appeal to under-served consumers. As the internet era dawned on the news industry in U.S. and Western Europe the late 1990s, there was reason for hope that digital media innovations would open up new opportunities for journalists to do some things better than before. Other areas of news production, scholars and pundits believed, would be left to "new entrants" who were taking advantage of digital media innovations to engage in traditional journalistic functions (Anderson et al., 2012).

Setting aside the business model disruptions and their revenue effects, the waves of digital media innovations which have disrupted the news industry could be roughly categorized as (1) the rise of metrics and analytics, (2) the growing use of crowds and engagement, and (3) distribution via algorithms and platform automation. The scholarship on digital media innovations in news has defined this set of phenomena as "post-industrial journalism" (Anderson et al., 2012), referring to the changing set of practices, values, and organizations which constitute the networked production and distribution of news in the digital age. To begin to characterize these digital media innovations and their disruptions, I explore each briefly below.

### 4.1 Metrics and Analytics

Digital media innovations also rendered news content — and news audiences — measurable in a different way than such content and audiences were previously (C. Anderson, 2011; Carlson, 2018; Napoli, 2011). Though newspapers always tracked circulation numbers and sales volume (Beam, 1995; Napoli, 2011), what particular articles were read or not read was difficult to measure in the ("bundled") print format. On the web, news articles are unbundled and published separately. That means each article that is rendered as a separate page can be tracked for how many users accessed the page, how long the page is open, where the user clicked from, and what else the user clicks on.

Commercial media since its inception has been deeply entwined with the available scientific and technological methods for measuring audience consumption of news as a product (Bermejo, 2009; Napoli, 2011). Where digital metrics have departed with other forms of audience measurement in other media is both that these numbers are much closer to measure of actual consumption (though technical and methodological problems remain, especially with the rise of bots) (Kosterich & Napoli, 2015; MacGregor, 2007), and that these numbers are increasingly being used in newsrooms, whereas similar figures were limited to the "business" side in news organizations (Carlson, 2018; Coddington, 2015).

The early web-based metrics used in newsrooms consisted primarily of page views, time on site, and unique visitors (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; MacGregor, 2007). Through general-purpose tools like Google Analytics, newsrooms could begin to track the popularity of different pieces of content posted to their sites. Homepage placement, headline optimization, and search engine optimization were some of the early strategies digital journalists had for making use of digital information about user behaviors. As the digital news distribution landscape has become more complicated, particularly with the rise in importance of social media platforms like Facebook, the types of data can could be compiled on how users interacted with particular pieces of content have also multiplied (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016).

What do digital metrics allow journalists or other news workers to do? Analytics systems and the metrics they provide inform different types of decisions. The first set are distribution-related decisions. For example, a reporter or editor might have to decide how to best optimize an article's headline to make sure it is properly indexed by the Google search engine and can be found in search queries. The second set are editorial decisions that have to do with story selection and coverage areas. An editor can use a tool like Crowdtangle, which can measure what is trending on Facebook, or a tool like Chartbeat, which can measure what articles are getting the most traffic on the newsroom's own site, to plan to cover particular topics or stories or to assign a particular angle on story. Analytics systems and the metrics they provide can also be used to make publishing decisions — such as what time of day is best to post certain types of stories, or how much prominence to give a story on a newsroom's homepage. At the highest level, these metrics can be used by newsroom and publishing executives to set editorial strategy, digital product development strategy, and distribution strategy (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016).

Though the intentional use of metrics to inform editorial decision-making was pioneered by digital-first media organizations like BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post, these practices have slowly diffused throughout the news industry, transforming the nature of journalistic practice and professional knowledge along the way (C. Anderson, 2011; Carlson, 2018; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Christin, 2018; Zamith, 2018). The use of metrics and analytics systems in newsrooms has spawned entirely new role categories (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Kosterich & Weber, 2018). Whereas the early adoption of web publishing in the late nineties and early aughts give rise to roles such as homepage producer, digital or online producer, digital or online editor, and digital reporter, the spread of metrics and analytics systems created new roles like audience growth editor, audience engagement editor, audience analyst (Boczkowski, 2010; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Kosterich & Weber, 2018).

### 4.2 Amateurs and Crowds: Crowdsourcing, Co-Creation, and User-Generated Content

The digital disruption of journalism has occurred not only in the realm of metrics and measurement. Via the mediated interfaces of digital platforms, non-journalists have been able to participate in the production of news much more directly. It is useful to unpack the different forms of crowd and amateur participation in the journalistic process to understand how digital media innovations have disrupted set of actors that can produce news.

Journalists have taken advantage of crowdsourcing to examine government documents (Aitamurto, 2011; Daniel & Flew, 2010) and to contribute to disaster coverage through live blogs and twitter hashtags and comments (Dailey & Starbird, 2014). Onhoua, Pinder, and Shaffer in their review of crowdsourcing practices, define it as "the act of specifically invited a group of people to participate in a reporting task — such as news gathering, data collection, or analysis — through a targeted, open call for input, personal experiences, documents, or other contributions (p. 9). Crowdsourcing has been particularly useful to investigative reporting outlets like ProPublica. The time and resources which investigations can be made both more expansive and efficient through the use of crowdsourcing (Onuoha et al., 2015).

Yet crowdsourcing is not without its difficulties. The request made to the crowd must be specific, or the task of culling through and making sense of the responses will be overwhelming. Even with a specific request, journalists must manage the process of encouraging responses through active engagement and follow-up with the publication's audience (Aitamurto, 2016; Onuoha et al., 2015). Furthermore, verification can quickly become a major problem when the scale of crowdsourced responses increases. Aitamurto, in comparing four cases of crowdsourcing, found that journalists were often forced to compromise their professional norm of publishing only verified information because the task of verification of the crowdsourced material became too unwieldy (Aitamurto, 2016).

Co-creation, the most intensive form of open journalistic practice, brings the journalists in much closer and extended contact with the audience member (Quamby & Jenkins, 2019). Co-creation is even more time and labor intensive than crowdsourcing, and is in many ways a more direct challenge to traditional journalistic norms and practices (Aitamurto, 2016).

The results of empirical studies tracing the use of "UGC" and other forms of "citizen journalism" inside newsrooms have generally shown that the content is framed by newsrooms as an additional source of information that journalists need to subject to existing process of verification (Williams et al., 2011). In other words, rather than audience-generated, participatory content precipitating major changes in journalistic practice, the use of such content often becomes "normalized" in the context of existing values and practices (Domingo et al., 2008; Singer, 2005). For example, Jonsson and Ornebring's 2011 study of user-generated content in online newspapers in Sweden and the UK found that opportunities for participation were mostly around lifestyle and popular culture content (as opposed to hard news), and that direct user participation in news production was limited.

Social media has also provided opportunities for non-journalists to participate in breaking news events, providing real-time, first-hand evidence and accounts of developing stories in ways that would have been incredibly resource-intensive in the old model of journalism. Subsequent empirical scholarship has shown how the widespread use of social media has indeed transformed the sourcing of breaking news (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Broersma & Graham, 2012; Hermida, 2010).

As digital media usage and penetration have progressed, the scholarly conversation around user-generated content has widened to include descriptions of "open source," "citizen" or "grassroots" journalism (Gillmor, 2004), or "participatory journalism" (Nip, 2006). Each of these concepts seeks to capture the role that user-generated content whether on social platforms like Twitter or Facebook, or related micro-publishing digital media such as blogging and commenting, are being used to complement existing journalistic practice (Williams et al., 2011).

### 4.3 Machines and Algorithms: Automated Journalism and Filter Bubbles

The final area in which digital media innovation has disrupted journalism is in the rise of machines and algorithms in the processing and analyzing of massive data sets, and increasingly in the curation of news (2012). In the most sophisticated use of such technologies, news organizations are using machine learning and natural language techniques to generate stories from large, structured sets of data. Companies such as Narrative Science can take sports data or financial data and generate basic stories. For example, the Associated Press works with Automated Insights technology to publish financial news.

However, there are very clear and narrow use cases for automated journalism: when the data set to be processed is not well structured or ambiguous, the resulting stories are not usable. Crime reports, little league games, and earthquake alerts are some of the other applications of automated journalism (Graefe, 2016). As Andreas Graefe wrote in his review of automated journalism, "[it] works for fact-based stories for which clean, structured, and reliable data are available. In such situations, algorithms can create content on a large scale, personalizing it to the needs of an individual reader, quicker, cheaper, and potentially with fewer errors than any human journalist" (2016, p. 14).

There are two other ways in which algorithms and machine learning techniques have been transforming journalism, both on the production and consumption side. The increasing importance of social platforms like Twitter and Facebook for the distribution of news content has put many news organizations at the mercy of the algorithmic curation engines which prioritize and individualize what content users see in their social feeds (Bell et al., 2017; Rashidian et al., 2018). Facebook's NewsFeed algorithm in particular, has been the subject of much speculation, worry, and gaming on the part of news publishers who on the one hand, want to access Facebook's massive global audience, but on the other hand, resent its increasing economic and audience power on the web. Early warnings about "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011) — the tendency of algorithmically-powered content filters meant to identify and reinforce user's particular preferences — have widened into larger concerns about the fracturing and polarization of particularly political news on social platforms (Benkler et al., 2018).

## 5 Openness and Rationalization Disrupts the Journalist/Audience Relationship

As the digital disruption of news has unfolded, the metrics-mediated audience has given rise to the "agenda of the audience" (C. Anderson, 2011) as an independent influence on the newsworthiness, apart from editorial judgement. The textually-mediated audience has expanded from "letters to the editor" to a torrent of comments, tweets, posts, likes, shares, and emails that can influence the images that journalists hold in their minds of their audience. Audience participation has expanded from phoned-in tips and sources to a whole range of user-generated media content that journalists can incorporate into their newswork (or not). And finally, the algorithmically-mediated audience expresses its preferences through the the curation engines built into new social platforms that journalists must take into account when publishing their work (Tandoc Jr & Vos, 2016). Through the mediation of digital media innovations, the audience is present in journalists' everyday work in new and different ways.

The values of openness and rationalization which are part of the institutional logic of digital media have disrupted the underlying values of news most profoundly through their effects on the journalist/audience relationship. The rise of metrics and algorithms (information about the audience), crowdsourcing and co-creation (digitally mediated interactions with the audience), and algorithms and automation (digital distribution to the audience) are disruptive because through the embedded values of openness and rationalization, these digital media innovations change the knowledge that the journalist has about the audience and the types of interactions that are possible with the audience.

In the high-modern period of journalism, the audience was constituted for journalists most often as colleagues, editors, sources, and immediate friends and family (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997; H. J. Gans, 1979). Much of the sociology of news in that period focused on unpacking what kind of an impact those face-to-face relationships had on journalists and on the production of news as those roles functioned as proxies for the audience (Fishman, 1988; Tuchman, 1978). Many scholars found that journalists were writing for other journalists, for the sources they interviewed, and from their experiences with friends and family outside the workplace (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997). Though the business side of news organizations engaged in market research to understand typical readers and their motivations, this knowledge rarely made it into the newsroom.

In contrast, the role of the audience (or, as Rosen (2006) famously coined, "the people formerly known as the audience") has shifted with disruptive digital media innovations that have brought readers/users into different relationships to media content. As this has unfolded, the role of journalists has changed as well. The nexus of that change — and the one of interest theoretically here — has been in how journalists construct and orient to the images of the audience that they carry in their minds (C. Anderson, 2011; Robinson, 2019). The role of the imagined audience in constituting the role of the journalist is important to understand because, unlike face-to-face social roles, such as doctor and patient, or mother and daughter, the typical journalist goes about his or her work without much face-to-face interaction with members of the audience. Thus the cognitive typifications of the audience are an essential component of the role of journalists, the identity of journalists, and the institution of journalism (Douglas, 1986).

As successive waves of digital media innovation have unfolded, the audience/journalist relationship has continued to evolve to include more openness as well as more rationalization. These changes are particularly apparent in the ways in which gatekeeping practices have shifted.

## 6 Disruptions in Gatekeeping Practices

Gatekeeping refers to the practices of story selection exercised by editors in a newsroom. It is, "the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news" (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The digital disruption in gatekeeping practices stems from the role of metrics, algorithms, and engagement in signifying audience preference. This is because inherent in the idea of gatekeeping is the counter-positioning of editorial judgement and audience demand — a balancing act between what the editor thinks the audience needs to know, and what the audience wants to read (H. J. Gans, 1979). Gatekeeping practices are thus deeply tied to the images of the audience that editors (and really any news workers who use metrics) hold in their minds (C. Anderson, 2011) and to editors' sense of their professional obligations to the public.

The audience/journalist relationship has often been an arms-length and ambivalent one, with the preferences of colleagues, peers, friends and family often standing in for the editor's a generalized notion of "the public" (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997; Robinson, 2019). To the extent that metrics, engagement, and social platforms are used in newsrooms to produce to interpret audience preferences, those preferences can then have the power to shape the practices of editorial gatekeeping. If audience tastes and editorial preferences were aligned, then the gatekeeping of editors would not change much with shifts in the quality, type, and timing of audience preference information. Yet studies of gatekeeping in both the "high modern" period of journalism (DeWerth-Pallmeyer, 1997; H. J. Gans, 1979) and more recently (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Bunce, 2017; Petre, 2015) suggest that by and large, the tastes of the audience and the professional tastes of editors tend to diverge. Editors and reporters tend to prefer "hard news," while readers tend to prefer more sensational "soft news" (Boczkowski, 2010; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010; Singer, 2011).

And yet as metrics, crowds and engagement, and algorithms have diffused into digital news production, the "agenda of the audience" (C. Anderson, 2011) has shifted from a background influence to a locus of strategy and monetization. Much of the scholarship on metrics and analytics uncovered a push-and-pull between gatekeeping sensibilities and audience preferences (C. Anderson, 2011; Christin, 2018). But as metrics and analytics systems have become more precise, and as digital distribution technology has become more functionally targeted, newsrooms are increasingly adopting the language and practice of customer segmentation and customer targeting to build their audiences.

The practices of "audience development" and "audience growth" are relatively new developments on the digital journalism landscape, both made possible by the use of tools that can segment and target readers. As these tools spread, they carry a logic of hyper-rationalization to the creation of audiences. The concept of an "audience funnel," borrowed from the discipline of consumer marketing, is on its way to being fully ensconced in journalistic practice. This development marks a complete inversion of traditional gatekeeping practices via the rationalizing logic of digital media innovations. In service of audience growth (and reader revenue), the rationalized "agenda of the audience" is the only agenda that has legitimacy and is the locus around which editorial and business practices are increasingly organized.

## 7 Transformed Values

I have argued thus far that the values of openness and rationalization which are embedded in the institutional logic of digital media have disrupted the audience-journalist relationship by changing the gatekeeping practices of journalism. In this section, I explore the transformative effects of openness and rationalization on the traditional occupational values of journalism via these profound changes in practice. To do so, I draw on the four core values that make up the occupational ideology of journalists: autonomy, ethics, immediacy, and public service (Deuze, 2005).

### 7.1 Autonomy

Autonomy is a core value of journalistic work. The ability to make independent judgements of newsworthiness, and the first amendment freedom to publish free of interference or censorship are two of the most important defining features of journalism. How is autonomy reconfigured by the openness and rationalization of digital media innovations? The rationalization of digital metrics has been clearly interpreted as a threat to editorial autonomy, as the metrics-driven "agenda of the audiences" impresses itself on the editorial process. The standards of performance for journalists is also shifting under the rationalizing force of digital metrics — think of the Kinja leader board at Gawker, which ranks writers and editors by their traffic numbers (Petre, 2015). A set of critical scholars in journalism studies have pointed out that the rationalization of journalistic labor led by metrics is eroding the autonomy of journalists, and empowering managers of news organizations to control ever larger parts of the labor process (Bunce, 2017).

The autonomy of journalists is being reconfigured by the value of digital openness in other ways as well. The freedom of the press is deeply entwined with the modes of publishing available to journalists. As the networked press migrates to large-scale technology platforms which dominate the application layers of the internet — Google, Facebook, Twitter — the architectures and policy choices of those platforms exert a powerful influence on what the public sees, reads, and hears (Ananny, 2018). The autonomy that print journalists have enjoyed until very recently was in large part dependent on the monopolies their employers enjoyed over publishing channels. As the publishing function has become disaggregated from news production (Bell et al., 2017), the autonomy of journalists to shape the news agenda has also been eroded (Rashidian et al., 2019). The openness that these platforms have provided to audiences — the ability for anyone to participate in the production and publishing of media content — has also ironically consolidated considerable power in the hands of a few companies and away from the press as an institution.

### 7.2 Ethics

The ethics of this digital disruption in journalism are also in flux as the openness of digital technologies brings new actors into the journalistic field. What does verification and accuracy mean when news organizations are deluged with information, some of it credible but much of it misinformation (Benkler et al., 2018)? The revelations of targeted mis and disinformation attacks on social platforms (D. Lazer et al., 2017; D. Lazer et al., 2018) have raised the question of the ethical responsibility of journalists in the new digital media landscape to a fever pitch. Credibility has been a core ethical principle of journalism and a key outcome of the gatekeeping role of editors (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). And yet, given the ongoing migration of publishing power away from news organizations and towards digital technology platforms, the question of how precisely to exercise that gatekeeping power in an effective way is ever more vexing.

Neutrality and objectivity are similarly ethical values in flux. The monopoly on publishing power in industrial journalism meant that very few editorial points of view could be expressed in any given information space and that journalists could claim the mantle of objectivity and neutrality without much challenge (Hamilton, 2004). Indeed, in historical perspective the rise of an independent and neutral press was deeply related to the monopoly power publishers held in their markets, and the need to appeal to as wide a swath of the public as possible (Hamilton, 2004).

The radical openness of digital platforms at one point promised a new networked public sphere (Benkler, 2006), the right of any citizen to contribute their voice and opinion to the public debate on issues of importance to civic society. The monopoly of the press to claim neutrality and moral authority, and thereby shape public opinion would be supplanted, the thinking went, by a symphony of new publics (Benkler, 2006; Gillmor, 2004; Shirky, 2008).

To some extent this has been true, as the value of digital openness has ushered new and different voices have entered the public sphere. The challenges leveled at the neutrality and objectivity of the press have only gotten louder (the current U.S. President being the loudest example). In addition to verification and editorial gatekeeping, neutrality and objectivity are also inputs to the production of credibility that has been the mandate of professional journalism. Thus the challenge to press neutrality via the value of openness has also contributed to the erosion of press credibility and a threat to its legitimacy (e.g. "Fake news").

The value of rationalization has similarly re-configured the ethical values of traditional journalism. In the rationalized logic of audience segmentation and targeting, the question of what constitutes neutrality and objectivity becomes difficult to answer. If audience behavior, captured and codified via digital distribution tools, signals a preference for content with a particular point of view, does that point of view then become the objective referent for that audience? What does it mean to take a "neutral" position in a public sphere that has been algorithmically personalized?

### 7.3 Immediacy

The value of immediacy in the reporting of events has mostly intensified with the digital disruption of journalism. The openness of participation in the breaking news process, which social media has brought about, increases the pace at which breaking news can be reported. In these arenas too, journalists are grappling with questions of verification and credibility. A number of recent controversies are illustrative. For example, shortly after the terrorist attack on the Las Vegas music festival, Google search results surfaced inaccurate and unverified identification of the shooter's identity. Those results were picked up and reported by some news organizations. This prompted a debate within the profession — where does the responsibility lie for the spread of such misinformation? When the public demands for real-time information and immediate answers from social media pull against the journalistic process of verification and promise of credible information, where does the culpability lie when lies are spread on the internet?

### 7.4 Public Service

Finally, what does it mean to serve the public in an open and rationalized digital media environment? The notion of a singular public has almost completely collapsed in the digital media space. The networked public sphere evolved to be a network of micro communities, each insulated in their own filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). The principles of homophily and emotional contagion which drive information flow on social platforms (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013) and the rationalized curation algorithms which ensure that like content follows like content (Benkler et al., 2018), have now thoroughly fractured the digital public into a series of disconnected publics (Hindman, 2008).

To the extent that newsrooms gain traction on a notion of public service in the digital news landscape, it is often because of an elision between an idea of "the public" and an idea of "the audience." In the context of rationalized and targeted audiences, "public service" as "audience service" actually becomes an empirically testable question. Did the new newsletter have an open rate above 5%? Did the new blog format attract users who returned more than three times in a month? Those questions are much easier to ask and answer than are the stickier ones of what constitutes a public in a pluralistic, polarized, and unequal society. Thus public service in this new milieu is a truly vexing value. Some scholars have argued for a "right to hear" in this new networked space, with reimagined notions of tree freedom to support that right (Ananny, 2018).

## 8 Ascendant Values

Alongside the unfolding reconfiguration in the traditional values of journalism is a new set of ascendant values brought about by the new types of interactions between journalists and audiences made possible in digital media. The rise of impact, engagement, and user-as-consumer, each have roots in older conceptions of journalism, but are coming to the fore in new ways in the disrupted news landscape.

### 8.1 Impact

The value of impact refers to the effects that a piece of journalism has in the world of politics, policy, and ideas (Green & Patel, 2013; Pitt & Green-Barber, 2017; Powers, 2018). Impact is something of an antidote to rationalized metrics — as an occupational value, journalists often use it as a standard to assess the value of a piece of work apart from its digital performance (Powers, 2018). As foundations have exercised increasing influence in the news landscape, adopting the value of impact has become a pre-requisite for newsrooms seeking philanthropic support. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that philanthropic values of impact and journalistic values of impact are one and the same. Indeed, some of the most interesting developments in the post-industrial journalism landscape are the new forms of reporting, like solutions journalism, that explicitly take on the tension between journalistic and philanthropic impact, and attempt to create new practices and values that are hybrid of both.

### 8.2 Engagement

Engagement is another ascendant value. This refers to the quality and amount of interactions (sometimes digital, sometimes face-to-face) between journalists as particular audience members (Nelson, 2018 & 2019). In the context of fracturing publics and audiences as gatekeepers, engagement is like a twin to public service and is increasingly considered a good unto itself, though it can also boost the relative competitive advantage of publications (Hansen & Goligoski, 2018). In the early days of social media, engagement was mostly an add-on to the standard editorial process, a step in the distribution work flow that ensured social media users could find and consume a publication's content (Bell et al., 2017). But as the digital advertising business has tilted against the commercial interests of publishers, social media as a tool for raw reach has faded in importance (Rashidian et al., 2019). Engagement in the last five years has come to mean something much different: a two-way relationship between newsroom and audience, a "new social contract" (Rosen, 2017), that envisions a productive and generative open relationship between journalists and readers. The platform Hearken's strategic transformation from an "engagement tool" to an "engagement approach" tracks nicely the evolution of the value of engagement from distributional to interactional.

### 8.3 User as Consumer

Finally, some scholars have pointed out the ascendant journalistic language around the audience as a user-consumer (Bruns, 2008). In a highly commercial media context such as the U.S., the audience member has always been both a consumer and a citizen — the consumer was identified, measured, and served to an advertiser by the business side of the news organization, and the citizen was served by the newsroom. Digital media innovations have introduced a new role of the audience member as a user — a person on the other end of a news article who is not just embedded in the state as a citizen and in the market as a consumer, but is embedded in the digital world as a user of technology (Lewis, 2012b). This user has a smartphone with some apps, a desktop computer with a browser, a smart-home speaker. This user has particular needs and is seeking particular gratifications that news organizations and increasingly journalists are expected to provide through the practice of user experience design (Hansen & Goligoski, 2018).

At the same time, the commercialization of web services has exaggerated the role of the audience member as a consumer (Wu, 2016). The harvesting of user data and the use of such data to hyper-target digital advertising to users is the most obvious example of user-as-consumer that dominates the digital media space (Zuboff, 2019).

Some scholars have termed these new values "entrepreneurial" and see their ascendancy as the product of both digital trends and the disintegration of traditional employment and career paths in the news industry (Davidson & Meyers, 2016; Vos & Singer, 2016). It is true that these values are more present in some of the new organizational forms that have begun to dot the news landscape — digital-first non-profit newsrooms, for example (Carlson & Usher, 2016). At the same time, the evolution of these values inside legacy news organizations suggests that these ascendent values are not only embedded in the edge experiments of journalism, but are part and parcel of the wider transformation of journalism in the disrupted landscape of news. (And it might be more accurate to say that, "entrepreneurial" values are in fact a part of a "product" design and the product lifecycle mindset elevated by the cultural and economic supremacy of Silicon Valley.)

## 9 Role Transformations

Overall, as this essay has tried to show, the digital disruption of journalism, through the clash of traditional occupational values with the digital values of openness and rationalization, has led to both de-professionalizing and a re-professionalizing of the journalist role (Meyers & Davidson, 2016). On the one hand, some of journalism's long-held practices and values have collapsed. On the other hand, new roles and sub-occupations are being formed almost yearly in response to this evolving change (Kosterich & Weber, 2018). Social media teams, audience growth editors, audience engagement editors, are a few of the newer roles that have grown up in response to the new possibilities (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018). Organizationally, the digital disruption of journalism is eroding and reworking the traditional boundaries between business and editorial functions inside news outlets (Hansen & Goligoski 2018). These new roles often sit at the intersection of business and editorial functions — feeding insights about the audience to the business and marketing teams, while translating those insights to editors who can make informed choices about content strategy.

These changes are not the same everywhere. The digital disruption of the news, far from bringing about convergence to a single model, has led to a fracturing of the news media ecosystem. There are many different types of news organizations serving many different needs, and the operation of the digital disruption manifests in very context-specific ways.

On the consumption side, scholars and practitioners worry that the digitized news which is the product of a disrupted journalism — personalized, measured, and widely distributed — is eroding the common knowledge and public understanding that were central outcomes of the ethical and public service values of journalism (Tandoc & Thomas, 2014). For journalists as workers, the digital disruption of news and the economic fragility of news organizations have thrown them into a class of precarious workers, in which the tension between openness, rationalization, and their traditional occupational values confronts them very clearly and has prompted conflicts with professional norms. As one scholar noted, "journalism as an institution is still struggling to define clear professional norms for the use of audience clicks and at present sticks — at least in words — to traditional norms" (Welberset al., 2016, p. 14).

## 10 Reconciling Rationalization and Participation in a Disrupted News Landscape

My analysis of the transformation journalistic values through the influence of the institutional logic of digital media raises the question of how the values of openness and rationalization are themselves held in dynamic tension. The simultaneous rationalization and democratization of newswork would seem to be a contradiction. How can digital disruption of an institution like journalism produce both more rationalization and more openness? Wouldn't an openness to the contributions of actors outside the traditional boundaries of an institution — readers, lay experts, bloggers — suggest less rationalization in the practices of production? Rationalization through metrics, after all, has typically been theorized in the sociological literature as leading to more standardization and centralization of control (Christin, 2018; Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Espeland & Stevens, 2008). And the scientific management literature has long taken for granted that increasing rationalization leads to more formalization and more efficiency, qualities that would seem to be at odds with open participation by anyone with an interest or motivation to join in a particular form of institutional work. How do these two values of the digital logic become reconciled?

Anderson, in his fieldwork of digital newsrooms in Philadelphia and New Jersey (2011), uncovers and theorizes this underlying tension between openness and rationalization in the nature of digital newswork. He writes, "[the] specific puzzle that emerged over the course of my research [was] the tension between the common rhetorical invocation of the news audience as a 'productive and generative' entity, and the simultaneous, increasingly common institutional reduction of the audience to a quantifiable, rationalizable, largely consumptive aggregate" (Anderson, 2011, p. 551). How is it, Anderson asks, that these two logics — one of generative, open audiences, and one of quantified audiences — can operate simultaneously?

Specifically, the ability to see which types of stories were doing well (being read by more visitors) versus which types of stories were doing poorly (being read by fewer web visitors), was changing how editors and reporters felt about their work, and how they assessed story quality and newsworthiness. Anderson clearly shows in his ethnographic data that although there was a fascination with traffic numbers, particularly in the Philly.com newsroom, that the gap these numbers exposed between traditional judgements of newsworthiness and the demonstrated preferences of the audience, was both changing practice and generating some mixed feelings.

The professional change in assessment of newsworthiness was a numbers-driven rationalization of what the audience wanted to read. The tension between a quantified audience (whose behavior has been measured and analyzed through digital traces) and a creative audience (who has agency and can participate and influence the news process) is thus, Anderson argues, resolved at the level of professional motivation and self-conception. If being a good digital journalist means being responsive to the needs of the digital audience, then the digital data available to quantify and rationalize audience behavior is a key piece of the knowledge required to produce valuable digital journalism. Thus, the rationalization of digital technology becomes the mechanism which promotes digital democratization, and vice versa. As Anderson writes, "The preferences of active audiences, in other words, need to be measured and taken into account" (p. 564). This is not a complete revision of previous professional values, however, as Anderson's case of audience comments clearly shows. In the qualitative arena of digital interaction, the professional code of distance and skepticism between journalists and their audiences still seemed to hold sway.

At the theoretical level, I want to take Anderson's analysis a step further. The reconciliation of rationalized audiences and participatory audiences precipitated a shift in the identity of the journalists he studied. That is, their self-conceptions of what it means to be a good journalist were shifting as a result of the reconfiguration of the journalist-audience relationship. Anderson found evidence that the rationalized journalist-audience role relationship and the participatory journalist-audience role relationship both existed simultaneously in a more complex professional identity than what preceded it. This suggests one of the core disruptive effects of digital media innovations is the evolution of actors' identities to contain more complex role relationships, which are complemented by a reconfigured set of values, and undergirded by a transformed set of practices.

## 11 The Stakes: Control and Transparency

The previous sections reviewed reconfiguration in the occupational values of journalism as a result of the ongoing clash between the values of openness and participation encouraged by the use of digital media innovations, and transformations in the identity and role of journalists. At this point, I want to abstract up another level to ask what is at stake in the digital disruption of the news. I have traced the contours of digital changes in practice, values, and roles, and identity produced by the disruptive nature of digital technologies but have so far left the deeper question of the so what. Why does it matter? What is at stake for the institution of the press as journalism transforms?

The stakes of this change in the immediate information and interactional environment surrounding journalist's everyday work is the level of control they can exert over their production of knowledge about society, and the level of transparency and exposure their work is subjected to. Digital metrics provide a level of informational transparency into the reception of a journalists' work in ways that were not and are not possible in other media. Audience metrics in other media are probabilistic, and provide much less information granularity than sophisticated digital metrics (especially those collected from social media platforms).

Similarly, the ability for journalists to engage in new types of digitally-mediated interactions with individual audience members provides the potential for more transparency between a journalist, her process, and the user. This transparency can be mobilized for a productive two-way exchange between a journalist and her readers in ways that enhance the quality of the final product (e.g. ProPublica's use of crowdsourcing), or it can devolve into digital abuse. Either way, the journalistic process, and the journalist as an individual, is laid bare in the digital space. Under these conditions of enhanced transparency — both in terms of quantification and visibility of process — some of the mystification of expertise can dissolve.

The second, related, set of stakes in the digital disruption of journalism is the level of control that journalists can exert in their work. The agenda-setting role of the audience—through the information that metrics and algorithms can provide, and through the possibilities for collaborative and co-creative interactions on digital platforms — has shifted both the level of control over the news agenda and core journalistic values of newsworthiness (Anderson, 2011). In other words, the openness and participation of amateurs, and the rationalizing force of metrics and algorithms, has displaced a degree of professional control that was enjoyed by journalists in purely monopoly media contexts. This control has not been given up lightly, and not ceded fully (Deuze, 2005; Singer, 2005). Yet newsrooms of every stripe have had to wrestle with just how much control over knowledge and process to cede to the openness and rationalization of digital tools, and how much to retain in order to justify their (economic and social) value and maintain the moral authority to speak on behalf of the public.

## 12 Conclusion

Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that the disruptive effects of digital media innovations, and the stakes of their operation, are completely *sui generis*. What stands out in the analysis of how the incorporation of digital media innovations are disrupting the production and distribution of news is how many of the conflicts were present in the institutional complexities of journalism to begin with. Though scholars have pointed to a high modern period, particularly in the U.S., the practice of journalism has varied widely across regions, types of media, and types of organizations. Journalism as practiced in public service broadcasting is and was different from journalism practiced in metro newspapers or in network television newsrooms. Because of this variation, the "same" technologies introduced into different social contexts have had very different trajectories (Boczkowski, 2005). As Boczkowski pointed out in his groundbreaking early study of digital transformation in newspapers — digital technologies evolve inside of different newsrooms facing different local contexts, each with their own particular technical histories.

Yet there is one, obvious, persistent tension in the institution of journalism, which the incorporation of digital media innovations has not resolved but rather exacerbated. The market logic of capitalism has existed uneasily alongside the occupational logic of journalism from its early days (Schudson, 2003). In the ideal-typical case, the editorial integrity of the newsroom is insulated from the demands of the market, represented in the commercial interests of the news outlet and its advertisers. Yet in actuality, there has been almost ceaseless public and scholarly debate over whether and how the commercial interests of advertisers influence the editorial agenda of newsrooms (Hamilton, 2004).

The rise of digital media innovations in journalism has heightened and aggravated this tension. This is partially because the level of competition in the digital media environment — and the eventual consolidation of advertising market power in the hands of a few big internet companies — has meant that news organizations stood very little chance of exercising the kind of monopoly power in digital media that they enjoyed in print or broadcast. The search for financial viability in digital news has come to entail the incorporation of commercial concerns into parts of the journalistic process (particularly audience growth and publishing) that were not so strongly present in other media.

Nevertheless, as digital media innovations have developed and spread in the field of journalism, the values of openness and rationalization, embedded in the institutional logic of digital media, have created new conflicts and tensions, many of which I have laid out in this essay. Tracing how the values and practices of digital media's openness and participation are changing the values and practice of journalism has revealed continuities, discontinuities, and radical reconfigurations.

## References

Aitamurto, T. (2011). The impact of crowdfunding on journalism: Case study of Spot.Us, a platform for community-funded reporting. *Journalism Practice, 5*(4), 429–445. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2010.551018

Aitamurto, T. (2016). Crowdsourcing as a knowledge-search method in digital journalism: Ruptured ideals and blended responsibility. *Digital Journalism, 4*(2), 280–297. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1034807

Alexander, J. C., Breese, E. B., & Luengo, M. (Eds.) (2016). *The Crisis of Journalism Reconsidered*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Ananny, M. (2018). *Networked Press Freedom: Creating Infrastructures for a Public Right to Hear*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Anderson, C. (2011). Between creative and quantified audiences: Web metrics and changing patterns of newswork in local US newsrooms. *Journalism, 12*(5), 550–566. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911402451

Anderson, C. W., Bell, E., & Shirky, C. (2012). *Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report*. New York: Columbia Journalism School.

Battilana, J., & D'Aunno, T. (2009). Institutional work and the paradox of embedded agency. In T. Lawrence, R. Suddaby, & B. Leca (Eds.), *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations* (pp. 31–58). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511596605.002

Beam, R. A. (1995). How newspapers use readership research. *Newspaper Research Journal, 16*(2), 28–38. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F073953299501600204

Belair-Gagnon, V., & Holton, A. E. (2018). Boundary Work, Interloper Media, And Analytics In Newsrooms. *Digital Journalism, 6*(4), 492–508. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1445001

Bell, E. J., Owen, T., Brown, P. D., Hauka, C., & Rashidian, N. (2017). *The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Reengineered Journalism*. New York: The Tow Center for Digital Journalism.

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bermejo, F. (2009). Audience manufacture in historical perspective: from broadcasting to Google. *New Media & Society, 11*(1–2), 133–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808099579

Boczkowski, P. J. (2005). *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Boczkowski, P. J. (2010). *News at Work: Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Boczkowski, P. J., & Mitchelstein, E. (2013). *The News Gap: When the Information Preferences of the Media and the Public Diverge*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.

Broersma, M., & Graham, T. (2012). Social media as beat: Tweets as a news source during the 2010 British and Dutch elections. *Journalism Practice, 6*(3), 403–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2012.663626

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*. New York: Peter Lang.

Bunce, M. (2017). Management and resistance in the digital newsroom. *Journalism*, *20*(7), 890–905. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884916688963

Carlson, M. (2018). Confronting Measurable Journalism. *Digital Journalism, 6*(4), 406–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1445003

Carlson, M., & Usher, N. (2016). News Startups as Agents of Innovation. *Digital Journalism, 4*(5), 563–581. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1076344

Center, P. R. (2019). *Newspapers Fact Sheet*. Retrieved from https://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/

Cherubini, F., & Nielsen, R. K. (2016). *Editorial Analytics: How News Media are Developing and Using Audience Data and Metrics*. Retrieved from Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:3e5e85d4-416d-42e6-8a58-c811ff5aa505/datastreams/ATTACHMENT01

Christensen, C. M. (1997). *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Christensen, C. M., Skok, D., & Allworth, J. (2012). Breaking News-Mastering the art of disruptive innovation in journalism. *Nieman Reports*, *66*(3), 6. https://niemanreports.org/articles/breaking-news/

Christin, A. (2018). Counting Clicks: Quantification and Variation in Web Journalism in the United States and France. *American Journal of Sociology*, *123*(5), 1382–1415. https://doi.org/10.1086/696137

Coddington, M. (2015). The wall becomes a curtain: Revisiting journalism's news–business boundary. In B. Carlson, & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 79–94). London: Routledge.

Dailey, D., & Starbird, K. (2014). Journalists as crowdsourcerers: Responding to crisis by reporting with a crowd. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, *23*(4–6), 445–481. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-014-9208-z

Daniel, A., & Flew, T. (2010). *The Guardian Reportage of the UK MP Expenses Scandal: A Case Study of Computational Journalism*. Paper presented at the Record of the Communications Policy and Research Forum 2010.

Davidson, R., & Meyers, O. (2016). "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" Exit, voice and loyalty among journalists. *Journalism Studies*, *17*(5), 590–607. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.988996

Deuze, M. (2005). What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, *6*(4), 442–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884905056815

DeWerth-Pallmeyer, D. (1997). *The Audience in the News*. Mahwah, N.J: Erlbaum.

Domingo, D., Quandt, T., Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Singer, J. B., & Vujnovic, M. (2008). Participatory journalism practices in the media and beyond: An international comparative study of initiatives in online newspapers. *Journalism Practice*, *2*(3), 326–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512780802281065

Douglas, M. (1986). *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Espeland, W. N., & Stevens, M. L. (1998). Commensuration as a Social Process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *24*(1), 313–343. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.313

Espeland, W. N., & Stevens, M. L. (2008). A sociology of quantification. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, *49*(3), 401–436. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975609000150

Ferrer-Conill, R., & Tandoc, E. C. (2018). The Audience-Oriented Editor. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 436–453. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1440972

Fishman, M. (1988). *Manufacturing the News*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Vintage Books.

Gans, J. (2016). *The Disruption Dilemma*. Boston: MIT press.

Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gillmor, D. (2004). *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism By the People, For the People*. Sebastopol CA: O'Reilly Media.

Graefe, A. (2016). *Guide to Automated Journalism*. New York: Columbia Journalism Review.

Green, D., & Patel, M. (2013). *Deepening engagement for lasting impact: A framework for measuring media performance and results*. Retrieved from: https://cmsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Deepening-Engagement-for-Lasting-Impact-Resoucres-reports.pdf

Greenstein, S. M. (2015). *How the Internet Became Commercial: Innovation, Privatization, and the Birth of a New Network*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hagey, K. L. I. A. Y. S. (2019). In News Industry, a Stark Divide Between Haves and Have-Nots. *The Wall Street Journal*, May 4. Retrieved from: https://www.wsj.com/graphics/local-newspapers-stark-divide/

Hamilton, J. (2004). *All the News that's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hansen, E., & Goligoski, E. (2018). *Guide to Audience Revenue and Engagement*. New York City: Columbia Journalism Review.

Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *4*(3), 297–308. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1732598

Hindman, M. (2008). *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kosterich, A., & Napoli, P. M. (2015). Reconfiguring the Audience Commodity. *Television & New Media*, *17*(3), 254–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476415597480

Kosterich, A., & Weber, M. S. (2019). Transformation of a Modern Newsroom Workforce. *Journalism Practice*, *13*(4), 431–457. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1497454

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Lazer, D., Baum, M., Grinberg, N., Friedland, L., Joseph, K., Hobbs, W., & Mattsson, C. (2017). Combating fake news: An agenda for research and action. *Harvard Kennedy School, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy*, *2*, May. retrieved from: https://shorensteincenter.org/combating-fake-news-agenda-for-research/

Lazer, D., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., Zittrain, J. L. (2018). The science of fake news. *Science*, *359*(6380), 1094–1096. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998

Lepore, J. (2014). The disruption machine. *The New Yorker*, June 23, 30–36. Retrieved from: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/23/the-disruption-machine

Lewis, S. C. (2012a). The tension between professional control and open participation: Journalism and its boundaries. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(6), 836–866. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.674150

Lewis, S. C. (2012b). From Journalism to Information: The Transformation of the Knight Foundation and News Innovation. *Mass Communication and Society*, *15*(3), 309–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2011.611607

MacGregor, P. (2007). Tracking the Online Audience. *Journalism Studies*, *8*(2), 280–298. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700601148879

Meyers, O., & Davidson, R. (2016). Conceptualizing journalistic careers: Between interpretive community and tribes of professionalism. *Sociology Compass*, *10*(6), 419–431. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12376

Mitchelstein, E., & Boczkowski, P. J. (2010). Online news consumption research: An assessment of past work and an agenda for the future. *New Media & Society*, *12*(7), 1085–1102. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444809350193

Napoli, P. M. (2011). *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nelson, J. L. (2018). The Elusive Engagement Metric. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 528–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1445000

Nelson, J. L. (2019). The next media regime: The pursuit of "audience engagement" in journalism. *Journalism*. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884919862375

Nip, J. Y. (2006). Exploring the second phase of public journalism. *Journalism Studies*, *7*(2), 212–236. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500533528

Onuoha, M., Pinder, J., & Schaffer, J. (2015). *Guide to Crowdsourcing*. New York City: Columbia Journalism Review. Retrieved from: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/guide_to_crowdsourcing.php

Orlikowski, W. J. (2000). Using Technology and Constituting Structures: A Practice Lens for Studying Technology in Organizations. *Organization Science*, *11*(4), 404–428. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.11.4.404.14600

Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You*. New York: Penguin Books Limited.

Petre, C. (2015). *The Traffic Factories: Metrics at Chartbeat, Gawker Media, and The New York Times*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University. Retrieved from: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/the_traffic_factories_metrics_at_chartbeat_gawker_media_and_the_new_york_times.php

Petre, C. (2018). Engineering Consent. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 509–527. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1444998

Pitt, F., & Green-Barber, L. (2017). *The Case for Media Impact: A Case Study of ICIJ's Radical Collaboration Strategy*. New York City: Columbia Journalism Review. Retrieved from: https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D85Q532V

Powers, E. (2018). Selecting Metrics, Reflecting Norms. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 454–471. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1445002

Quamby, K., Goligoski, E., & Jenkins, J. (2019). *Making Journalism More Memberful*. Retrieved from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58cfa917d2b85767b5778f0a/t/5d6639e23295f200016c45c3/1566980612512/mpp_memberful_routines_report_eng_01.pdf

Rashidian, N., Brown, P. D., Hansen, E., Bell, E. J., & Albright, J. R. (2019). *Friend and Foe: The Platform Press at the Heart of Journalism*. Retrieved from: https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/the-platform-press-at-the-heart-of-journalism.php

Robinson, J. G. (2019). *The Audience in the Mind's Eye: How Journalists Imagine Their Readers*. Retrieved from: https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/d8-drvj-wj06

Rosen, J. (2006). *The People Formerly Known as The Audience*. In: PressThink. Retrieved from: http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

Rosen, J. (2017). This is What a News Organization Looks Like When It Is Built on Reader Trust. In: PressThink. https://pressthink.org/2017/03/news-organization-looks-like-built-reader-trust/

Schudson, M. (2003). *The Sociology of News, Contemporary Societies*. New York: Norton.

Seo, M.-G., & Creed, W. D. (2002). Institutional contradictions, praxis, and institutional change: A dialectical perspective. *Academy of management review*, *27*(2), 222–247. https://doi.org/10.2307/4134353

Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. London: Penguin Press.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. (2009). *Gatekeeping Theory*. New York: Routledge.

Siles, I., & Boczkowski, P. J. (2012). Making sense of the newspaper crisis: A critical assessment of existing research and an agenda for future work. *New Media & Society*, *14*(8), 1375–1394. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1461444812455148

Singer, J. B. (2005). The political j-blogger: "Normalizing" a new media form to fit old norms and practices. *Journalism*, *6*(2), 173–198. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884905051009

Singer, J. B. (2011). Community service: Editor pride and user preference on local newspaper websites. *Journalism Practice*, *5*(6), 623–642. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2011.601938

Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2013). Emotions and information diffusion in social media. Sentiment of microblogs and sharing behavior. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *29*(4), 217–248. https://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222290408

Tandoc, E. C., & Thomas, R. J. (2014). The Ethics of Web Analytics. *Digital Journalism*, *3*(2), 243–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.909122

Tandoc Jr, E. C., & Vos, T. P. (2016). The journalist is marketing the news: Social media in the gatekeeping process. *Journalism Practice*, *10*(8), 950–966. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1087811

Tavory, I., & Swidler, A. (2009). Condom semiotics: meaning and condom use in rural Malawi. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(2), 171–189. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F000312240907400201

Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W., & Lounsbury, M. (2012). *The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure, and Process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: Free Press.

Turco, C. (2012). Difficult decoupling: Employee resistance to the commercialization of personal settings. *American Journal of Sociology*, *118*(2), 380–419. https://doi.org/10.1086/666505

Vaidhyanathan, S. (2018). *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vos, T. P., & Singer, J. B. (2016). Media discourse about entrepreneurial journalism: Implications for journalistic capital. *Journalism Practice*, *10*(2), 143–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1124730

Welbers, K., Van Atteveldt, W., Kleinnijenhuis, J., Ruigrok, N., & Schaper, J. (2016). News selection criteria in the digital age: Professional norms versus online audience metrics. *Journalism*, *17*(8), 1037–1053. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884915595474

Williams, A., Wardle, C., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2011). "Have they got news for us?" Audience revolution or business as usual at the BBC? *Journalism Practice*, *5*(1), 85–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512781003670031

Wu, T. (2016). *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Zamith, R. (2018). Quantified Audiences in News Production. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(4), 418–435. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1444999

Zelizer, B. (2015). Terms of Choice: Uncertainty, Journalism, and Crisis. *Journal of Communication*, *65*(5), 888–908. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12157

Zittrain, J. (2008). *The Future of theInternet and How to Stop It*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Zittrain, J. L. (2006). The generative internet. *Harvard Law Review*, *119*, 1974–2040. https://doi.org/10.1145/1435417.1435426

Zuboff, S. (1985). Automate/informate: The two faces of intelligent technology. *Organizational dynamics*, *14*(2), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(85)90033-6

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.

**Elizabeth Hansen:** Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School (United States)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5329-7600
elizabeth_hansen@hks.harvard.edu; http://www.elizabethahansen.com
Elizabeth Hansen is academic lead for the News Sustainability Program at the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy at the Kennedy School. She directs the program's primary project studying how public media institutions are growing their local journalism service. Her academic work focuses on the organizational and institutional dynamics of navigating digital change in journalism. She has written about the changing relationship between news publishers and social platforms; and strategies for combining audience engagement and revenue generation in digital news. She holds a PhD in Organizational Behavior from Harvard Business School.

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News" – *peer-reviewed*
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11238

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# Hope as a Portal to Change: Reimagining Journalism's Value(s)

Amanda Daniëlle Brouwers* Tamara Witschge†

Submitted: June 27, 2020 – Accepted: September 4, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

In this article, we explore how normative understandings of what "proper journalism" is affects journalistic practices, particularly for those who are trying to develop new types of practices. Drawing on the autoethnography of one of the authors of this article, who is both an academic and an entrepreneurial journalist, we explore how explicit and implicit norms of journalism, and the central values they imply, impact individual experiences of doing journalism. We highlight the pressure that these dominant values and understandings can induce and explore an alternative value that can help guide innovation in journalism. We argue that putting the value of "hope" centrally in the discourse and practice of journalism can help change journalism for the better. By seeing how hope is a driver of change in entrepreneurial journalism — as its practitioners see what is possible, but not yet actual — we provide a new conceptualization of innovation in journalism. In redirecting our attention away from pressure, and toward hope, we also redirect our focus to what is possible in the field. By doing so we can tap into the huge potential for change journalism's hopeful practitioners endeavor to realize.

**Keywords**: Pressure; hope; entrepreneurial journalism; innovation; autoethnography.

* Department of Media Studies and Journalism, University of Groningen (Netherlands); a.d.brouwers@rug.nl

† Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries (Netherlands); Department of Media and Journalism Studies, University of Groningen (Netherlands); https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7642-4868

## 1 Introduction

Something is pushing
I am moving

Something is pushing
Turn into a stone

Something is pushing
Run to keep up

Something is pushing
Now what do I do?

*Amanda Brouwers*

When journalists are called to defend journalistic values and journalism's value in society, they are inadvertently confronted with the question: "what is journalism?" It is a simple, yet infinitely complicated question. Indeed, it has proven quite difficult and even controversial for both researchers and practitioners to define what journalism and news is (Malik & Shapiro, 2016, p. 16; Young & Carson, 2018). What makes defining journalism even more difficult is the many forms of journalism that are constantly forming and "flourishing" next to one another (Deuze & Witschge, 2018, p. 121). In this flux, practitioners appear continuously engaged in "boundary-building discourses" (Eldridge, 2018, p. x) centering on what journalism is, and what it is for. This ultimately leads them to questions regarding the values that are practiced, and how individual journalists can demonstrate these values in their practices, whether explicitly or implicitly. In this article, we explore the normative demands this boundary work makes and how it affects journalistic practices, particularly of those trying to develop new types of practices.

In particular, we need to understand (and challenge) the pressure that comes with maintaining standards and values that are embedded in normative understandings of journalism. Understanding this would allow us, we argue, to adequately respond to the myriad of changing practices in journalism and the existing desire for innovation in the journalistic field (Vos & Singer, 2016). The pressure we speak of is most tangible when journalists attempt to divert from traditional standards and values, and aim to pursue change. Recent research has pointed to entrepreneurial journalists as actors in the journalistic field that are driven by a desire for personal and collective change (Hepp & Loosen, 2019; Wagemans et al., 2016; Wagemans et al., 2019). Therefore, these entrepreneurial journalists are the focus of this article. We examine the way in which entrepreneurial journalism is conceptualized as one of the ways to resolve crises in journalism (Cohen, 2015; Jarvis, in Briggs, 2012; Kreiss & Brennen, 2016) and discuss how this impacts practices, in particular how it puts a pressure on journalists to perform in a certain way.

Ultimately, we do not want to repeat and feed existing normative understandings of journalism, which more often than not are defensive, static and reactionary (Singer, 2015). Instead, we want to challenge these and ask for a more *hopeful* understanding of journalism. Conceptualizing hope as a practice (Mattingly & Jensen, 2015), specifically one that is based on conjectural knowing (Pedersen & Liisberg, 2015), we challenge scholarship that predominantly views journalism from a sense of lack, or treats journalism with a sense of "suspicion" (Witschge & Deuze, 2020). We consider entrepreneurs as those longing for change in journalism (Deuze & Witschge, 2020), which means they operate not from a known, fixed understanding of the field, but much more from a sense of what is "not yet" (Bloch, in Miyazaki, 2004) and from the possible. In this article we moreover consider the implications of valuing hope for journalism research: with hope as method, we identify the richness and value of current and emerging practices rather than be blinded by what journalism should be and "what it is not." This opens up a discussion, not about which journalistic values are lost and compromised with change, but about the broad range of values that are already part of, and could be a part of journalistic practices.

To explore how implicit and explicit standards or norms with regard to journalistic values can have an impact on everyday practice, we use an auto-ethnographic approach (Ellis, 2014). In 2016, Amanda co-launched an entrepreneurial journalistic venture: the audio production company called PodGront. She did so to collect data on everyday experiences of entrepreneurial journalism for her PhD project which is part of the broader research program "Entrepreneurship at Work", funded by the Dutch Science Council (2015–2021) and run by Tamara Witschge. We draw on her daily diary entries collected from February 2016 until October 2018, and her personal reflections that continue until 2020. This data is the basis of the critical interrogation of how having to defend specific values as a journalist impacted her work, well-being and creative liberty. Insight into her experiences provides us with the data that allow us to make explicit taken-for-granted assumptions, values, norms and beliefs that are a part of (entrepreneurial) journalism as a practice (Singer, 2018; Steyaert & Landström, 2011; Witschge, 2015).

This auto-ethnographic approach allows us to gain unique knowledge on entrepreneurial journalism. As pointed out by Bengt Johannisson (2011, p. 144), research into entrepreneurship demands a very specific type of interactive research in order to gain insight into the situated knowledge that is part of entrepreneurship: "Since the phenomenon concerns initiating a process, only an invitation that coincides with the very instigation of the process will be appropriate." Enactive research — in which "the researcher her/himself instigates an entrepreneurial process and practices auto-ethnography or self-ethnography" (Johannisson, 2011, p. 144) — allows us to gain insight into personal experiences which is where the impact of normative understandings is felt and can be researched (Schatzki, 2001). Such an account provides unique insight that retrospective approaches of entrepreneurship cannot attain:

> the uniqueness that we associate with entrepreneuring can only be revealed if its initiation and unique development trajectory is tracked by a researcher who is present throughout the process. Accounts of its cognitive and emotive as well as its material manifestations must be captured in the very context in which they are experienced (Johannisson, 2011, p. 147).

In this article, we first outline the discourse on entrepreneurial journalists in academic work centrally featuring the "saviour-discourse" (Deuze & Witschge, 2020), in which the entrepreneurial journalist is mostly defined and valued as the saviour of existing journalistic forms and values. We show how this normative understanding of entrepreneurial journalism brings forth a pressure on individuals and impacts journalist' practices. To then re-conceptualize entrepreneurial journalism and the focus on change that we can find in the discourse on and in the practices of entrepreneurial journalists (Deuze & Witschge, 2020), we introduce the concept of hope. Allowing for hope as a central driving force in the reconceptualization of what journalism is and what it is for, we are able to do justice to the diversity of values that are practiced throughout journalism. To tap into and highlight this diversity, we argue that we as scholars, can benefit from a similar drawing on hope as a method for understanding change in journalism: centering on hope we redirect our attention not on that which was, but rather on what is "not yet," that which is deemed possible under the banner of journalism by its hopeful practitioners.

## 2 Valuing the Entrepreneur as Saviour of Journalism

Entrepreneurship started gaining popularity in journalism practice and studies at the same time as academic researchers identified several crises in the journalistic field (Gitlin, 2011; Leurdijk, 2015; Singer, 2018; Vos & Singer, 2016). In various countries, media companies reported declining circulation and audience numbers, and faced increasing competition, failing business models and declining levels of trust (Gitlin, 2011; Witschge, 2015). Established media organizations saw themselves forced to reorganize and innovate, changing newsroom structures and cutting jobs in the process (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Deuze & Witschge, 2018). In this time of flux, individual journalists experienced increasing levels of precarity in their work (Cohen, 2015; Deuze, 2007; O'Donnell & Zion, 2019). Entrepreneurial journalism has been proposed as an answer to this precarity (Cohen, 2015) and entrepreneurial journalists have been put forward as a solution to the crises. Their search for new forms and practices of journalism was considered to lead to change needed in the broader journalistic field (Ruotsalainen et al., 2019).

Since that time, entrepreneurial journalism found its way into journalistic practices and journalism education (Singer & Broersma, 2019), though no standard definition has emerged (Rafter, 2016; Vos & Singer, 2016). The term is used to refer to a number of different actors, developments and content forms in the journalistic field, including the emergence and growth of a start-up culture in journalism (Wagemans et al., 2016) and the growing number of online start-ups (Marsden, 2017) and freelancers in the journalistic field (Leurdijk, 2015). It tends to include content forms ranging from investigative journalism to hyperlocal news sites (Arends & Van 't Hof, 2020; Singer, 2018).

Entrepreneurial journalism has furthermore introduced a set of specific values at the heart of journalism that may not have been deemed standard in the field. Descriptions of entrepreneurship usually introduce a focus on the individual in charge (rather than brands or newsrooms or other more collective understandings of who produce journalism). They also foreground the ability for monetizing and selling or marketing content and the need to be innovative in one's own practices. Last, entrepreneurs are deemed to be capable to grasp opportunities and respond to (or better yet: shape) its environment. Entrepreneurial journalists have therefore been dubbed "pioneers" (Hepp & Loosen, 2019) and research has emphasized the way in which they search for new forms and new practices of journalism (Leurdijk, 2015; Singer & Broersma, 2019; Wagemans et al., 2016).

Entrepreneurial journalists are not only deemed capable of bringing change to the field, they are actually deemed the saviours of journalism: as answer to the crises they are deemed to help journalism survive. Nicole Cohen observes and explains the saviour-discourse as such:

> Central to this discourse is the journalist as entrepreneur, an individual hero called upon to renew journalism's relevance and reinvigorate stagnating business models. (...) The championing of entrepreneurial journalism is a response to spreading precarity, a way to cope with job scarcity, declining wages, declining faith in the occupation, and journalists' declining autonomy and control (2015, pp. 514–516).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11238

The entrepreneurial journalist, while responding to her own precarious working conditions, is proposed as the champion that saves journalism in both academic and popular discourse (Kreiss & Brennen, 2016). Rather than slaying dragons and saving princes, our entrepreneurial journalist constructs working business models, finds ways to renew trust in journalists and re-engages audiences.

Specifically, entrepreneurial journalists are valued for being equipped to address the issue of failing business models, because they have to sell their content as well as produce it (Singer, 2015). This means they can act as an exception to one of the long-standing professional markers of good journalism: the adherence to not crossing "the wall" between editorial and financial content (Coddington, 2015). Entrepreneurial journalists are expected to be able to produce as well as know how to generate an income from content (Singer, 2015) and in doing so are able to change (or rather *be*) the future of journalism: "Entrepreneurs will be the salvation of the news business (…). Journalists must now take on the urgent *responsibility* of building the future of news" (Jarvis, in Briggs, 2012, pp. xv–xvi). Referring to the entrepreneur's ability to create something new out of existing elements, they are expected to be innovative and agile, coming up with new solutions when slow moving, large companies and rigid governments cannot (Briggs, 2012).

Practicing entrepreneurial journalism with the saviour-discourse in mind means journalists create and design their own jobs, in theory having free range to experiment and innovate with journalism's form, content and practices. Advocates of entrepreneurial journalism envision these local innovations to then serve as a model for the rest of the news industry (Jarvis, in Briggs, 2012). In this way, entrepreneurial journalists are seen as spearheading change first for themselves, and subsequently for journalism as a whole (Ruotsalainen et al., 2019).

Research into the motivations and practices of entrepreneurial journalists indeed shows their desire for personal and collective change (Arends & Van 't Hof, 2020; Hepp & Loosen, 2019; Wagemans et al., 2019). It is clear that there is a central focus on change as part of both the discourse and the practice of entrepreneurial journalism. As such a high ideal of what entrepreneurial journalism can offer to the field of journalism as a whole has come into being. But what is the cost of such idealization of the tremendous value put onto change that is supposed to come from the individual practitioner in a field that is deemed in crisis? In other words: how is this specific discourse that is used by advocates and researchers in both academic and popular texts, affecting experiences of individual (entrepreneurial) journalists? We find one answer to this question in Amanda's experiences when introduced to entrepreneurial journalism at journalism school.

*I am sitting in a lecture room. It is almost silent around me. Almost. Behind me, two rows of computers are buzzing. Above me, TL lights are humming. Next to me, I hear pens scratch on the paper, keyboards click under the pressure of fingers. But mostly I listen in front of me. Hanging back, my arms folded, I look at my lecturer. I listen to his booming voice. He is passionate, voice raised, arms moving wildly, eyes spitting fire, trying to motivate us to become* entrepreneurial journalists. *And all I can think was:*

*No.*

*No.*

*The teacher tries to lure us in by telling us how important we are. We, journalism students, are the future of journalism. We, journalism students, could be more important than everybody who was already working in the field. His words should make me feel special, I guess. My eyes move away from him towards the edge of the table while I let his words sink in.*

*No.*

*We, the students, could be the saviours of journalism.*

*NO.*

*I don't want to. It's too much pressure. Does that make me a coward? A feeling of insecurity creeps up. Is it my duty to be an entrepreneurial journalist?*

*But no. I really don't want to. I can feel anger, which is a rare feeling for me. I'm ready to stand up for myself.*

*In my mind I speak the words that I actually want to say out loud: "I am not doing this. I am not going to present myself as the saviour of journalism. Why do I have to be the one to do so? Can't someone else do it? Someone with more experience?"*

*This lecture is supposed to motivate us. But rather than hearing a story about an exciting challenge, I hear a story that oozes with major responsibility. Do I not have enough confidence to take it up? Do I genuinely think the task is too big? Do I think it is unfair to expect* students *to save journalism? Or am I just scared? I feel as if I am rejecting entrepreneurial journalism. It becomes clear that I won't become an entrepreneurial journalist any time soon. In fact, as soon as I hear the word "entrepreneurial journalism" I experience a paralyzing pressure. My body is set in stone and it feels like it can never be moved.*

## 3 The Costs of the Saviour-Discourse

In the saviour-discourse, we see a focus on the *individual* that is expected to save journalism. For, at the heart of the discourse on the entrepreneur as saviour, is the idea of the "committed individual" who is bringing about the necessary change to save journalism: "Thanks to entrepreneurial journalism and the work of the committed individuals leading its charge, the world runs little risk of a future without information" (Kelly, 2015, p. 95). Where journalism for long has been understood as a practice thoroughly embedded in institutional structures, the focus on entrepreneurship shows a significant shift in journalism education, critique and practice where the future of journalism is envisaged to (also) lie in journalistic start-ups, changes in individual journalist's mindsets, and journalists' capability to recognize and grasp business opportunities. Emphasizing individual traits, skills and mindsets, the future of journalism is envisaged in the form of journalists who (alone or in collaboration) are able to monetise content in innovative ways, connect to its publics in interactive new formats, grasp opportunities and respond to (and shape) its environment (see, for instance, Briggs, 2012). Thus, in presenting the entrepreneur as a "saviour" of journalism, we see the focus has been largely on the traits of individual journalists, and less on structural issues underlying production processes, such as the increasing levels of stress journalists have to cope with (Reinardy, 2011) and the lack of a steady job-security in the journalistic field (Cohen, 2015), or the arbitrariness often involved in the process (Görling & Rehn, 2008).

Such a focus on individuals as the future of journalism, we argue here, produces a pressure on individuals that is detrimental in the long run, and is hindering innovation rather than bringing it about. This pressure was already observable in the first experience Amanda described, and continued as she developed her own company.

*In 2016 I created PodGront with five other people. We all loved audio stories, and we all wanted to produce work that we thought would not fit within existing media outlets. To us that meant work that was focussed on background less than on the latest news and work that experimented with form rather than fit into existing structures — f.e. a "choose-your-own-adventure"-podcast or a podcast made from the viewpoint of diseases. I enjoyed working on PodGront, but also noticed that I was doing a lot of the work, and over the course of two years, came to consider myself as the only active member of PodGront. I was lonely and felt powerless: the company was not sustainable yet and I had no idea how to achieve this on my own. Then I received an e-mail, from someone who introduced himself, not as a journalist, but as a serial entrepreneur. He told me he needed podcast producers for his prospective company, and proposed working together. I felt relieved by the promise of help. And I felt flattered a "proper" entrepreneur wanted to talk to me.*

*So, he and I discussed his request over Skype. We debated our terms and conditions. We discussed what the future would look like if we would work together. I remember feeling both enthusiastic and sceptic about working with this stranger. But there was one moment in the conversation in which I went from envisioning possibilities to completely shutting down. The Entrepreneur told me that having ideals and doing small projects is absolutely fine, but he was done with it. He knew, through his years of experience, that he also needed to pay the bills, and he wanted a company that was big. Well, he didn't say "big". He said he did not want to operate in the margins. And I froze up as soon as he said this.*

*I became confused, and a feeling of unrest ignited. It was the way the Entrepreneur said it… as if not wanting to operate in the margins was a universal wish. As if it made perfect sense that one did not want to be in the margins, but… but where? Sitting behind my laptop, I imagined letting my anger out and subjecting the Entrepreneur to a number of questions: What was the opposite of the margins? The centre? The centre of what? Does one only matter if one's company aspires some sort of significance? If your goals are big and you (want to) make a grand impact? In reality, I believe I smiled and I nodded at my screen, but right below my skin, I could feel my body getting frustrated. Slowly but surely, my body was being set on fire. I was rejecting this man, and especially, I was rejecting his ideas. I felt like a small child, sitting on her chair in the corner of the room, stomping her little feet to the ground and yelling on the top of her lungs: "No! I do not want this! Don't make me do this!" Once again, I felt how my body was turning into stone.*

In Amanda's experiences it is clear that she is feeling rejection toward the pressure to save journalism and to take up the responsibility of playing a big role in the journalistic field. This is not to say all journalists feel this resistance. As Vos and Ferrucci (2019, p. 50) show, a number of journalists embrace the saviour-role: " 'Who am I? I'm the salvation of journalism.' The digital journalists studied here are not humble. They seek to see their subgroup in positive terms, and they are supported by the broader journalistic field in those efforts." We argue here that, despite the individual responses, we need to consider the consequences of the "offloading" of "the responsibility for journalism's future onto individuals" (Cohen, 2015, p. 526). Here we would like to highlight in particular, the consequences that are prominent in Amanda's experiences and our reading of the existing research: (1) a normalization of stress as part of the job, (2) a downplaying of the increasing precarity of journalists' working conditions and particularly its consequences, (3) a decrease in space to experiment and play, (4) and an aversion to failure. This is not to say these consequences are applicable to every entrepreneurial journalists' experiences. Rather, it means the saviour-discourse is playing into these consequences, and therefore it is important to both acknowledge and counter this prominent discourse when talking about entrepreneurial journalists.

(1) Amanda's experience expressed in her reflection in Section 2 shows how she felt an immobilizing pressure when invited to make the lasting change deemed necessary in the field. These feelings of pressure are not unique to entrepreneurial journalism. They are deemed normal throughout or even inherent to journalistic practices. In newspaper journalism, as Reinardy (2006, p. 400) claims "a certain degree of stress is an acceptable consequence of the job." This normalization of pressure is illustrated by the fact that some journalists even state that "if you burnout, you are not suitable for this profession" (Douwes, 2018). In entrepreneurial journalism this is combined with the "commitment" that is expected when striking on your own — and the pressure that that comes with such a responsibility. In Brouwers and Witschge (2019), we explicate how the norms in the two fields of practice can be seen to reinforce the normalization of hard work. In entrepreneurship the focus is on the responsibility of the individual for making it work, which makes it hard to resist the implicit norms surrounding the amount of stress, pressure and work you should be able to "endure." With the entrepreneur as saviour, she is attributed "God-like qualities" (Sørensen, 2008), presenting him as a "super-individual", who should be able to take on the world. As such, questioning whether the amount of pressure is acceptable, is to question whether you are actually a "good" entrepreneur in the field of journalism.

(2) Related to accepting stress and pressure as the status quo in entrepreneurial journalism, precarity is an equally uncontested part of the discourse. This is also not unique to entrepreneurial journalism, as it is a normalized condition of journalism in general (Deuze & Witschge, 2020). However, in entrepreneurial journalism, there is an added relation to precarity: it is mentioned time and time again as a reason for the increasing popularity of entrepreneurial journalism (Cohen, 2015; O'Donnell & Zion, 2019; see also Deuze & Witschge, 2018), and as such is not only part and parcel of the practice, but even the reason people practice it. What remains hidden is how people experience these working conditions once they become a freelancer, set up their own start-up, or start a company with other entrepreneurial journalists. Deuze and Witschge (2020) show that working for a start-up can feel just as, if not more, precarious as working in an existing newsroom. This emotional downside of these working conditions is downplayed as those engaging in entrepreneurial journalism argue that they made an active choice, and thus have to accept these conditions without complaint (Deuze & Witschge, 2020). This does not mean however, that there are no downsides, or that entrepreneurial journalists are not consciously aware of them, as Amanda's experiences show.

(3) Precarity and pressure can have a rather specific negative consequence that we wish to highlight here, and which is reflected in Amanda's opening poem: paralysis. Entrepreneurial journalism is deemed *the* space for free play (think of the table tennis tables in all start-ups and the playful design of start-up spaces), and innovation (given their pioneer status). Yet, Amanda's experiences suggest that the pressure put on individuals can counter the space for these elements. Her experiences show the costs that come with the thought of having to fit

the norms of working hard (see Brouwers & Witschge, 2019), the individual commitment to work beyond what the "job" calls for, and the high expectations placed on entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the idea that an individual needs to "save" journalism suggests a strong normative understanding of what journalism should be, seeing as it is valuable enough to save. Amanda's auto-ethnographic data show that this normative understanding is precisely what held her back in being free to perform journalism as she liked. Ideas of what was "proper" journalism kept demanding her to come back to what she deemed to be "right". We see that by placing an emphasis on saving journalism, the saviour narrative implicitly places an unevenly great value on journalism's current form and function in society.

(4) We see that the offloading of the "responsibility for journalism's future onto individuals" (Cohen, 2015) also holds consequences for journalists' engagement with failure. The majority of start-ups fail (Dinnar & Susskind, 2019), also in journalism (Bruno & Nielsen, 2012; Deuze & Witschge, 2020), and failure is considered inherent to both innovation and entrepreneurship (Briggs, 2012; Shepherd et al., 2016). However, the responsibility that is now placed on the shoulders of entrepreneurial journalists weighs heavily on this process of trial and error. An attitude that is geared to survival, and in particular towards saving journalism, may put innovation or learning on the backburner, though this is precisely what is needed, we argue, both for individuals and for the industry to thrive (for the importance of experiment and failure, see also Brouwers, 2017). The question is: how can innovation happen from within this strong normative understanding of the entrepreneurial journalist?

## 4 Valuing Hope as Driver for Change

In the saviour-discourse on entrepreneurial journalism there are a number of myths that make it hard to live up to the normative expectations put to the individual. As an entrepreneurial journalist you, individually, need to save journalism and ensure its future, amidst societies in which trust in journalism and interest in news are declining. You, individually, need to be able to deal with precarious working conditions, and find a working business model where large news organizations failed. We have argued that we need to consider the pressure and the broader implications that come with this discourse as it impedes the spirit of innovation, playfulness and fearlessness. Having said this, we do not suggest that all entrepreneurial journalists feel the same pressure, paralysis, and limitation of free play, or that they all understand themselves as saviours. Nor do we suggest that there is no pursuit of change or innovative energy in entrepreneurial journalism. Quite the opposite. We argue that if we take the innovative spirit and the well-being and resilience of both individual journalists and the field as a whole seriously, we need to counter the dominant discourse that places pressure and lack at the heart of entrepreneurial journalism.

Here we want to turn to Amanda's experience more in detail, to consider what we can learn from her relation to change. Resisting the pressure that comes with accepting the task of saving journalism and the responsibility of upholding its traditional values, Amanda does not necessarily resist the label of entrepreneurial journalism (or at least not indefinitely) or the pursuit of change. Rather, with her podcast company she explicitly aimed for innovation in the field, as a lot of other entrepreneurial journalists do as well (Deuze and Witschge, 2020). Upon creating PodGront in 2016, she writes in her notebook,: "It's simple: more space for curiosity, empathy, and experiment." And she was able to bring about change and produce innovative projects that diverged from how she had considered and had been taught what was journalism, which was particularly focussed on the idea that her journalistic output needed to be immediately relevant to society. She created a game-based audio tour with both historic and fictional material about the Second World War, experimented with live cooking shows, and explored interactional story structures in a podcast about dogs. All productions produced within the freedom of her own company. Why then do we make such a fuss to resist the normative understanding that depicts the entrepreneur as the harbinger of change and subsequently the saviour of journalism?

The simple answer is that these innovative projects came about not because of Amanda's desire to save journalism, but in spite of this discourse that is prominent in academic and popular texts about entrepreneurial journalism. Indeed, Amanda did not regard any of her PodGront productions as directed towards saving journalism. Her experience and desire for change is not congruent with the way in which change is framed in the saviour discourse. We therefore propose to understand her work with PodGront, and the work of other entrepreneurial journalists, in terms of hope instead. By focusing on hope, we can highlight and understand the rich complexities that are involved in the discourses and practices of Amanda and others. Yes, they can be seen as pioneers, but do not see themselves as saviours of what was. Yes, they uphold a strong set of values that guide them in their endeavor, propelling them forward, and pushing boundaries, but no, they do not want to accept the burden of having to uphold all traditional values. Certainly, there is overlap in the values of entrepreneurs and those of traditional journalism. But it is the normative straitjacket that is what is causing the pressure.

We understand hope as a *future-oriented* practice (Mattingly & Jensen, 2015; Miyazaki, 2004), which is based on *conjectural knowing* (Pedersen & Liisberg, 2015). This means that hope as a practice relies on "what has 'not-yet' become" (Miyazaki, 2004, p. 14), on the future (Miyazaki, 2004; Wentzer, 2015), imaginative horizons (Mattingly, 2010), and change. What people do under the label of hope, they do so based on *missing* information. Hope is asking about and acting upon "what if?", instead of acting on the basis of existing information. Though hope is often understood as a positive feeling or attitude (Rasmussen, 2015), we do not confuse it with optimism. Mattingly and Jensen (2015) show us that "paradoxically, hope is on intimate terms with despair. (...) It is poised for disappointment" (p. 35). Hoping is acting in the face of disappointment. This is the driving force of change: feelings of despair, sadness and frustration causes one to move, and pursue change. And in such a practice of hope, imagination can lead us to envision change which may be improbable, or even unrealistic, and thus surprising or radical.

Within the saviour-discourse, efforts to pursue change would be evaluated in terms of what came before. In her diary entries, Amanda kept coming back to whether she was doing journalism "right", basing her judgment of her actions on what she had understood to be "proper" journalism. With a frame of hope for the future, which is different from a longing for the past, we let go of the shackles of normative frames of how things "ought to be done" and move on to creating something even more beautiful. For Amanda, reflecting on her efforts in through the lens of hope allowed her to do three things:

First, the longer PodGront existed, the less she seemed interested in fitting a specific existing definition or understanding of journalism, and the less defensive she felt for practicing journalism in the way that she did (at some stage she wasn't even bothered anymore with the question if what she was doing, was journalism at all). PodGront became more and more interesting to her the more its projects went beyond journalism as she had predominantly understood it: as a way to report information to citizens.

Second, as she became able to sit with feelings of insecurity and frustration (rather than wishing them away), she could see how these actual feelings were the portal to change. PodGront itself was created in 2016 arising out of feelings of frustration about the lack of experiment in the Dutch podcasting scene at the time, imagining something better was possible.

And, third, once released of the burden of having to save this grand intangible thing called journalism, Amanda's creative spirit kicked in more and more, and where she had experienced anxiety and doubt, came pleasure and energized focus. She started to recognize more and more how any hint at this type of responsibility impeded the spirit of innovation and playfulness she wanted, needed to feel to be able to make anything. The reconceptualization of her work in terms of hope granted her with a sense of space she needed to enjoy her company.

*I am sitting on a patch of grass, looking over the pond in a local park. My eyes wander over the ducks and other people relaxing. Across the water I see bright containers and thousand little lights, that are part of our local theatre festival. In a couple of days, I will host my own little party at here. My new business partner Egbert, with whom I am currently running PodGront and organizing this party, is sitting next to me in the grass. It is such a pleasant moment. I feel really... safe. A sensation of warmth creeps over my body — like chemicals have just been released in my abdomen. I imagine, and feel, how they find their way throughout my chest, fill my heart, and finally, make my fingers tingle a little bit. It is not a feeling of relaxation. No. It is energy. It creates a space in which nothing will ever go wrong, whatever I say or do. So I share with him the story of the Entrepreneur.*

*As I am retelling this story, I feel calm instead of angry. And I wonder: who I was really mad at? Is it fair to now place the Entrepreneur into my story as some kind of villain? I can still feel the anger thinking back, but time has given me some space to reflect. And what I find underneath the anger is fear, not about him, but toward myself. This man identified so clearly with being an entrepreneur, had introduced himself as such, and he mentioned he did not want to operate in the margins. But I did not identify with him nor with his ideas. So I feared, and still fear, for my future: Can I still be an entrepreneur? Can I act as an entrepreneur without wanting to play some big part in the journalistic field? There was a feeling of relief when I realized that I wanted my company to remain small. And at the same time: a brick landing in my stomach, igniting despair. I imagined I was holding my tiny business in the palm of my hand, and people laughing at me when I showed them. I was scared to do things my own way, was afraid I would not belong. It had been easier to blame someone else.*

*I attempt to explain to Egbert my feelings of frustration by making my internal reaction implicit: "But what is wrong with operating in the margins? I quite like it! Why would I have to operate in the centre?" There is a moment of suspense, in which my words hang in the air, and can either be embraced or stricken down. Egbert answers: "Yes! Exactly! I love working in a niche and making something exceptional for that niche. And I love that for every niche, people may wonder, is there a podcast for that? And then there is something really awesome! For that tiny niche!"*

*With his response, I feel opportunities opening up. The warm sensation I felt before strengthens, solidifies. I feel safe. I feel accepted. My mind immediately starts tracing "what-ifs". It is already in overdrive, searching for possibilities, for chances, for opportunities in a broader framework. In what is niche. I think of audio tours, festival podcasts, playing with sounds around a park. My body brimming with energy...*

## 5 The Implications of Hope

Hope is a word packed with numerous possibilities. In our concluding remarks we would like to highlight that adopting hope as lens to understand new forms of journalism, also holds implications for how we approach the field. For adopting hope as lens means to have space for emotions, which within this understanding hold the key to understanding change. We have not been good with dealing with emotions in the field (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), and particularly allowing the more uncomfortable ones to surface in our research is demanding. To sit with and see how frustration, anger and sadness are driving forces is harder than to suggest a blind optimism to be at the heart of change.

Hope as lens also means that we need to have faith in and attention for another type of knowing than we normally do. In journalism studies, as in other fields, entrepreneurship is understood as a strategic process, with "reliance on conscious intention and goal-orientation" (Chia, 2017, p. 107). Here we suggest that we start to understand more that (and how) "conjectural knowing" (and even non-knowing) are at the basis of action and change. This means that in our studies we need to pay attention also to tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1966), which is all the more difficult to grasp. Understanding the different ways of knowing would ask us to adopt an approach much more focused on experiences. In this way we can also start to see how values that may be deemed to be clashing, can sit side by side and each inform journalistic practice in its own way (see also Witschge et al., 2019).

Last, a lens of hope suggests that we let go of our preconceived ideas of what is journalism (as some of the practitioners we mentioned do), and start to look in a more open, receptive way at the diversity of practices happening in the field (see also Witschge & Deuze, 2020). If we use traditional values and understandings of journalism as benchmarks, we do not only miss out on seeing a rich diversity but also feed the discourses that we, in this article, have shown to hinder change and well-being. If we hope for another journalism, as scholars we need to see our contributions to the vested ways. Can we expand our imaginative horizons and help journalists create something more beautiful?

## References

Arends, S., & Van 't Hof, E. (2020). *De Nieuwe Journalist*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Briggs, M. (2012). *Entrepreneurial Journalism: How to Build What's Next for News*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Brouwers, A. D. (2017). Failure and understanding-with in entrepreneurial journalism. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, *14*(3), 217–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1445161

Brouwers, A. D., & Witschge, T. (2019). "It Never Stops": The Implicit Norm of Working Long Hours in Entrepreneurial Journalism. In M. Deuze & M. Prenger (Eds.), *Making Media: Production, Practices, and Professions* (pp. 441–451). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Bruno, N., & Nielsen, R. K. (2012). *Survival is Success: Journalistic Online Startups in Western Europe*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Chia, R. (2017). A process-philosophical understanding of organizational learning as “wayfinding”: Process, practices and sensitivity to environmental affordances. *The Learning Organization*, *24*(2), 107–118. https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-11-2016-0083

Coddington, M. (2015). The Wall becomes a Curtain: Revisiting Journalism’s News-Business Boundary. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism and Participation* (pp. 67–82). New York: Routledge.

Cohen, N. S. (2015). Entrepreneurial Journalism and the Precarious State of Media Work. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, *114*(3), 513–533. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3130723

Deuze, M. (2007). *Media Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Deuze, M., & Witschge, T. (2018). What Journalism Becomes. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking Journalism Again: Societal Role and Public Relevance in a Digital Age* (pp. 115–130). Oxon: Routledge.

Deuze, M., & Witschge, T. (2020). *Beyond Journalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dinnar, S., & Susskind, L. (2019). The Entrepreneurial World. In S. Dinnar & L. Susskind (Eds.), *Entrepreneurial Negotiation* (pp. 13–40). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92543-1

Douwes, J. (2018). Zelfs een journalist is vatbaar voor stress. Retrieved November 27, 2019, from https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/zelfs-een-journalist-is-vatbaar-voor-stress

Eldridge, S. (2018). Preface. Interlopers, journalism on the periphery. In S. Eldrigde, *Online Journalism from the Periphery. Interloper Media and the Journalistic Field* (pp. x–xii). New York: Routledge.

Ellis, C. (2014). *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. Lanham: Rowman Altamira.

Gitlin, T. (2011). A surfeit of crises: circulation, revenue, attention, authority, and deference. In R. W. McChesney & V. W. Pickard (Eds.), *Will the Last Reporter Please Turn Out the Lights: The Collapse of Journalism and What Can Be Done to Fix It* (pp. 91–102). New York: The New Press.

Görling, S., & Rehn, A. (2008). Accidental ventures. A materialist reading of opportunity and entrepreneurial potential. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *24*(2), 94–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2008.03.001

Hepp, A., & Loosen, W. (2019). Pioneer journalism: Conceptualizing the role of pioneer journalists and pioneer communities in the organizational re-figuration of journalism. *Journalism*, *00*(0), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919829277

Johannisson, B. (2011). Towards a practice theory of entrepreneuring. *Small Business Economy*, *36*, 135–150. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-009-9212-8

Kelly, S. (2015). *The Entrepreneurial Journalist’s Toolkit: Manage Your Media*. New York: Routledge.

Kreiss, D., & Brennen, J. S. (2016). Normative Models of Digital Journalism. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism* (pp. 299–314). London: SAGE Publications.

Leurdijk, A. (2015). *Entrepreneurial Journalism*. Zwolle: Windesheim.

Malik, A., & Shapiro, I. (2016). What's digital? What's journalism? In B. Franklin & S. Eldridge (Eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies* (pp. 15–24). New York: Routledge.

Marsden, P. (2017). *Entrepreneurial Journalism*. London: Routledge.

Mattingly, C. (2010). *The Paradox of Hope: Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*. Orlando: University of California Press.

Mattingly, C., & Jensen, U. J. (2015). What Can We Hope For? An Exploration in Cosmopolitan Philosophical Anthropology. In S. Liisberg, E. O. Pedersen, & A. L. Dalsgård (Eds.), *Anthropology and Philosophy: Dialogues on Trust and Hope* (pp. 24–56). New York: Berghahn.

Miyazaki, H. (2004). *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

O'Donnell, P., & Zion, L. (2019). Precarity in Media Work. In M. Deuze & M. Prenger (Eds.), *Making Media: Production, Practices, and Professions* (pp. 223–234). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Pedersen, E. O., & Liisberg, S. (2015). Introduction. Trust and Hope. In S. Liisberg, E. O. Pedersen, & A. L. Dalsgård (Eds.), *Anthropology and Philosophy: Dialogues on Trust and Hope* (pp. 1–20). New York: Berghahn.

Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Rafter, K. (2016). Introduction. *Journalism Practice*, *10*(2), 140–142. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1126014

Rasmussen, A. M. (2015). Self, Hope, and the Unconditional: Kierkegaard on Faith and Hope. In S. Lissberg, E. O. Pedersen, & L. Dalsgård (Eds.), *Anthropology and Philosophy: Dialogues on Trust and Hope*. New York: Berghahn.

Reinardy, S. (2006). It's Gametime: The Maslach Burnout Inventory Measures Burnout of Sports Journalists. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *83*(2), 397–412. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F107769900608300211

Reinardy, S. (2011). Newspaper journalism in crisis: Burnout on the rise, eroding young journalists' career commitment. *Journalism*, *12*(1), 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1464884910385188

Ruotsalainen, J., Hujanen, J., & Villi, M. (2019). A future of journalism beyond the objectivity-dialogue divide? Hybridity in the news of entrepreneurial journalists. *Journalism*, *0*(00), 1–19.

Schatzki, T. R. (2001). Introduction: Practice research. In T. R. Schatzki, K. Knorr Cetina, & E. Von Savigny (Eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (pp. 10–23). London: Routledge.

Shepherd, D., Williams, T., Wolfe, M., & Patzelt, H. (2016). *Learning from Entrepreneurial Failure: Emotions, Cognitions and Actions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Singer, J. B. (2015). Out of Bounds: Professional norms as boundary makers. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation* (pp. 21–36). London: Routledge.

Singer, J. B. (2018). Entrepreneurial Journalism. In T. P. Vos (Ed.), *Journalism* (pp. 355–372). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Singer, J. B., & Broersma, M. (2019). Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Journalism Students' Interpretive Repertoires for a Changing Occupation. *Journalism Practice*, *14*(3), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1602478

Sørensen, B. M. (2008). "Behold, I am making all things new": The entrepreneur as savior in the age of creativity. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *24*(2), 85–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2008.03.002

Steyaert, C., & Landström, H. (2011). Enacting entrepreneurship research in a pioneering, provocative and participative way: on the work of Bengt Johannisson. *Small Business Economics*, *36*(2), 123–134. https://doi.org/10.1007/sl

Vos, T. P., & Singer, J. B. (2016). Media Discourse About Entrepreneurial Journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *10*(2), 143–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1124730

Vos, T. P., & Ferrucci, P. (2018). Who am I? Perception of Digital Journalists' Professional Identity. In S. A. I. Eldridge & B. Franklin (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies* (pp. 40–52). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315270449

Wagemans, A., Witschge, T., & Deuze, M. (2016). Ideology as Resource in Entrepreneurial Journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *10*(2), 160–177. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1124732

Wagemans, A., Witschge, T., & Harbers, F. (2019). Impact as driving force of journalistic and social change. *Journalism*, *20*(4), 552–567. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918770538

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019). *Emotions, Media and Politics*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Wentzer, T. S. (2015). The Eternal Recurrence of the New. In S. Liisberg, E. O. Pedersen, & A. L. Dalsgård (Eds.), *Anthropology and Philosophy: Dialogues on Trust and Hope* (pp. 76–89). New York: Berghahn.

Witschge, T. (2015). Entrepreneurship at Work: Analyzing Practice, Labour, and Creativity in Journalism. Retrieved from https://www.rug.nl/staff/t.a.c.witschge/entrepreneurship_at_work_witschge.pdf

Witschge, T., Anderson, C. W., Domingo, D., & Hermida, A. (2019). Dealing with the mess (we made): Unraveling hybridity, normativity, and complexity in journalism studies. *Journalism*, *20*(5), 651–659. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918760669

Witschge, T., & Deuze, M. (2020). From Suspicion to Wonder in Journalism and Communication Research. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *97*(2), 360–375. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699020912385

Young, S., & Carson, A. (2018). What is a Journalist ? The view from employers as revealed by their job vacancy advertisements. *Journalism Studies*, *19*(3), 452–472. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1190665

**Amanda Daniëlle Brouwers:** Department of Media Studies and Journalism, University of Groningen (Netherlands)
a.d.brouwers@rug.nl; https://www.rug.nl/staff/a.d.brouwers/
Amanda Daniëlle Brouwers is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at the University of Groningen. She is currently specializing on the topics of entrepreneurial journalism, tacit knowing, and podcasting.

**Tamara Witschge:** Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries (Netherlands); Department of Media and Journalism Studies, University of Groningen (Netherlands)
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7642-4868
https://tamarawitschge.com
Tamara Witschge (PhD) is Applied Professor of Crossmedia at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Digital Media and Creative Industries and Professor of Media and Cultural Industries at University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research explores the ways in which cultural, technological, economic and social changes are reconfiguring journalism and other cultural industries, with a particular focus on innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. She is co-editor of the *Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism* (2016) and co-author of *Changing Journalism* (2011) and *Beyond Journalism* (2020, with Mark Deuze).

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News" – *peer-reviewed*
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11190

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# Virality, Algorithms, and Illiberal Attacks on the Press: Legitimation Strategies for a New World

Ronald N. Jacobs*

Submitted: June 19, 2020 – Accepted: September 4, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

Historically, professional journalism has justified its importance through a series of binary oppositions that privileged objectivity over opinion, news over entertainment, impartiality over partisanship, and public interest over profit. Over the last half century these distinctions have become increasingly destabilized, and the press finds itself under attack from a number of different directions. This article examines the social forces that have combined to challenge press authority: (1) the changing ownership structure and revenue model for news organizations, (2) the shifting dynamics of media influence made possible by convergence culture and algorithmic culture, and (3) the attacks on expertise made possible by the spread of neoliberal and populist rhetorics in the public sphere. After describing this challenging new media climate, the article finishes by examining the different legitimation strategies journalists have used to defend themselves, considering the different challenges and constraints they confront when articulating these strategies as well as the different potential alliances that are available to them.

**Keywords**: Journalism; populism; algorithmic culture; democracy; civil society.

* Department of Sociology, University at Albany, State University of New York (United States); rjacobs@albany.edu; http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1253-8102

## 1 Introduction

In November 2018 the White House revoked the press pass of CNN reporter Jim Acosta, after a verbal confrontation he had with President Trump. CNN sued the White House, arguing that they were violating the reporter's First Amendment and Fifth Amendment rights. While extremely unusual by historical standards, the confrontation was part of a clear pattern for President Trump, who had repeatedly called the press the "enemy of the people," and who had threatened to fine and even jail journalists he disliked. Defenders of the press responded with equal force, raising millions of dollars for legal defense funds to protect press freedoms, and filing dozens of lawsuits challenging Trump's attacks on a free press.

Trump's behavior is unusual because of the strong history of press freedoms in the US, but his attacks on the press are part of a larger global trend. According to Freedom House, press freedoms have been deteriorating for the last decade. For a long time, it was primarily authoritarian governments that threatened press freedoms, through tactics of censorship and intimidation. Though these tactics continue to prove effective, and while they increasingly serve as inspiration for populist and would-be authoritarian leaders, they are being supplemented by new types of attacks that are appearing in democratic societies. Indeed, there is now a well-developed "illiberal toolbox" that elected political leaders are using to threaten and curtail journalists' actions (Csaky, 2019). These new tools include the following key strategies:

- The creation of new media outlets, the takeover of financially-struggling organizations, and the biased distribution of state advertising, all designed to increase the proportion of pro-government media and also to make pro-government media more profitable than their competitors.
- The installation of loyalists at the head of public media organizations, which increasingly become agents of state propaganda.
- The deployment of expensive lawsuits and tax investigations against critical media organizations, which are designed to make them unprofitable and ultimately to drive them out of business.
- A refusal to grant interviews to journalists who work for more independent and critical media organizations.
- A campaign of verbal harassment against the press, in which journalists are called traitors, foreign agents, and the like.
- An unwillingness to pursue or prosecute cases of physical threats made against journalists.
- An indifference to fake news and disinformation campaigns, which contributes to a general mistrust of all media information.

The historical strategies of press legitimation are not well-suited to the significant new challenges that this "illiberal toolbox" presents. While the discourse of a "crisis of journalism" is as old as professional journalism itself (Breese, 2016), the political and professional challenges facing journalists today are fundamentally different in several important respects. My aim in this article is to describe these new challenges, and to explore the different legitimation strategies that journalists are developing to confront the new challenges that face them.

## 2 The Traditional Narrative of Press Legitimation

Legitimation of journalism is important for two reasons. First, legitimation is absolutely essential for securing the relationship between news organizations and their readers. To put it simply, if readers do not trust journalists to act as legitimate professionals, they will not read newspaper articles, or watch television news programs, or click on new websites. Understandings are not fixed for what counts as press legitimacy, and readers are open to new narratives about the legitimate role of journalism. Once they settle on an understanding of what that legitimate role is, however, they must believe that the press is fulfilling that role.

The legitimacy of the press is also consequential for the relationship between journalists and political actors. After all, it is the legitimacy of the press that forces political actors to engage with journalists in the public sphere — answering questions, justifying their positions, and engaging in debate in front of a large, impersonal public audience. Similarly, the source and meaning of that legitimacy is not fixed. It could be based on a belief that journalists are representatives of the public, it could be based on the celebrity and the influence of journalists themselves, it could be based on a belief that journalists are an important source of public opinion and will formation, or it could be based on something else entirely. But most political actors prefer secrecy, and engage in public sphere discussions only grudgingly (Adut, 2018). The main reason they participate in public debate is because of the power, influence, and legitimacy of the press.

Cultural sociologists have identified a "sacred discourse of journalism" that links the mission of the press to the ambitions and the ideals of democracy and civil society. Because the sacred discourse of journalism is part of a culture structure, it is everywhere put into practice through the semiotic logic of opposition (Alexander, 2006). The sacred is only made meaningful in relationship to the profane, the pure through the polluted, the heroic through the tragic. A heroic press narrative only works in relationship to a crisis narrative.

Historically, the cultural logic of press legitimation has been built around three sets of binary oppositions. The first is a distinction between information and opinion. Here the goal of the press is to provide citizens with the information they need to become informed and discerning citizens (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011). Individuals read newspapers, watch television, and browse the internet to become better informed about public matters, to make more informed choices about public policies, and to distinguish fact from opinion. In fulfilling this aim, editors and journalists have a civic responsibility to get the facts right, and to hold public officials accountable to getting the facts right.

The second opposition that has informed the culture of press legitimation is the distinction between impartiality and partisanship. As Schudson (1978), has argued, the modern press evolved throughout the nineteenth century, shifting away from a media ecology dominated by partisan party papers toward a new situation dominated by neutral and impartial styles of reporting. Specific strategies developed for reporting about the facts of the day (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011). Fact-based news articles and opinion-based editorial columns were strictly separated. There were new guidelines about how to source news articles, how to develop and deploy quotations, and what kinds of authorial voices were appropriate for creating a non-partisan presentation of the relevant facts of the day.

The third and final element is the distinction between news and entertainment. Modern discourses about democracy and civil society were built upon a symbolic hierarchy that privileged serious talk about politics and policy, while criticizing talk about entertainment as a mindless diversion from more serious matters (Jacobs, 2012). Journalism has more or less embraced this symbolic hierarchy. The newspaper places its most important stories about politics and policy in the front page and the front section, while segregating news about arts, entertainment, and sports into separate sections that come later. The majority of journalism awards are reserved for the more "serious" news genres, which means that professional status tends to concentrate around those genres.

Historically, these three sets of binary oppositions have combined together to institutionalize a "sacred discourse of journalism", which symbolically purifies objective print-based news while polluting entertainment-based television (Jacobs & Wild, 2013). As new media technologies enter the scene, this gets elaborated as a historical narrative about a golden age of print journalism that is perpetually under threat by new technologies (Breese, 2016). If journalism is failing, in this narrative, it is because it is unable to combat the encroachment of entertainment values and market logics. This is the standard form of press legitimation that journalists produce, particularly if they are elite print journalists.

As I have argued elsewhere, the traditional strategies of press legitimation featured prominently in the aftermath of the 2016 US Presidential election (Jacobs, 2017). In criticizing the press coverage of the political campaign, elite journalists and media critics complained that news organizations had treated the campaign as a reality television program. They complained that dishonest political actors had been able to bypass the critical press by using Facebook and other social media to spread falsehoods and propaganda. They complained that decades of cynical political comedy had eroded the public's interest in the kinds of impartial, information-based deliberative norms that were essential for a democratic political culture. And yet, even while making these criticisms, they did so with a sense of resignation, and a growing awareness that the media ecology in which they operated had changed forever.

## 3 The New Media Ecology

While the environment in which journalists work is always changing, the pace of change has accelerated rapidly over the last three decades, in a manner that has profoundly destabilized and challenged the traditional narratives of press legitimation. These changes include (a) new ownership patterns and revenue models that have been imposed on news organizations, (b) the growth of convergence culture and algorithmic culture, and (c) new trends in populist rhetoric.[1]

### 3.1 Ownership Patterns and Revenue Models

The intensifying concentration of media ownership is by now well-known. When Ben Bagdikian first published *The Media Monopoly* in 1983, he sounded the alarm about the fact that there were fifty companies that together controlled more than half of the total media market share (Bagdikian, 1983). By 2004, when he published *The New Media Monopoly*, that number had been reduced to five companies: Time Warner, Disney, News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann (Bagdikian, 2004). Since 2010, more than 90 percent of media market share has been controlled by no more than six companies (Rapp & Jenkins, 2018).

The concentration of ownership presents a number of potential hazards to the press. When news organizations are controlled by a small number of large corporations, there is a tendency

1. The discussion that follows concentrates on the US experience, where all three trends are well-developed. To be sure, different media systems would display different levels of development and balance in the different changes that characterize the US experience.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11190

for them to privilege the voices and perspectives of corporate managers over those of workers and unions (McChesney, 2008). Corporate ownership also tends to place larger profit expectations on the press, typically resulting in reduced news-gathering costs (reducing the number of journalists, of news bureaus, and of extended investigative stories) and an increased proportion of "soft news" stories that will attract a wealthier consumer audience (e.g., expanded travel sections, real estate stories, etc.).[2]

The growing preference for digital media has also had a big impact on the press, and particularly for print newspapers. Total newspaper advertising revenue has been on the decline since 2006, driven by a continuing decline in overall circulation as well as an accelerating turn to digital media (Boczkowski, 2004). The problem with digital media is not only that digital newspaper ads cost less, but also that the turn to digital media means that the ad revenue is often going to aggregator sites (Google, Facebook, Buzzfeed) instead of the legacy journalism organizations. And these trends have an impact on the daily practices of journalists too, as they are asked to devote more of their energies thinking about how to become reputational entrepreneurs on Twitter and other social media (Revers, 2017).

In an era of neoliberalism, where the ability to be viable in the market is the dominant test of social and moral worthiness, the financial pressures facing many news organizations create legitimation challenges for the press. To put it simply, newspapers that fail to turn a profit are viewed by many as failing in general, and television news stations that suffer from low ratings are viewed as illegitimate (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011). These kinds of criticisms align easily with populist rhetorics, as I discuss later in the article.

## 4 The Intensification of Convergence Culture

Connected to the changing ownership patterns described above is the rise of convergence culture, in which the distinctions between different media genres and media formats become increasingly blurred. As audiences have become increasingly segmented, and as a small number of media companies have grown and consolidated their control, they have shifted their programming strategies toward content that encourages intensive engagement, across multiple media platforms, and over extended periods of time. According to Jenkins (2006), who focuses primarily on entertainment and creativity, convergence culture offers a number of advantages to users and would-be content creators, including low entry costs, good informal mentorship, the opportunity to develop media skills, and the continual adaptive upgrading of those skills.

Where the press is concerned, however, the advantages of convergence culture are less clear. As Sunstein (2001) has argued persuasively, convergence culture encourages the creation of self-contained multi-media ecosystems that fan the flames of political partisanship. The ability to filter topics means that people are only exposed to content that they choose themselves. This minimizes unanticipated encounters with others who have different experiences and different opinions. As like-minded individuals interact only with each other, they strengthen and harden the attitudes and beliefs that they hold in common. Building a homogeneous and self-reinforcing information ecosystem, they come to see alternative beliefs not just as different but as evil. They develop an adversarial relationship to those audiences and publics that have different beliefs, viewing the world of networked audiences and publics through an increasingly Manichean lens of allies and enemies (Malacarne, 2020).

2. For a thoughtful review of the literature on the sociology of media ownership, see Benson (2019).

These tendencies toward polarization are accelerating further with algorithmic culture, in which machine learning technologies analyze users' media browsing patterns in order to select and suggest new information for them. The basic idea here is that algorithms help to create "filter bubbles" in which the user is fed information that matches her previous consumption behavior (Pariser, 2011). The user is likely to click on these algorithmically provided links, because they confirm preexisting biases and interests; when they do this, the algorithm feeds them even more of this kind of content, resulting in ever more narrow and selective exposure (Cho et al., 2020). Even more concerning, algorithmic selection technologies do not tend to distinguish between high-quality and low-quality information, or between professional journalism and "fake news" (Woolley & Howard, 2016). Political actors can take advantage of how these algorithms work to spread propaganda, to manipulate public opinion, and to sow division and discord (Kurasawa, 2014; Golebiewski & boyd, 2019).

Taken together, convergence culture and algorithmic culture have created significant legitimacy challenges for the press. Balanced, professional journalism finds itself polluted as either uninteresting, or dishonest, or both. For many of the many media consumers who get their news from social media, professional journalism gets filtered out almost entirely, replaced by algorithmically curated sources of information that reinforce and harden prior beliefs. In this new media ecosystem, the quest for alternative viewpoints and the respect for expertise both recede in importance — particularly when combined with a resurgent populist movement that seeks to delegitimate the very notions of impartiality and expert knowledge.

### 4.1 New Trends in Populist Rhetoric

Taken together, convergence culture and algorithmic culture encourage an attitude of ambivalence about expertise, by suggesting that traditional expert discourse is only one form of analysis and interpretation, and by questioning whether expert discourse deserves the intellectual privileges that have historically been associated with it. Neoliberal discourse reinforces this ambivalence, by offering up a singular and alternative metric for evaluating quality, in which quality and worthiness is reduced to market success. The spread of populism accelerates these delegitimation tendencies even further, by inverting the hierarchical relationship between expertise and ordinary knowledge (Jacobs & Townsley, 2018).

The rise of right-wing populism has been a significant force in the Western world since the late-1980s (Berezin, 2009; Kazin, 1995). Globalization and neoliberalism have weakened national identities at the same time as they have magnified feelings of insecurity. Populist movements have been able to exploit these insecurities, usually relying on charismatic leaders who promise to return society to "the people" by overthrowing a corrupt establishment and building higher walls against external enemies (Hawkins, 2010). Examining the structure of populist discourse, Mudde (2004) finds that it is based on a binary distinction between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." The symbolic pollution of elites is a key factor, because it helps to mobilize large masses of people against traditional political leaders and traditional forms of expertise. A leader who can successfully use populist discourse becomes almost immune to traditional forms of criticism, because every critique by an intellectual expert quickly gets interpreted as evidence that the leader is succeeding in their epic quest — rescuing society from the corrupt establishment, and returning it to the people (Moffitt, 2016).

Berlusconi provided the contemporary template for using populist discourse in a mediatized world defined by increasingly diverse and relativized forms of intellectual/ public performance. Berlusconi was already a celebrity based on his extensive real estate and media holdings, which gave him virtually unlimited access to the means of symbolic communication. Berlusconi presented himself as the savior of the Italian people, calling himself the Jesus Christ of politics. He made exaggerated claims about how great Italy would be after he became the leader. He relied on performance styles that he knew would be dismissed and mocked by traditional political experts and critics. He made frequent references to his sexual exploits. He made vague policy proposals that were instantly dismissed by the experts as uninformed, unrealistic, and dangerous. But criticism by experts only reinforced Berlusconi's support, at the same time that it made him the center of the public conversation.

In contemporary US politics, Donald Trump deployed a similar conservative populist strategy to win the Presidency of the United States in 2016. Dismissing his critics as "losers", Trump justified his own intellectual authority by pointing to his millions of followers on Twitter and Facebook, and he continues to engage his base through Twitter as a tactic for circumventing traditional media spaces.

Since his election, Trump has accelerated his criticism of experts. He has eliminated nearly one-third of all scientific advisory committees from the federal government, he has suppressed scientific research on climate change, and he has dismissed scientific advisers who disagreed with him. His attacks on the press have been particularly vicious. He has repeatedly called the press "the enemy of the people", he has threatened to rescind the licenses of television news stations that criticized him, and he has threatened to regulate or even to shut down social media such as Twitter when they labeled his posts as misleading or false.

As I suggested at the beginning of the article, Trump's populist attacks on the press are part of a larger global pattern. In the Phillipines, President Duterte has called journalists "spies" and "vultures", and he has warned that members of the press are plotting to overthrow his government by spreading lies and "fake news" (Hammer, 2019). In Brazil, President Bolsonaro regularly attacks and discredits journalists, calling them an "endangered species" and encouraging his followers not to read newspapers and not to believe what the press reports. Bolsonaro has actually created a "hate office" that publishes fake news and helps to coordinate the distribution of more than 10,000 daily attacks on professional journalists. Similar strategies have been employed by leaders in Hungary, Poland, and Turkey, as well as by opposition parties and populist movements throughout Europe, Africa, and Australia.

## 5 New Legitimation Strategies

In the current media environment, the old strategies of press legitimation have proven ineffective. Complaining about entertainment values and partisan news genres fails to resonate in a neoliberal era where the higher ratings of those formats are taken as evidence of their social and moral value. Arguments about democracy's need for an adversarial press face counterarguments from populists who call the press the "enemy of the people." Beliefs about the putatively self-evident value of impartial professional journalism fail to recognize how algorithms and filter bubbles are pushing that kind of content off the screens of an increasingly large number of users.

And yet, regardless of the challenges that this new media environment presents, many journalists have continued to act like their only choice was to continue doing their jobs as if nothing had changed. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the 2016 US Presidential election, with journalists wondering aloud about where they had failed and worrying about the threats they were likely to face from a Trump administration, a common refrain among journalists was that they "just needed to do their job" (Jacobs, 2017). We can see this suggestion in an article written by Martin Baron, the editor of *The Washington Post*, about how journalists should respond to Trump's electoral victory:

> The answer, I believe, is pretty simple. Just do our job. Do it as it's supposed to be done... The public expects that of us. If we fail to pursue the truth and to tell it unflinchingly — because we're fearful that we'll be unpopular, or because powerful interests (including the White House and the Congress) will assail us, or because we worry about financial repercussions to advertising or subscriptions — the public will not forgive us (Baron, 2016).

Baron and others argued that the public desperately needed and wanted an objective and fact-based journalism covering the actions of the Trump administration. But while this was certainly true for some members of the public, it was by no means true for all of them. As a legitimation strategy, it failed to consider any of the changes in the media environment I described earlier. Furthermore, it was based on a vision of professional journalism that described a much narrower set of practices than journalists actually employed.

Looking at the full spectrum of journalistic practices, and relaxing or questioning some of the assumptions about the nature of the relationship between journalism and democracy, we can identify four new legitimation strategies that are based on things that are already happening in the world of journalism. Some of these practices have been common in journalism for more than a century, and suggest new legitimation strategies that have been available for just as long, but which have largely not been articulated by journalists, editors, or media critics. Other practices are newer, and are associated with the growing influence of digital media. One of the strategies remains extremely uncommon. The specific combination of strategies that journalism might adopt will depend on the specific conjuncture of events, and the specific nature of the relationship between elected politicians and the press.

### 5.1 New Strategy #1: Rely on the Columnists

Professional journalism has always included more than the kind of impartial, information-based reporting that informs the traditional narrative of press legitimation. As Jacobs and Townsley (2011) argued in *The Space of Opinion*, the rise of fact-based reporting was closely connected to the rise of modern opinion columns. Already by the 1920s, it was becoming clear to editors and other media professionals that most readers lacked the time or the discernment to filter the deluge of information that was coming at them. They needed trusted guides to help them determine which facts were important, which facts could be trusted, and which public policies the facts supported. And newspapers offered up just such a guide from the world of professional journalism, in the form of the syndicated columnist.

The most influential and iconic of the early columnists was Walter Lippmann. After a successful period of working as a journalist and a political adviser, Lippmann moved into the world of editorials and opinion columns — first at *Vanity Fair*, then at the *New York World* (the first newspaper to establish the op-ed page), then at the *New York Herald-Tribune* (where his "Today and Tomorrow" column won two Pulitzer Prizes), and finally at *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post* (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 23). At its peak, Lippmann's syndicated column was distributed to 275 different newspapers.

In his more academic writings, Lippmann articulated a second narrative of press legitimation that was centered around the work of columnists (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, pp. 24–25). Lippmann argued that most individuals lacked the time and the analytical skills to develop a sufficiently informed and nuanced understanding of the world. Nor were they well-served by the dominant practices of news reporting, which tended to compress the complexity of the day's events into a series of oversimplified news leads. What they needed were expert analysts, who could help them understand what events were really important, how different events were connected together, and what kinds of social and historical context they needed in order to understand the significance of a particular event and to evaluate different policy proposals that were being offered to help respond to it. They also needed someone to speak as a proxy for them in the political conversation — people who could advocate for the public interest, and who had enough influence that other political actors would have to take their advocacy seriously.

The columnist's authority has had a number of different sources, including access to political insiders, the detachment of an academic scholar, and the autonomy that came from syndication. But it was really the autonomy derived from syndication that marked the distinctive power and influence of American opinion columnists, as compared to other countries (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 30). And this autonomy has actually been magnified by the current media environment. Today's popular columnists are syndicated in dozens of newspapers, like they always have. But they also appear frequently on television, blogs, Twitter, and other digital media (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, pp. 49–51). Their columns are shared by users on social media platforms, increasing the likelihood that they will get pushed forward by algorithms.

The autonomy, influence, and ubiquity of the columnists gives them the ability to move beyond analysis and explanation in order to engage in moral argument and critique. In fact, as Jacobs and Townsley (2011, p. 141) found, slightly more than one quarter of all opinion columns in *The New York Times* contained moral critique as their primary argument style. In the aftermath of the Enron scandal, columnist Paul Krugman blamed Republicans in Congress for shirking their responsibilities to provide honest oversight of the financial industry (Jacobs and Townsley 2011: 185). During the lead-up to the US invasion of Iraq in 2002, columnist David Brooks complained that many politicians in Congress were placing party loyalty above their moral conscience, in a manner "that really is dishonorable" (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011, p. 233). This kind of moral discourse may not be available to reporters, but it is absolutely part of the repertoire available to columnists.

In fact, elite columnists have been consistently and scathingly critical of President Trump since his election in 2016. In *The New York Times*, columnist Charles Blow responded to Trump's election by declaring that he was "part of the resistance," and he has castigated Trump as a racist, a misogynist, a xenophobe, and a bully who was a danger to democracy itself.[3] Paul Krugman describes Trump as a openly corrupt individual, a "deadly narcissist" who is a danger to the nation and to the world at large.[4] David Brooks has argued that Trump is a sociopath who is incapable of empathy, and so ethically flawed that he is a danger to the moral standing of American democracy.[5] Recent new columnists hired by the paper reinforce this moral criticism of Trump. Outlining how Trump's actions are connected together in a dangerous kind of moral degeneracy, they act as proxies and advocates for those members of the public who secretly worry that the nation is headed in the wrong direction.

3. See for example, Charles Blow, "America Elects a Bigot", *The New York Times*, November 10, 2016. Accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/opinion/america-elects-a-bigot.html

4. Paul Krugman, "Trump's Deadly Narcissism", *The New York Times*, September 29, 2017. Accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/29/opinion/trumps-deadly-narcissism.html

5. David Brooks, *PBS News Hour*, March 13, 2020. Accessed at https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/shields-and-brooks-on-leadership-in-a-time-of-crisis

### 5.2 New Strategy #2: Partner with Social Media Companies to Develop Different Algorithms

Shortly after the 2016 US Presidential election, media scholar Zeynep Tufecki wrote an op-ed column in *The New York Times* suggesting that Facebook was failing to meet its civic responsibilities (Tufecki, 2016). Specifically, she argued that Facebook's algorithms (a) made no attempts to distinguish between real news and fake news, (b) were de-prioritizing information from professional news organizations in favor of those posts shared by friends and family, and (c) were actively creating filter bubbles by prioritizing posts and information that users already agreed with. Worse still, Facebook seemed uninterested in exploring or responding to these problems, and they refused to share their data with independent researchers who were concerned about the social impact of these media algorithms. Tufecki later wrote a similar op-ed column about Youtube's algorithm, which she described as "one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the twenty-first century" (Tufecki, 2018).

Tufecki's op-ed columns about algorithms, news, and democracy are a good example of the important role that columnists play in the public sphere, a voice of moral criticism that offers an alternative (or, more likely, a supplementary) legitimation strategy for the press. But they also point to the fact that professional journalism has much less control over the flow of information than they once did. It is not only that journalism's legitimacy has come under attack by populist discourse. It is also the case that many users access the world of news in a media ecosystem that fails to distinguish between credible news and misinformation, and that has a built-in tendency to push forward more partisan and more radical viewpoints.

Rather than denouncing the situation, hoping that users will come to their senses and realize the value of professional news, an alternative response by the press might be to create alliances with those individuals and organizations that have already proved themselves to be adept at navigating the waters of the new media ecosystem. What might such an alliance look like? In an article published in *Columbia Journalism Review*, Buzzfeed's journalism editor Ben Smith suggested several possibilities (Smith, 2016). First, journalists could start covering the new media ecosystem as an important beat, covering the innovative actors who were working to expose the dangers that algorithms posed to civil society and to promote less partisan or selective forms of digital engagement. This kind of reporting would improve media literacy, by making people more aware of the way that they were being herded into filter bubbles. It would bring attention and influence to these digital innovators, improving their effectiveness by increasing their visibility and their prestige. Finally, by making these digital innovators into regular subjects and sources for professional journalists, it would increase the opportunities and the possibilities for creating solidarities and alliances with professional journalists. Alliances between these groups was crucial in the fight against fake news and polarization, Smith argued, as a way to encourage the new media platforms to think more seriously about how to support the "native journalism" that comes from newspapers and other legacy media (Smith, 2016).

While coverage of social media algorithms and polarizing discourse is not institutionalized in the press in the same way that the work of columnists is, it has definitely increased in the years since Trump's election. Besides Tufecki, who writes regular columns for *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic*, the major newspapers in the US have moved to hire prominent figures from the world of new media. Most notably, perhaps, *The New York Times* hired Ben Smith in 2020, bringing him in from his position as editor-in-chief of *Buzzfeed News*. *The Washington Post* created a new position in 2016 for a full-time beat reporter who would cover big data, artificial intelligence, and the impact that algorithms had on social life. *The Wall Street Journal* has three reporters covering the new media and technology. Over the last twelve months there has been consistent reporting in the press about the relationship between social media algorithms and polarizing discourse.

## 6 New Strategy #3: The Aesthetic Public Sphere

The aesthetic public sphere refers to public discussions about entertainment and other aesthetic concerns (Jacobs, 2012). Aesthetic publics work at the level of the social imaginary, by providing important meaning structures and cultural scripts that people use to make sense of themselves and the world around them (Alexander, 2006). They have occasionally expanded the collective understanding of what counted as a matter of common concern, through psychological portraits that helped people think about the link between biographical problems and socio-historical structures (Jacobs, 2012). Because arts and entertainment often include social commentary, they can act as a "counterfactual public sphere" in which fictional individuals gather together to discuss matters of politics and common concern. With some genres, such as docudrama or documentary theater, the story, dialogue, and characters are based on real events and are intended as a consideration, reflection, and commentary on those events. Furthermore, because the audience for entertainment has a different (and often larger) composition than the audience for "serious" news, the public discussion about entertainment and the arts expands the scope of people who are talking about matters of common concern.

There is good reason to believe that the aesthetic public sphere offers important spaces for social criticism in contexts where professional journalism faces significant challenges and restrictions. In China, where strict government controls of media place significant restraints on the kinds of news professional journalists can produce, Internet discussions of popular reality television programs allowed ordinary people to have conversations about social justice, about how voting should work, about generational differences, and about other matters of common concern (Wu, 2017). In the US, political satire programs on television have been effective at criticizing government propaganda, particularly during wartime contexts that placed greater constraints on professional journalists (Wild, 2019). Professional journalists recognize this. During the immediate post-9/11 period, for example, there was extensive newspaper coverage of "The Daily Show", which was described as the "perfect antidote" to government misinformation as well as to the "fake news" emanating from cable television stations (Jacobs & Wild, 2013; Townsley, 2020).

Just like journalists once covered political satire programs as a way of criticizing the Bush Administration's communication strategies, they are now covering how key critics in the aesthetic public sphere are effectively mocking and criticizing President Trump. In the US, programs such as *Saturday Night Live*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, and *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* continue to receive extensive coverage by professional journalists — treating these satirists as important official sources in the political public sphere, as good models of effective critical journalism, and as better journalists than the kinds of partisan hosts one often finds on cable television news programs. Journalists have also started covering popular Internet memes mocking Trump, with considerations of why they were resonating so much with viewers, why they were so successful as examples of critique, and what that says about the current state of political debate and political journalism.[6]

6. Internet memes that have drawn attention from the press include those created by Sarah Cooper, by Occupy Democrats, and @TrumpDraws.

Reporting about the aesthetic public sphere has a number of advantages for professional journalism. First, it reinforces the way that "the new media ecosystem" is an important beat for journalists, and an important way to increase media literacy among its readers. Second, it increases the visibility and the influence of these media satirists, in a way that challenges the legitimacy of populist leaders. Third, it creates conditions for possible alliances between professional journalism and political satirists, in a manner that can destabilize the populist rhetoric that equates professional journalism with elitism. Indeed, it is much more difficult for Trump or other populist leaders to use their standard rhetorics to delegitimate these more satirical criticisms, because the critics are neither journalists nor experts.

## 7 New Strategy #4: Journalistic Boycotts of Populist Demagogues

Finally, professional journalists can decide to reduce or even eliminate coverage of a populist demagogue, arguing that the leader whom they are boycotting represents a fundamental threat to civic norms and to democracy itself. Legitimating such a move would be complicated and risky, requiring a fundamental shift in the discourse used to legitimate professional journalism. But there are theoretical foundations as well as some limited empirical evidence supporting the possibility of such a move.

Though still uncommon, we can find some evidence of press boycotts against elected populist leaders. In Brazil, in response to angry verbal attacks and threats against the press by supporters of President Bolsonaro, the nation's four largest news media outlets withdrew their reporters and announced that they would no longer cover the informal press conferences that Bolsonaro regularly held outside his presidential residence (Phillips, 2020). In the UK, journalists boycotted a government press conference after an aide to Prime Minister Johnson tried to ban specific reporters from the room (Mason & Sparrow, 2020). In the US, there have been repeated debates among journalists about boycotting President Trump's news briefings and restricting coverage of his Twitter provocations. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* stopped sending reporters to cover Trump's COVID-19 press briefings, complaining that they were bereft of news and filled primarily with propaganda, and that they were not worth risking reporters' health. For the most part, though, journalists have been extremely hesitant to boycott elected politicians, feeling that doing so violated their professional obligation as journalists to cover the news of the day.

Theoretically, a news boycott against a populist leader would require a fundamental rethinking of the proper balance between the civic and professional identities of journalists. As I argued earlier, the professional identities of journalists emphasize the impartial reporting of information, so that their readers and viewers can be knowledgeable about the key issues and events of the day. To be sure, journalistic identities are also informed by a civic narrative about the press as the "fourth estate," which insists that a free press is a necessary requirement for a real democracy. But this civic identity is based on the idea that reporters serve democracy by shining a light on the actions of elected politicians, and doing so without having to worry about coercive reprisals from the state. A decision not to shine a light on the actions of an elected politician would seem to be something different.

To think about how the press might legitimate a boycott of a populist leader, we can turn to Alexander's recent work on the societalization of social problems (Alexander, 2018). In that work, Alexander explores how ongoing structural tensions become full-blown social crises. They do so by becoming "societalized", which means that they come to be judged according to a justice-based civic logic instead of some other social logic (e.g., market rationality, political expediency, professional autonomy, etc.). Alexander argues that investigative journalists and prosecuting attorneys are particularly important actors in this respect, because of the work that they do to uncover corruption and abuse and because of their insistence that this corruption and abuse represents a fundamental threat to the moral fabric of the society.

Although fairly unlikely, it is possible to imagine a sequence of events that could lead to a justification of a specific kind of boycott of a populist leader. A series of investigative stories uncovers flagrant actions of dishonesty, corruption, and abuse of power by the elected leader. These stories are followed by a series of legal filings asking the courts to force the leader to turn over more information, and to sanction the leader for violations of the law. The populist leader refuses to cooperate, continues to spread lies, and threatens the investigative journalists and prosecuting attorneys who are arrayed against him. At this point, media organizations decide that the populist leader is an untrustworthy source and a threat to public safety. They attach warning labels to all of the leader's statements, describing them as untrue, untrustworthy, and dangerous. They change their algorithms to de-prioritize information coming from the office of the elected leader. They cover the leader's battle with the legal system and with the media, but they stop attending his press briefings and press conferences organized, choosing instead to label them as dangerous disinformation campaigns. They promise to return to normal reporting as soon as the civil crisis has ended.

## 8 Discussion and Conclusion

To be sure, all of the legitimation strategies discussed above face significant challenges and constraints. Many of them run against the traditional narrative of press legitimacy, and would require a more expansive understanding of professional journalism that was embraced by journalists as well as the larger public. Some strategies require alliances with other actors in the media ecosystem, which would require those actors to embrace a civic orientation over a market-focused one. Still other strategies run the risk of reinforcing the populist criticism of elites. None of them deal very effectively with the existence of political loyalists at the head of key media organizations. Nor is it clear how they deal with the legal and physical harassment which journalists increasingly face. And several of the legitimation strategies are in tension with one another. The rest of the article elaborates on these constraints and tensions in greater detail.

The riskiest and most unlikely strategy is the press boycott of populist leaders. The notion of a press as a fourth estate is based on journalists actively reporting about events those in power would prefer to keep secret, and the need for democratic societies to protect them in their quest to uncover the truth and expose it to the light of public scrutiny. Labeling a political leader's statements as dishonest, reporting on the nature of the dishonesty, and correcting the public record are active moves that more closely align with this ideal. The decision simply to stop covering the leader does not. Furthermore, a press boycott would need to be widespread in order to be effective. This is difficult in a market system where news organizations are competing for an audience. It is even more difficult in a media system where the leader being boycotted has political loyalists at the head of key news organizations. In addition, a press boycott feeds directly into the populist critique of the press, because the decision to boycott can easily be narrated as a paternalistic move by an elitist press. The more active journalistic actions that would presumably accompany a press boycott are already happening in the US, and are likely to continue: reports of government lies and corruption, extensive coverage of legal suits filed against the Trump Administration, and warning labels attached to Trump's tweets and other public statements. And while Twitter has not changed its algorithms to de-prioritize information coming from Trump, the labels they have applied to some of his tweets do prevent them from being circulated more broadly. While an absolute boycott is much more likely to lead to societalization and an escalation of crisis, it is an exceedingly low-probability and high-risk event, which would turn the press into an explicitly political institution and create significant tension with all other sources of journalistic legitimacy.

Relying on the social and moral criticism of the columnists also carries significant risk. While columnists have been an important part of the press for more than a century, the traditional narrative of press legitimation has continued to rely on the opposition between news and opinion. This inherent symbolic tension between news and opinion means that highly visible columnists have an ambivalent relationship with traditional journalists, particularly when those columnists lack work experience as national or foreign correspondents, a professional trajectory that was more typical in the past (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011). The moral criticism of populist leaders by successful and influential syndicated columnists also feeds directly into the populist rhetoric about elites, because the sustained criticism can get reinterpreted as evidence that the leader is succeeding in his quest to rescue society from the corrupt establishment and to return it to the people. Historically, the press has dealt with these risks by maintaining a symbolic and spatial bifurcation between news and the op-ed page.

Relying on the aesthetic public sphere to fend off populist attacks carries also carries risks, though they are less significant than those associated with press boycotts or reliance on columnists. Satirists and entertainers have proven adept at uncovering misleading and false political statements. They have proven equally effective at unmasking the hypocrisies of feigned moral outrages. Journalists recognize and appreciate the role that these media figures play in reinforcing the spirit of critical journalism. On the market side, they recognize that coverage of the most popular political satirists links them to an audience that is desirable to advertisers. The main problem is that the aesthetic public sphere offers few legitimation resources for traditional journalists. Reporting that treats comedy as critical journalism threatens the symbolic hierarchy between news and entertainment that informs the traditional narrative of press legitimation. Furthermore, the comedians and satirists of the aesthetic public sphere have frequently also turned their critical gaze toward mainstream journalists, in a manner that surely does not reinforce press legitimacy.

The fewest risks and constraints are associated with a potential alliance between traditional newspapers and new media organizations. Covering the new media ecosystem as a regular beat is an active move that aligns well with the traditional narrative of press legitimation, because it is providing information on matters of common concern. On the market side, reports about new media draw an audience that is desirable to advertisers. The main challenge associated with a more robust alliance is that new media platforms have made a lot of money with their current algorithmic strategies, which prioritize information that users already agree with and that increase user engagement within tightly drawn filter bubbles. Op-ed columns are unlikely to convince them to change their behavior, nor are careful news articles about how filter bubbles work. On the other hand, pressure from civil society itself can be effective. Twitter and Facebook have both faced extensive social pressure to block or even suspend Trump's accounts. These pressure campaigns have had some success, with Twitter placing warning labels on some of Trump's tweets. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has stated publicly that he he is personally disgusted by Trump's divisive rhetoric, but has so far continued to leave the posts on the platform. Increased pressure by Trump himself could also strengthen an alliance between newspapers and new media organizations, if Trump were to follow through on his threats to punish social media sites he doesn't like.

While the current environment is indeed challenging for journalism and its traditional legitimation strategies, changing political alignments have the potential to ease some of these challenges. Consider what would happen if the public rejected populism, whether by refusing to vote for populist leaders, protesting against or rejecting populist rhetorics, or both. Semiotically, the public that rejects populism also rejects the symbolic and physical assaults on the press that are connected to populist political rhetorics. The public then becomes the protector and the defender of journalism. No longer seeing themselves as relatively passive readers and viewers of news, they embrace their identities as citizens, demanding that elected politicians engage with journalists in a transparent and good-faith manner. But this scenario is almost certainly too optimistic. The structural challenges facing journalism show no signs of abating, nor do the structural forces that are fueling populist movements worldwide. In such an environment, the press needs a variety of legitimation tools in its cultural toolkit.

## References


Adut, A. (2018). *Reign of Appearances: The Misery and Splendor of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Alexander, J. C. (2006). *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, J. C. (2018). The Societalization of Social Problems: Church Pedophilia, Phone Hacking, and the Financial Crisis. *American Sociological Review*, *83*(6), 1049–1078. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418803376

Bagdikian, B. (1983). *The Media Monopoly*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Bagdikian, B. (2004). *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Benson, R. (2019). Rethinking the Sociology of Media Ownership. In L. Grindstaff, M. Lo, & J. Hall (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (pp. 387–396). London: Routledge.

Berezin, M. (2009). *Illiberal Politics in Neoliberal Times: Culture, Security, and Populism in the New Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Boczkowski, P. (2004). *Digitizing the News: Innovation in Online Newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Breese, E. (2016). The Perpetual Crisis of Journalism: Cable and Digital Revolutions. In J. C. Alexander, E. Breese, & M. Luengo (Eds.), *The Crisis of Journalism Reconsidered* (pp. 31–42). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Cho, J., Ahmed, S., Hilbert, M., Liu, B., & Luu, J. (2020). Do Search Algorithms Endanger Democracy? An Experimental Investigation of Algorithm Effects on Political Polarization. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, *64*(2), 150–172. https://doi.org/1010.1080/08838151.2020.1757365

Csaky, Z. (2019). A New Toolbox for Co-Opting the Media. In *Freedom and the Media 2019: A Downward Spiral* (pp. 16–23). Freedom House. Available at https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FINAL07162019_Freedom_And_The_Media_2019_Report.pdf

Golebiewski, M., & boyd, d. (2019). Data Voids: Where Missing Data can Easily be Exploited. *Data and Society Report*, October 29. Accessed at https://datasociety.net/library/data-voids/

Hammer, J. (2019). The Journalist vs. the President, With Life on the Line. *The New York Times Magazine*, October 15.. Accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/15/magazine/rappler-philippines-maria-ressa.html?login=smartlock&auth=login-smartlock

Hawkins, K. (2010). *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobs, R. N. (2012). Entertainment Media and the Aesthetic Public Sphere. In J. C. Alexander, R. Jacobs, & P. Smith (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (pp. 318-342). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, R. N. (2017). Journalism after Trump. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, *5*, 409–425. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-017-0044-8

Jacobs, R. N. & Townsley, E. (2011). *The Space of Opinion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs, R. N., & Townsley, E. (2018). Media Meta-Commentary and the Performance of Expertise. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *21*(3), 340–356. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431017740720

Jacobs, R. N., & Wild, N. M. (2013). A Cultural Sociology of *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, *1*, 69–95. https://doi.org/10.1057/ajcs.2012.7

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Kazin, M. (1995). *The Populist Persuasion*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Kurasawa, F. (2014). *The Algorithmic Shift: Theorizing the Social Implications of Big Data and Crowdsourcing*. Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA.

Malacarne, T. (2020). Connected Audiences in Social Performance. *Sociological Theory*, forthcoming.

Mason, R., & Sparrow, A. (2020). Political Journalists Boycott No. 10 Briefing After Reporter Ban. *The Guardian*, February 3. Accessed at https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/03/political-journalists-boycott-no-10-briefing-after-reporter-ban

McChesney, R. (2008). *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. NY: Monthly Review Press.

Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.

Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, *39*(4), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Pariser, E. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You*. NY: Penguin Press.

Phillips, T. (2020). Brazil Media Boycott Bolsonaro Residence After Abuse of Reporters. *The Guardian*, May 26. Accessed at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/26/brazil-media-boycott-bolsonaro-residence-abuse-of-reporters-suspend-reporting-president-supporters

Rapp, N., & Jenkins, A. (2018). Chart: These Six Companies Control Much of US Media. *Fortune*, July 24. Accessed at https://fortune.com/longform/media-company-ownership-consolidation/

Revers, M. (2017). *Contemporary Journalism in the US and German*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schudson, M. (1978). *Discovering the News*. NY: Basic Books.

Smith, B. (2016). How Tech and Media Can Fight Fake News. *Columbia Journalism Review*, November 17. Accessed at https://www.cjr.org/first_person/ben_smith_fake_news_buzzfeed_facebook.php

Sunstein, C. (2001). *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Townsley, E. (2020). Media Metacommentary, Mediatization and the Instability of Expertise. In G. Eyal & T. Medvets (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Expertise*. New York & London: Oxford University Press, in press.

Tufecki, Z. (2016). Mark Zuckerberg is in Denial. *The New York Times*, November 15. Accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/mark-zuckerberg-is-in-denial.html

Tufecki, Z. (2018). Youtube, the Great Radicalizer. *The New York Times*, March 10. Accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html

Wild, N. M. (2019). *Dubious Pundits: Presidential Politics, Late-Night Comedy, and the Public Sphere*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Woolley, S. C., & Howard, P. K. (2016). Political Communication, Computational Propaganda, and Autonomous Agents. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 4882–4890.

Wu, J. C. (2017). *Entertainment and Politics in Contemporary China*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Ronald N. Jacobs:** Department of Sociology, University at Albany, State University of New York (United States)
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1253-8102
rjacobs@albany.edu; https://www.albany.edu/sociology/faculty/ronald-n-jacobs
Ronald N. Jacobs is Professor of Sociology at the University at Albany, State University of New York. He is cofounder and coeditor of the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. A cultural sociologist who studies media, politics, and civil society, his publications include *The Space of Opinion: Media Intellectuals and the Public Sphere* (Oxford University Press, 2011), *Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (2012), and *Living Sociologically: Concepts and Connections* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News"
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11514

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# Value and Values in the Interstices of Journalism and Journalism Studies: An Interview with Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young

Rick Harp[*] Candis Callison[†] Mary Lynn Young[‡]

Submitted: September 4, 2020 – Accepted: September 5, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

In this interview, Professor Candis Callison and Professor Mary Lynn Young, along with *MEDIA INDIGENA* podcast creator Rick Harp, provide a deep and sometimes personal set of insights as to why the field of journalism studies came to function the way it did and why that field so often falls short in its analysis of issues related to race, indigeneity, gender, and colonialism. Both Callison and Young highlight the arguments they make in their recent book, *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities*, about the role and practice of journalism as it relates to methods, ideals, aspirations, social order, and ethics. They conclude with a discussione of the theoretical and epistemological frameworks that undergird their analyses in the book, and address the tensions between value and values in the news.

**Keywords**: Indigenous media; journalism; organizational structure; values.

*MEDIA INDIGENA* is an independent, Indigenous current affairs roundtable podcast, hosted and produced by Rick Harp. This discussion with Candis Callison and Mary Lynn Young took place over episodes 214 and 215.[1]

* INDIGENA Creative Group (Canada); rick@mediaindigena.com

† School of Journalism, Writing, and Media & Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies, University of British Columbia (Canada); https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7268-3574

‡ Graduate School of Journalism, University of British Columbia (Canada)

1. The following machine-based transcript of the original audio has been edited for brevity and clarity. Please verify against the source audio before quoting.

**Rick Harp:** These days we hear only a little about the possibilities of journalism but a lot about the limits of journalism. Today, among those who are hopeful, we are joined by the co-authors of *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities*, from Oxford University Press. A book about the media moments we're living through, a time where both crises and opportunity coexist.

We're honored that Candis Callison, and Mary Lynn Young, have agreed to sit down with us to discuss their book. Candis is an associate professor in the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies and the School of Journalism, Writing and Media at the University of British Columbia. And Mary Lynn Young is a fellow professor of journalism at UBC.

To start out, could I get you two to each reflect on what got you into journalism in the first place? Was it a calling at first? Were you, like me, kind of seduced by its power and how shiny it was? Candis, let's start with you.

**Candis Callison:** Yeah, I kind of fell into journalism, almost by accident. I had to put out a ton of CVs after I got my undergraduate degree. And then I got a job with one of the very few Indigenous television producers at that time. I mean, this was the mid-90s. There weren't very many Indigenous journalists at the time.

For my undergraduate, I went for a degree in business though I was most interested in history, and I got a minor in psychology and a sort of almost minor in communications. I had this emerging interest in communications that happened over my four-year undergraduate degree. But when I got out, it was really hard to find a job. I was a sort of typical first-gen undergraduate graduate.

I was offered a few jobs. One was working for a bank and one was working for a ski school, and one was working for this documentary series that had, as I said, one of the very few Indigenous television producers who had produced at a high level for the CBC. And I started working on that series. I fell in love with storytelling with audio and video. I took a night school course in film. Then I got a job at the CBC and worked on all kinds of different news and current affairs shows and eventually moved to CTV. I also made a film independently with Canada Council grants on my own First Nation.

What I realized was my kind of core interest was: whose voice matters. The very things that I'm still writing and thinking about, and whether or not there were very many people in the newsroom who looked like me — those kinds of representational issues, and whether our stories were getting told and who they were getting told by and how they were getting told. Those were all the things that were the engine for why I kept going in journalism.

I ended up getting a Ph.D. also by accident because the Internet happened in the late 1990s. I moved to the United States and I worked for one of the very first stations to launch online and offline. And then I worked for a search engine which was one of the top search engines at the time, rivalling Yahoo! It was called Lycos. I always tell my undergrad students because they've never heard of it: at the time that I started at Lycos, people were leaving to work for this *new* startup called Google. It was at the very beginning of the dot com transformation that has really transformed our daily lives as well as what it means to do journalism. And from there, I started down the path towards becoming an academic. I went to M.I.T. and did a Masters in Media Studies first and then a Ph.D. (in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society) and really never meant to come back to journalism. But again, my core interests were around whose stories matter, whose voices matter; how do we talk about issues like climate change that are of great concern to us all? And where are we speaking from? Those are the things that still animate what I do in research and what I do in teaching.

**RH:** Mary Lynn, outline your path into journalism.

**Mary Lynn Young:** Well, first, that's a great question. And I didn't know that about Candis and ski school. Always good to learn something about your co-author.

Basically, I can answer this in two ways. There's what I thought as a younger self. I see it quite differently now why I chose to go into journalism with the benefit of hindsight and a few decades under my belt. What I thought at the time was that, similar to Candis, I was looking for a way to have a job and to do something that I felt was meaningful and committed to in university. And, my mother and stepfather hadn't gone to university. And I didn't know many paths that were open to people with my kind of background growing up in Stoney Creek, Ontario.

When I was at the University of Toronto, they had two newspapers that you could volunteer for as a student. I was completing a history degree with a focus on the medieval and early modern period (I loved it, but not something that you can find a clear path to a career necessarily.) I volunteered at the underdog, more alternative newspaper on campus, called "the newspaper" (all spelled in lower case). And I enjoyed it. I started doing campus news and I started to find it interesting. And I got a job working for the Ministry of Culture and Communications, doing clippings. I'd show up at 7:00 a.m. and go through all the media newspaper clippings and cut out what was relevant to the minister so that it would be on her desk when she got in the morning.

And I thought, OK, this is a fascinating career. It's committed to all these principles of truth and holding power to account. And I bought into all of journalism's ideals when I was a young person and started. I ended up staying on at the ministry, doing some early communications work. I had applied to go to Ryerson. I didn't get accepted the first time that I applied. And, I thought, I've got to try and figure out what I do now to reapply, what I do in between not getting accepted and then trying to apply again the next year. I applied to work at a small weekly newspaper and worked there for a few months, and then I applied to work at the daily newspaper in my hometown, which was Hamilton. The city editor finally gave me a chance to cover a small little area called Flamborough. And I started to cover the council meetings. That's how I got my foot in the door.

My first job after that was as the night weekend crime reporter. I'd work 6 to 2 in the morning at the *Hamilton Spectator* on Friday and Saturday nights. And yeah, I'd cover death, destruction and anything difficult that happened in Hamilton on the weekend. I ended up getting accepted into Ryerson, and I was off to the races. That's what my younger self was probably thinking.

Fundamentally though, I was compelled and I believed the idealized mission that journalism told about itself. When I worked as a journalist, I thought I was finding the truth through fact gathering through my interviews, sources. It was only until I ended up reporting on crime in Houston, Texas, for the *Houston Post* that I started to have a number of moral dilemmas and crises about: was I representing things accurately? Could I, given my level of expertise, my educational background, given the complexity of the structural and sociological landscape that I was covering?

**RH:** So you were disabused of this crusade that we're supposedly on for The Truth, right? And I'm wondering — was it gradual or was it more an acute thing?

**MLY:** I had an epiphany about a question about am I causing harm here? It started to come into my consciousness: am I causing harm here?

Because I was covering Houston, the fifth-largest U.S. city; it's a major crime city. There were more than 500 homicides a year. And I was responsible. I worked out of the downtown police station. The city was ringed by petrochemical plants, two major international airports.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11514

What would happen in a day in Houston wouldn't happen in a year sometimes in parts of Canada in terms of just the crime beat. Yes, I started to think I was causing harm, but really, it took decades to re-socialize myself. I have to be honest from both having been a journalist and how I thought I knew what I knew, what I thought I was doing. There was the epiphany about harm. And then I went to graduate school. And it took years there to understand the role of structure, power, gender dynamics. I went in for a master's and Ph.D. in Criminology, and then it took even more time in the university to see not all professional identities or professional groups interact this competitively. Not all professional identities engage in these kinds of relational ways.

**RH:** You just made me think, how many crime reporters have a criminology degree?

**MLY:** Not many. No, no. That's why I went back to school. I thought I would do a better job. That was my initial impulse after I started thinking about harm. I thought, okay, I'll go back, I'll get a master's degree... I thought, I'll go back to school and I'll come back as a better-informed crime reporter. I'll be able to do my job better. But then I realized that it was more complicated than that.

**RH:** But you Candis, how did you come to go, "Jeez, maybe what I'm doing here isn't what I want to be doing."

**CC:** I relate to both of you. I bought into the voice for the voiceless aspects of journalism, like: 'oh, we just need more of our stories' and not recognizing that there were real solid structural issues. And I don't think I realized that until, like Mary Lynn, I had gone through grad school and come back. I was working on this book that I wrote about climate change, which looked at not only journalists, but scientists, Inuit Circumpolar Council leaders, corporate social responsibility activists, and American evangelicals who were super involved in environmental issues. So, really different groups of people alongside journalists, and it made me start asking a lot of questions. At the same time, I was teaching a media ethics course and really questioning a lot of the foundations of how we thought about ourselves as journalists.

Part of my transformation also comes from the fact that when I started in journalism in Canada, there was no APTN [Aboriginal Peoples Television Network]. I always felt like I was the only Indigenous person in the room and I *was* — in most of my journalism experience. I was hired to work on shows to get the "Indigenous content," to find Indigenous people, because of course, nobody seemed to know an Indigenous person or an Indigenous community organization that they could call. So, that ended up being a very odd part of my career.

When I moved from CBC to CTV, we had the first-ever, national Indigenous current affairs show that was all about the kinds of issues that I was grappling with in my personal life as well. My father and his siblings went to a residential school. The episode that we did on residential schools, I think it was one of the very early, national shows that looked at residential schools. This was back before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

People talked about that show in general as being like the first time you really saw this kind of urbane Indigenous community — our first show was talking about the "urban reserve." It was a concept people hadn't even thought about at that time: all of the many Indigenous people who come to a place like Vancouver or Toronto or Winnipeg from different communities and different nations, different languages and cultures. I feel like that was a super-rich time and I didn't have time to process it until I got to grad school.

Of course, I really thought the Internet, too, was going to change our lives in very positive ways. Suddenly, those voiceless would have a platform of their own and that actually has been kind of true. We do a chapter in the book that talks about pushback, especially from Indigenous people when it comes to how media are covering them. So, I think some of that stuff has happened. But, yeah, it's funny to think back to the younger self that was completely bought into thinking that journalists had a very tough job and they do, but not thinking about the broader structural issues that we confront in the book.

**RH**: Mary Lynn, my read of what you've mapped out in this book is that there are concurrent crises that flow out of this current media rupture and, at the risk of essentializing things, I submit that two broad crises are facing what's known as legacy media. One is a crisis of profitability. The other is a crisis of legitimacy. To me, it's very tempting to connect the two, and we can do that if you feel they very much are. But for now, I'm just curious whether you feel that the first crisis of profitability has sucked up much of the oxygen and effectively starved the other crisis of any attention or any sustained investigation.

**MLY:** I agree with you and we talk about the myopia that some of the journalism studies literature has focused largely on the business of journalism crisis and the technology crisis, the advent of digitalization or digital media, and its impact on the former legacy players.

**CC:** The crisis is real, right? The technological, economic crisis. We're seeing daily tweets right now about journalists who are being laid off and losing their jobs. That stuff is really real.

At the same time, what this book is, is a not-hot take on what's happening in journalism. Instead, it builds on this long-term critique of the story that journalism has told itself about what it's doing that often ignores ongoing harms, the way that journalism is very much a part of social ordering, the whiteness of newsrooms. The fact that there are very few people of colour, there are very few Black and Indigenous people in newsrooms in North America. I think that on one hand, we don't want to downplay the crisis. But on the other hand, we also have to look closely at what journalism has been doing and how it might do it better in this time of reorganization that is inevitable as we're watching this downturn economically. The way that journalism has done business as usual isn't working the way that it used to. How do we begin to rethink all aspects of journalism, not just the technology and economic piece of it?

**RH:** Well, there was this great short quote, and you've alluded to this a bit already in your comments, but I'm thinking here of the late sociologist Herbert J. Gans and his study of mainstream U.S. newscasts back in 1979 led him to conclude, "news reflects the white male social order."

**CC:** We open our first chapter talking about the history of journalism scholarship by talking specifically about the apology that *National Geographic* issued in the last couple of years. They had a historian look through all of the *National Geographic* coverage. We did a show on this for *MEDIA INDIGENA* and we quote from that show because it's such a powerful moment in terms of media recognizing its participation in ongoing harm, in colonialism and at the same time doing very little to change how newsrooms are composed. Really, the same kind of exoticization of Indigenous people, of people of colour is still going on. That same hope, the same kinds of things that drove certain kinds of publications in response to who they think their audience is and what their audience interests are is still ongoing. We need to think more transformatively about what kind of tool journalism is and about the many kinds of journalism that are already out there operating, and what's good about those many different kinds of journalism.

**RH:** Still with Gans, though, Mary Lynn, it feels like a sweeping statement, "white male social order." Yet all you have to do is just look at the employment data and it bears it out to this day.

**MLY:** Yeah, and it is. And I think you are right. It is true and it can be more nuanced in terms of language. It's really about the performance of white masculinity — because we don't want to make it essentialized. Even the studies on gender, about the kinds of women or the traits that women show who get ahead in newsrooms, end up embodying masculine traits to get ahead in newsrooms. It's not just white men. It's the performance of a certain kind of white masculinity in modern journalism that has become the primary authority and legitimized journalism more than its methods. So the fact that you had certain kinds of people with certain kinds of traits telling the news, you know, the major newscasters in charge of news organizations, those were stabilizing authoritative structures… news itself has been stabilized by the performance of a certain kind of white masculinity, and this repeated performance has grounded it.

**RH:** Candis, there's an expression I was reminded of by your book: "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." And I thought, "Well, if that's true of beauty, how true might that be of the stories we tell?" If no single unitary narrative is possible, how many eyes do we need on a given day? If you want to step back further, where do we even choose to look? That's where my mind goes thinking about this.

**CC:** When we were writing the book, a lot of big issues came up. I had been teaching media ethics for a number of years at the journalism school. I had also been helping students wrestle with a lot of the inconsistencies and paradoxical looseness and rigidity of journalism methods of how to get to what happened, of which narratives matter, of whose voices should be prominent. When the book *Seeing Red* came out, I was grateful for historians who looked closely at how Indigenous people had been represented over time in the Canadian Press. The book mounted this pretty solid argument about how Indigenous people were always found wanting by the press and how it is absolutely part of the colonial social order in Canada.

**MLY:** There are multiple perspectives that are obviously required. It even goes deeper than that though, to the fact that content only matters so much in terms of developing relationships and engagement and trust. It's that relational piece. All of us have worked as journalists. I'm sure we can all remember that newsrooms didn't want to get calls from audience members complaining. People used to actively avoid trying to answer the phone. There was a whole system set in place that the audience could write short letters to the editor but it didn't filter over to the newsroom part, at least in the news organizations that I worked in.

It's the relational elements that have been undermined as they become more commercial. There are multiple elements to that. But the relationship elements have been undermined to the point that coming to that shared perspective requires navigation and relationship and some degrees of trust. We see this breaking down all over and that's what we try to unearth and get at in the book as well. That's why we moved to harm. All these audiences weren't included and or were harmed all these years and we've got to start there.

**RH:** We're seeing this turn to audience engagement, right? We need to be more "inclusive." We need to be more "responsive" to the audience. And it's almost like a tacit acknowledgement: yeah, all the things we weren't doing before the digital revolution upset the apple cart, upset our monopoly on — or oligopoly, as the case may be — on the creation and control and distribution of information.

**CC:** That's like the core questions that we try to open up because we think that digital media has opened up these questions. 'How do journalists know what they know?' 'Who gets to decide what good journalism is?'

These kinds of questions, they weren't necessarily asked. They were maybe asked among journalists themselves at the bar or in the newsroom once in a while. But most of the time what Mary Lynn said is right. We sort of had these very small interventions that the public could make or to ask us, as journalists: how did you get that story? How did you arrive at that conclusion? Whereas, with Twitter, if there is real problematic coverage, journalists find out very quickly and the uproar doesn't stop until it's addressed somehow by the news organization.

Journalism has done some great work, right? We're not saying that it hasn't, but the kind of dominant narratives that journalism has told about what it's doing have not necessarily been problematized. I think they are being more problematized now. I think the newsrooms are beginning to ask questions because they're getting pushback in a digital environment.

So, the arc of the book, the last half of the book looks at how repair and reform and transformation have begun to happen in different kinds of organizations and how hard it is to do at older media organizations, at startups.

**MLY:** The socialization process in journalism school and in newsrooms is powerful. I'm sure you all remember; I remember being singled out.

My first job when I was starting at the *Hamilton Spectator*, I was sent out to cover the extended bar hours for an hour from 11:00 till midnight on Sunday. I hadn't gone to journalism school yet and I was sent out to interview people... to see if it was busy. And it was really quiet and my lede was "it was quiet on Main Street" (there was a Main Street in Hamilton). So quiet in fact that you could shoot a cannon down the street.

And how did I spell cannon? Not with two *n*'s, unfortunately. Basically, "you could shoot a canon down the street" and that made the blooper board in the newsroom. I remember the censure and the internal practices that newsrooms do to socialize you into not making certain kinds of mistakes and then, as you said, Rick, some things that you can say, some things that you can't say. I mean, it's a powerful organizing force, the newsroom socialization process.

**CC:** The thing is that one of the real challenges of writing this book and basing it both on sort of a deep study and a deep dive into scholarship and also talking to working journalists right now in various kinds of circumstances — freelancers, newsrooms, etc. — the challenge is really to kind of get to how the interpretive aspect of journalism is also really about socialization, like Mary Lynn was describing.

What is it like to be inside a newsroom? How do we begin to think about that over time, historically, in the present with digital media, how have those things changed? All those kinds of underlying questions are woven into the book as well. I think this is something that journalism scholars have really struggled to also get their heads around.

You mentioned Gans. There have been a couple of other, really famous ethnographies that talk about how it is that stories, frames — the way that we think about what's at issue in a particular news story or what news even is — how much that is determined by the socialization processes in a newsroom. Once you've been working in a newsroom, you do have that sensibility that's hard to describe of what's a news story. What should the lede be? How do we line up what the top stories of the day are? You pick that up in a newsroom, depending on what kind of newsroom you've been in, what kind of platform it's putting the news out on, and who it thinks its audience is.

This is why we ended up doing a chapter specifically on Indigenous journalism because I think that the approach that a lot of Indigenous journalists take explicitly recognizes that they are part of communities, that they are already in an ongoing relationship with lands, waters, non-humans, each other. The question of what are your obligations to lands and waters is already part of how many Indigenous journalists approach their work, which is quite different than the kinds of obligations and responsibilities that a lot of mainstream non-Indigenous journalists might approach their work with.

We all know from *somewhere*. I think that is still a real mind-bender for many who've been kind of socialized and instantiated in a profession that still thinks it can take a view from

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11514

nowhere, that still thinks that it's possible to stand outside of your role, of your organization and assess what's going on and come up with a framing and a representation that is in a way omniscient. When in fact, the ways in which we make sense of the world deeply reflects who we are, where we come from, what our experiences have been, and what organization we're part of and who that organization thinks their audience is.

**MLY:** I wasn't very reflexive as an early journalist. I didn't have a lot of thoughts or hot takes on my backstage thinking and motives and understanding about what the profession was doing and my role in it. It took quite a while, but we devote a whole chapter to journalists' existential crises and the emerging meta genre of journalists' personal stories. They're speculative memoirs, we call them, and they're writing them in real-time and or else they're talking about them in the bar.

**RH:** Why do journalists, who purport to be deeply skeptical, they don't themselves get to be the subject of skepticism. I always thought it was just like a 'good for the goose, good for the gander' kind of thing. Shouldn't people be skeptical about you, and in turn, you skeptical about the place you work, and its motives and its ability to deliver on what it claims to want to do, serve the public?

**CC:** Journalists don't like to be critiqued, Mary Lynn said that earlier but I think this is a really big challenge. The challenge around providing good critique for journalists is that journalists are able to take it on board and recognize not just when it's an egregious mistake, but when their framing is not necessarily identifying what the problem is.

One of the things that fascinated me when I started researching climate change was how to make climate change meaningful for diverse publics meant that you had to dive into ethics and morality and reasons why people should change the way they live in order to address climate change. Those sorts of questions also end up falling off the table if you're just focused on a more objective approach to reporting. If you're just reporting the facts then you're leaving off the table what's meaningful.

How do journalists begin to navigate that, especially when it's a pressing issue like climate change? But you could also apply that to Indigenous issues as well. We have a pressing issue when it comes to murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. We have a pressing issue when it comes to addressing what's happening with Indigenous children who are in care and Indigenous children in the education system. I think these sorts of ongoing issues demand more engaged journalism.

There have been some great examples of that where Indigenous journalists have intervened. Think about the kind of work that Tanya Talaga has done. She's somebody we also interviewed and quote in the book. She says that before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, before Idle No More, thoughtful, fair, nonracist reporting on Indigenous issues was hard to find.

We're still really struggling to get to the kind of fair and engaged reporting that might change the system, that might actually use journalism as a set of tools to make significant changes or to prod the system towards making significant changes.

**MLY:** That's a great point, Candis — really great point. When I think about when I was doing my Ph.D. and when you look at the nature of event journalism, you could almost argue that it's a cultural working through. We cover the same events over and over again. We cover the same kinds of crime stories. We cover the same kinds of public events in terms of politics and other areas of the public sphere.

**RH:** Almost ritualistically, eh?

**MLY:** Definitely. My most generous read is that it is a cultural working through because when I was doing my dissertation, I had a hard time coming up with a research question. I knew the topic area I wanted to cover. It was crime journalism, media, economics and gender. But I had a hard time coming up with the question and at one point, my advisor said to me, "Mary Lynn, you can't solve the nature of good and evil in a dissertation. You just have to have a research question." That's when the light bulb went off. I thought, oh, I can do this. But I didn't realize that those were some of the larger conceptual themes that I'd been working through from a very young age. I think that as a culture, these are the connections we need to be making as we're doing this cultural working through on this ritualistic event coverage. Ideally, we're also generating moral values. We're generating wisdom, although I'm hesitant to use that word; we're generating other kinds of knowledge to help our communities make sense of these wider questions that these events called into play. But right now, journalism is just that: ritual. Without the other questions, it is just event after event.

Because when you look at the homogeneity of most news coverage globally, the fact that people across the globe who conform to a certain kind of journalism style and believe that that's the method, how the stories look the same, how they come up with similar angles except when there's a nationalist or a national context piece. It's really impressive how powerfully conformist this genre has been in terms of both people's emotional and ways of being in the newsroom, as well as what the content looks like.

I mean, how is it that Canadian Press style and spelling come to matter more than potential harm or harm that's actively ongoing? How is it that style comes to matter more than everyone you're talking to? People misremember. People are conspiracy theorists. People have inner conflicts. They get things wrong. But, because it is so messy, journalists have had to come to these shorthands. It's much more complicated and people's lives, Rick, as you say, are at stake. We try to bring that to the fore in the book that it is life and death as we quote you as saying and that journalists need to care.

**RH:** Let me ask you, Candis, is racism a fact... or not? And I'll tell you why I ask: because every time I see it, it's slapped inside quotation marks whenever it's reported on, as if it was opinion, not fact.

Is racism a fact or not, and if it's treated as if it isn't, how telling is that on the part of those who do so?

**CC:** It's such an interesting question, point, observation about journalism — that racism ends up being a claim that people make as opposed to an observable experience, documented with much precision increasingly over the last century.

We talked a little bit already about the *National Geographic* apology, right? They needed a documented, analytical opinion from somebody who had gone through all of their reporting to say: actually, it was racist. When, in fact, one of the interesting points they make in this story that they do on themselves is that at a time when they were reporting on the crowning of a king in Ethiopia, Black men and women in the United States could not get into a lecture at a *National Geographic* place because everything was segregated still at that time.

So, it's the same thing with objectivity. If you think about the way that the history of journalism has been told, we talk about the rise of objectivity and how it emerged in the 1920s. Well, in the 1920s, who had the vote? Who was able to fully participate in democracy?

When you start asking those kinds of questions, it becomes sort of untenable that the way that journalism has perceived itself as recording a story that gets better over time when you know the experience of many minority populations. Marginalized populations, Indigenous populations have definitely had an uneven experience with democracy, with colonialism, and have often suffered and not had their stories told in anything like mainstream news. In fact, in most cases, at least when it comes to Indigenous people, we've had to start our own media. If you look at the way that media has evolved, you see the way that Indigenous people have taken it up at every single turn, including when it came to digital media.

**RH:** Is genocide a fact? Is settler colonialism? What's a fact anymore? I don't understand!

**MLY:** It's a really good question. And I think, obviously, genocide's a fact as is settler colonialism. Facts, as Candis talks about in her first book, are often settled upon in the social. And when you look at James Carey's definition of journalism, it's a special kind of public conversation and it performs a cultural function. And one of those functions is to, as he talks about and Candis mentioned earlier, create enemies and allies.

But I would also suggest it's this kind of, as Candis talks about, "the communality of facts." It's to help people work through the communality — the coming together — of what makes a fact. And that's really what journalism's function is to both recognize that it's part of a much larger set of systems and to try and help people work through what's more likely to be true than not.

**CC:** I think it also goes to: if Indigenous journalists or other journalists from communities of colour come into a situation and sort of pronounce on it, they're immediately called out as having some form of bias. And of course, in the book, we argue that coming from a community actually gives you a form of expertise; the knowledge that you have from your community and from your communal experiences is a form of expertise. And it should be treated as such.

It's interesting because the example you're talking about — you could right away say: well, are you biased or are you supporting one particular social order or view of the world or, one hoped for kind of future and present?

I think these are the challenges that we try to open up by recognizing that there are multiple perspectives and that journalism is often making choices about enemies and allies, about the systems that they want to support and reinforce. At the end of the book, we call for a kind of *systems journalism* — so that journalists situate themselves as adding to prior journalisms, as coming from somewhere, and as providing a window through their reporting on events of the way that systems interact and intersect and the ways a particular moment can shed light on broader trends, on broader problems, and potentially also, on broader solutions.

**MLY:** Candis and I co-teach a course that comes out of the book. One of the early lectures is on what is journalism, and we take many different approaches.

The first approach that journalists would likely all agree to — they would all say, yes, journalism is a fourth estate function. It holds power to account. It is fundamental to democracy.

The second one that we go through is journalism is a professional ideology — basically, it is what journalists say it is. And this is from many scholars, not us. It's how journalists practise journalism, their norms and practices, their ideals. That's what journalism is at any point.

The third one that we go through is that journalism conforms to dominant ideology. Like Noam Chomsky, that it supports state interests; Anderson and Robertson, that it supports settler colonialism; McChesney and other scholars are political economists, that it supports capitalism.

And so arguably, a challenge is that, again, if you go back to Carey, it's a special kind of conversation. Journalism is all of those things. It's such a broad umbrella term. Trying to parse it is so hard when it is doing all of those functions in different ways.

**RH:** In some ways, I find political/legislative reporters to be in the worst position to try and talk about power because power operates outside the halls of parliament. And if we want to get into these bigger structural pictures of how power works and reproduces itself. Looking at Bill X or Y or whether Party Z is up or down in the polls and all this horse racing stuff and the scandals are more soap opera and drama. It has nothing to do with helping its audience understand how power works.

It's funny you mentioned Chomsky, though, because never far from my mind in these types of discussions is a scene in a documentary called *Manufacturing Consent*, which is a doc about Noam Chomsky in the media. And there's a *New York Times* editor who was interviewed and he had this to say:

"There's a saying about legislation that legislation is like making sausage, that the less you know about how it's done, the better for your appetite. The same is true of this business. If you were in a conference in which decisions are being made and what to put on page one or what not, you would get, I think, the impression that important decisions were being made in a flippant and frivolous way. But, given the pressures of time to try and get things out, you resort to a kind of shorthand and you have to fill that paper up every day."

So basically, newsrooms are like abattoirs. But, it's funny, as white male dominated space, I guess they are indeed sausage factories.

**CC**: But this is partly why we argue that, in fact, the crisis facing journalism is maybe more profound. That it isn't just about economic changes and technological changes and new platforms coming along, but it's really about questioning what kind of tool journalism is, what kinds of work can you do with it, what kinds of interventions and transformations can be made. And we can point to many instances in which journalism has done better and we can point to a lot of instances in which journalism hasn't.

We actually teach with that film, *Manufacturing Consent*. We're probably really some of the few journalism professors who do teach with it. It's considered a bit, I don't know, what's the word? Passé?

**RH:** It's a pre-Internet film so it's dated.

**MLY:** Rick, you just said it so brilliantly about power. Journalists tend to focus on the horse race and the discrete events versus the fascia or the links between them. There's another scholar who writes about the strategic role of emotionality as a strategic ritual of emotionality versus objectivity. Part of the horse race and part of some of these events are also emotions run amok. You get a certain set of emotions in journalism: outrage, anger, fear, anxiety. You only have to look to some of the COVID-19 coverage, and this is not to suggest that the pandemic is in any way not fearful or anxious. But, journalism adds its own emotional cocktail, ritual of emotion that is, again, under-addressed in some of our conversations to Candis' point.

**RH**: Well, I'm glad you spoke about this concept of "the news event" because that's something you flag as a key element of current media practices. Let me quote you.

"Journalism's focus and forte of elevating what anthropologists would call the particular through its focus on news events has made it difficult to reflect and name structures and contexts in the reporting."

So, reporters can't see the forest for the trees. They privilege the micro at the expense of the macro. Having said that, changing that — and I guess we're starting to move a little bit into fixing things — changing that sounds like more than just a tweak around the edges, does it not?

**MLY** You talked about it, your capacity for reflection, earlier. When I look at my trajectory, the discrete events worked for me because my backstage I was still trying to work through the universal. I think it takes a tool kit. It takes a personal tool kit at that level of the self, structural, sociological, cultural tool kit. It takes a lot of tools to be able to start to bridge the particular to the universal and create understanding and be able to digest it.

**CC:** I think you're right, though, Rick. I think it is more than just a tweak.

And that is the challenge, right? As people who work in journalism education and actively participate in conversations like I do on this podcast; Mary Lynn has co-founded *The Conversation* [Canada]. The kinds of work that we do both in and out of the university are really thinking about how journalism considers its role and thinking about its potential and its possibility to shine light on these persistent episodes of injustice. Because of the event orientation of news — like what's new here, what happened here, that prevents us from really taking into account the broader trends and the broader structural considerations when it comes to gender, race, colonialism, etc.

Turning these questions to the broader problems to which events could direct our attention, that's something that journalism necessarily hasn't always reached for. Certainly in news, that's true; but, maybe more of that has been done in investigative journalism. So, maybe more so in some genres of journalism rather than others. This systems perspective really matters when it comes to looking at certain events where marginalized individuals, communities, and populations have continually encountered a press who have really not taken into account the history. We interviewed Jenni Monet, who was arrested at Standing Rock. She's an Indigenous journalist [Laguna Pueblo], and she talked about how it's important not only just to know that history matters, but *when* it matters. That's an important aspect of journalism and journalism education that I think has been neglected and particularly so in North America, where the history of Canada and the United States when it comes to Indigenous people has largely been erased.

**RH:** I think it's pretty clear we could talk for many hours more. I mean this is — it's an existential crisis as you've described it. So I want to thank you both for being so generous with your time and for being so generous with your book, your work.

**CC:** Thanks, Rick, and thanks for having us on. One of the great things that I think is woven through the book is my participation in this podcast. So, thank you for inviting me to be part of many conversations.

**RH:** Well, I expect some royalties any day now. [laughter]

**CC**: You and me both. [laughter]

**MLY:** Thanks, Rick, for your leadership in this space, really. You've done an excellent job on this podcast; it's impressive. Thank you.

**RH**: Happy to do so. Take care, you two.

**Rick Harp:** INDIGENA Creative Group (Canada)
rick@mediaindigena.com; https://mediaindigena.com/rick-harp/
Rick Harp is the Winnipeg based host, creator, and producer of the weekly podcast, *MEDIA INDIGENA*. He is a citizen of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation in what's now known as Northern Saskatchewan. While pursuing his BA as a student of political science at Carleton University in Ottawa, he got bit hard by the radio bug at the campus and community station, CKCU-FM. Thus begat a twenty-plus-year career in broadcast media, including national and regional stints at CBC Radio, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), and NCI-FM. A former Artistic/Managing Director of the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival, he is a co-founder and president of the INDIGENA Creative Group (MI's parent company).

**Candis Callison:** School of Journalism, Writing, and Media & Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies, University of British Columbia (Canada)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7268-3574
https://journalism.ubc.ca/callison_bio/
Candis Callison, PhD, is an Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia, jointly appointed in the School of Journalism, Writing and Media and the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies. She is the author of *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts* (Duke University Press, 2014) and the co-author of *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities* (Oxford University Press, 2020). She is a citizen of the Tahltan Nation (an Indigenous people located in what is now known as Northern British Columbia), a former journalist, and a regular contributor to the podcast, *MEDIA INDIGENA*.

**Mary Lynn Young:** Graduate School of Journalism, University of British Columbia (Canada)
https://journalism.ubc.ca/mary_lynn_young/
Mary Lynn Young, PhD, is a Professor, co-founder and board member of The Conversation Canada, a recently launched national non-profit journalism organization, and affiliate of The Conversation global network. She has held a number of academic administrative positions at UBC, including Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts (2011-2016), Director of the UBC School of Journalism (2008-2011), and Acting Director (June-December 2007). A former journalist, she is co-author with Candis Callison of *Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities* (Oxford, 2020).

Symposium "Value and Values in the Organizational Production of News"
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11515

Sociologica. V.14 N.2 (2020)
ISSN 1971-8853
https://sociologica.unibo.it/

# Reflecting on Forty Years of Sociology, Media Studies, and Journalism: An Interview with Todd Gitlin and Michael Schudson

Jiang Chang* Todd Gitlin† Michael Schudson‡

Submitted: September 4, 2020 – Accepted: September 5, 2020 – Published: September 18, 2020

**Abstract**

Reflecting on more than four decades in dual scholarly careers that cut across the boundaries between communication, the sociology of culture, and journalism studies, Professor Todd Gitlin and Professor Michael Schudson discuss the growth, evolution, and strengths and weaknesses of the media studies field with Professor Jiang Chang. The three reflect on the origins of the research, the gap between the field of journalism studies and the field of sociology, the role played by journalism in the growing conflict between China and the United States, the relationship between media and political protest, and whether there ought be any cause for optimism regarding the state of democracy in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords**: American Sociological Association; China; culture; Fox News; journalism studies; sociology.

* Shenzhen University (China); criver@protonmail.ch; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8992-5410

† The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and Chair of the Ph.D Program in Communications (United States)

‡ The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism (United States)

**Jiang Chang:** Thank you both. Okay. I'm really honored to do this. The first question is, can you describe your own intellectual history in graduate school? You were involved enrolled in the prestigious sociology department, but you ended up writing dissertation on journalism and media. So was this common at the time? Why was there such a flowering of media studies within sociology in the 1970s?

**Michael Schudson:** So that's really two questions I guess: how did I get to this topic and why was sociology in general moving toward this topic. The answer of how I got to the topic is somewhat accidentally! I wasn't strictly interested in media, I was interested in professions. And the dissertation that I wrote compared the emergence of notions of professionalism and objectivity in journalism and in law. And later, after that was finished, and I was considering turning the dissertation into a book, I sent it around to a few people, all of whom said the journalism part is really interesting. The law part really isn't. So, it became a book about the rise of objectivity in journalism. There was still little general interest in the media at the time, within sociology. I remember telling people that it was my "Watergate Dissertation" — that law and journalism were the two professional fields (or professionalizing fields in the case of journalism) that were constantly in the news at the time I was coming to a dissertation topic. So those were the ones I worked on.

It took a while, in some ways not until my second book — on advertising, that I said, "oh, I study media." And as you know, although the institutionalization of journalism studies as such came many years after that, there was a turn more broadly to studies of media, popular culture in the news media, particularly because of the political moment — the anti-war movement, the various rights movements evolving at the time, all very much present among younger sociologists and graduate students. And everyone I knew was a critic of the news media. Todd [Gitlin]'s work was very important in pushing people further in that direction, *The Whole World is Watching* comes out 1979, I think soon after *Discovering the News*. So does Dan Schiller's book, on objectivity in the news. Gaye Tuchman's "News as a Strategic Ritual" appeared prominently in *American Journal of Sociology* in 1974. I think she was a real pioneer. I'd also heard that [Herbert] Gans was also working on the news media but that he'd been working on this for many years off and on, finally publishing *Deciding What's News* in 1979, I believe. But I think this was all a response to public events and a new, critical take on journalism, and the fact that a great many standard practices of journalism seemed to be inadequate to the moment.

**Todd Gitlin:** I'm not sure what the right answer is. Let me explain about my own graduate school trajectory. It was unusual. I did a Master's degree at the University of Michigan in Political Science in 1963 to 1965. When I was deeply involved in student radical activity. I was involved with the organization Students for a Democratic Society and very much involved in organizing for Civil Rights, against South African Apartheid and American corporate connections, and then against the Vietnam War.

For the next nine years I worked as a political organizer or community organizer, and a journalist, and that was the core of my life. I wrote quite a lot of poetry too, and a book about community organizing in Chicago, but primarily I published journalism in what we then called the "underground press," which was not literally underground but was alternative, a more impassioned form of journalism than the traditional kind.

When I decided to go back to the university I wasn't originally planning to write about media. I decided to go to Berkeley, I was living in San Francisco. I was looking for a program that would be unconfining, that would be relatively open to my various interests, which were not only sociological but cultural and literary. I also had grand — and I would now say grandiose

— theoretical ambitions when in the late 1960s I started to become influenced by the idea that we had entered into a post scarcity society. And I was interested in the concept of scarcity. So when I decided to go back to get a Ph.D. at Berkeley, my initial thought was that I would try to write an intellectual history of the idea of scarcity. Now, I had not intended to go on with media studies.

After taking a year of courses and passing my qualifying exams, for which I submitted quite a lot of previously published work, one of my professors, Bob Blauner, told me that he liked an article I had written in early 1969 about the mutual influences of the media and the student movement. He thought that was a promising topic. I had written this piece for a New Left nonacademic journal, *Leviathan*, while out of school. I had read very little of the sociological literature on media; or on movements, for that matter. But I had a lot of experience and I had observations which were, I would say, both intuitive and earned through reflection on experience. The article, "14 Notes on Television and the Movement," was quite speculative. But it had in it some of the ideas about the interaction between media and the new rough that I later developed. A couple of years later I revised it ("Sixteen Notes") for publication in the literary journal *Tri-Quarterly*.

So Bob Blauner said to me, "I thought that was a very interesting piece. Why don't you develop it?" And that was actually the first time I thought about doing so. A professor's suggestion can be mighty powerful! In fact, if I had been stubborn and kept to my plan of writing the intellectual history of the idea of scarcity, I would still be working on that, I'm sure. In any event, I had been interested in media for years, in a way that combined curiosity and lack of discipline. In graduate school at Berkeley, I spent a whole year catching up on the disciplinary field, and was rather astonished and appalled, frankly, at how thin it was. That led me, in 1976, to write my critique of the dominant paradigm (which was published in *Theory and Society* in 1978).

I wrote it because I wanted to digest and react to my underwhelming experience of reading the field. Then I started to encounter other sociologists of more or less my generation who were working on media in a fresh way. One was Michael Schudson, the other was Gaye Tuchman. They were the prime ones, along with the slightly older Harvey Molotch, then at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who had written an important article after the big oil spill in 1970, first in a popular journal and eventually in an academic journal. "Accidents, Scandals and Routines," he and his co-author called it — a very detailed attempt to reconstruct the process by which events become news.

Now, at that time, I was largely unaware that there was a field called Communications. There was a Ph.D program in Communications at Stanford, but for me their behaviorist empiricism would have been too narrow. I was in a Sociology department because I aspired toward a sociological imagination. My advisors were quite sympathetic to my pursuit of a sociological understanding of media. In fact, my thesis advisor, Bill Kornhauser, many years earlier, as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, had participated in some pioneering research in 1951 about television's representation of a parade to honor General MacArthur after President Truman fired him as commander in Korea. Gladys and Kurt Lang positioned graduate students around the parade in real time and then compared what they observed with the media coverage. Bill Kornhauser was one of the observers, and moreover, he was interested in the concept of mass society. So he was very encouraging. My committee in general, I think, appreciated that the field of Sociology, of media or as we then said, Mass Communication, was quite thin. I knew Herb Gans' work, which I appreciated, but there wasn't much else. I still don't understand quite why the three of us, Michael, Gaye and myself, stumbled into the field more or less at the same time.

**JC:** But how did the study of media institutionalize? Because it has been a quite mature discipline worldwide. Why do so many sociologists who studied the media finally decide to leave sociology?

**MS:** In my case, just to be autobiographical again, the faculty at Harvard sociology who most influenced me were the least sociological in terms of professional connection. My dissertation advisor was Daniel Bell, who was given a Ph.D at Columbia in sociology for already published work in journalism in several different magazines. He was basically a magazine journalist with an insatiable thirst for social and political knowledge. He came to Columbia to teach undergraduates and he wrote an early book about the undergraduate curriculum at Columbia, which is quite an interesting book on general education that contains seeds of several of his later, more famous works.

But he never studied in a graduate school. The other great influence on me was David Riesman, whose only advanced degree was in law. He learned what sociology he learned by teaching undergraduates at the University of Chicago. He taught in the same course that Daniel Bell also taught in — and at the same time. There's a great story Riesman told me about teaching undergrads there in a room next to Daniel Bell's classroom. He could hear the clamor and excitement of students' voices in Bell's class through the wall. It was intimidating when his own students were practically silent! When I knew him, of course, he was world-famous and didn't need to be intimidated by anyone. But I was not socialized in graduate school into learning about the American Sociological Association. I'm not sure Bell or Riesman ever went to an ASA meeting. If they did, they did so as outsiders. They would never have been on committees. They probably never voted in ASA elections. They were sociologists in intellectual orientation, but not in professional orientation or training.

Now at some point, I don't remember the dates, but I started attending ASA meetings. I organized a small, informal group of sociologists there who were interested in culture, popular culture, and so on, and we started meeting, without an agenda, except to learn what one another were doing. Maybe this lasted for three years or so? Had I known more about the ASA, I would have said, "Hey, we should be a section! We should organize ourselves formally within the ASA." But this never occurred to me because I didn't know what a section was, you know, no one had ever taught me that. Or mentioned it to me so far as I know.

And so the Sociology of Culture section at ASA got founded maybe five years after that. And people who knew more about institutions than I did put it together and did all the work to make it happen.

So people drifted elsewhere looking for jobs in a tight job market — and communication was a growing field. And it was, I think it's fair to say, it was an intellectually limited field and one that borrowed almost everything from social psychology and sociology. A little bit from political science, a little bit from elsewhere, but it was an importer of ideas and intellectual traditions, and at that point a lot of people, some of us who sort of accidentally started studying the media, benefited from that. My initial job in University of Chicago was in sociology. There was no communication department there. But my next job, at the University of California, San Diego, also in sociology, came with the understanding that I would teach in the undergraduate communication program that was an interdisciplinary program that only later became a department.

**TG:** I had a sociological imagination before I went back to graduate school. I carried Sociology with me in my head, or at least aspired to do so. I did not care what was the departmental setting for my thinking. But when I think back on it, in the 1970s, if one wanted to write about media, one might write straight history, or undertake some empirical research on media effects in political science. For a deeper look, Sociology was the place to be. In my view this was partly because Sociology was not as confined as it later became — not as quantified. Berkeley, I'm happy to say, was the least quantified of the major American departments.

What happened in Sociology was a boom in the study of culture. The culture section of the American Sociological Association rather quickly grew large. It was so large, in fact, that it was in a way ungainly. For better or worse, it became difficult to demarcate the media as such — media institutions, media flows, the relation between media and ideology, between media and other institutions. Perhaps the sociological study of media later dwindled in part because it was subsumed within the larger currents of the sociology of culture.

**JC:** My next question is about the differences between the study of journalism and the study of media. How is the study of journalism different than the study of the media? Are we too focused on journalism and not enough on larger media systems or is the opposite true?

**TG:** I am inclined to believe that the study of the media generally is the over-arching framework and that the study of journalism is largely nested within it. I felt this more and more acutely over the years. When I was first writing about media in the 1970s, in my dissertation, I was operating on the premise that the way in which media operate on people is primarily through ideology, through framing, through conceptual impact, and I wrote on that premise. For many years thereafter, some intuition about the shortcomings of that approach nagged at me. I came to think my initial approach to media was too intellectualized. I did a second study in 1980–1981, on television entertainment. Occasionally I had odd thoughts about what I called the ontology of television — what kind of phenomenon is this, the presence of television, the attention to it? What is the nature of its presence in our social life? I scribbled notes and put them in an ontology file. In the end I used almost none of it in my book, *Inside Prime Time*, which came out in 1983.

I had the intuition that if we look at the interaction that takes place between people and media — and here I was thinking particularly about television — the interaction was far more enmeshed in emotional life than purely cognitive life. And that in fact, cognition floated on the surface of emotion. So this long period of rethinking culminated in the book that I wrote in 1999, 2000, and published in 2002, called *Media Unlimited*. There I tried to reconstruct the history of media, including the history of journalism as a subset within the context of the history and sociology of emotion.

Now, some journalists who resent seeing journalism enclosed within the area of media studies. I remember one review of Media Unlimited by a journalist who liked the book very much but said, "I don't understand what all this is about the media," because that's not how he thought of his profession. But I think in a way it's a seed of professional arrogance to think that the way people at large approach journalism is essentially different from the way in which they approach any other kind of media content.

I had a trace of this intuition in my dissertation, *The Whole World is Watching* — that the ways in which journalism gets our attention is not essentially different from the way which it approaches us as entertainment or mood or whatever you want to call it. In other words, a headline or a news photo or even the structure of an article, the forms of emphasis and so on, use a repertory of appeals and approaches which is not essentially different from what a movie maker does or a musician does.

There are differences, of course. Journalism is a special style of media. But I did feel more and more strongly, and continue to feel very strongly, that journalism is an art of human sensation and attention-getting. That it is, in Aristotle's terms, a form of rhetoric. And that among its rhetorical devices and commitments is to a certain conception of truth. Journalism should not operate the same way cartoonists do. I don't want the Walt Disney company producing the news. But the human interaction is not so different.

**MS:** Right. Well, again, I'll start autobiographically. In around 2000, probably about 1999 or 2000 or so, I began work on what later became *The Sociology of News* in a WW Norton series that Jeff Alexander edited. And what he had asked me to do was either, I can't remember exactly now, a sociology of culture book, or a sociology of popular culture book. And I said that that's beyond my capacity. It's just too vast a topic. I wouldn't know where to begin. How about a sociology of news? And he said okay. That was what I thought I could handle and what I would enjoy doing and that was my entry (published 2003) in the series.

There is such a thing as a sociology of news. And at that time, we still didn't have journals like *Journalism* or *Journalism Studies*. We would have many others later, but those were just getting off the ground or hadn't started yet. So there gets to be an institutionalization of this study of journalism. (What year did the "Journalism Studies" section of the International Communication Association begin? I suspect a few years after that.) *Journalism Quarterly* (later *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*) existed but it drew contributors and readers largely from J-School faculty with very little interaction with or interest in sociology or history or political science or the more adventuresome developments in communication studies.

When I wrote *The Sociology of News*, you know, I was still teaching at the UCSD Department of Communication. Which had at that point 15, 16, 18 faculty. It was deeply interdisciplinary. All of the early hires had to be appointed in some other department, because communication couldn't make appointments. So Michael Cole was in psychology, Carol Padden was in linguistics. Dan Hallin was in political science. I was in sociology, Chandra Mukerji was in sociology, and so forth, with a 50% appointment in the program on communication. And I think for all of us it was communication that quickly became our real home because it was so much fun. So interesting. And the interdisciplinarity of it was absolutely crucial. People there just loved it and didn't want to be confined to the discipline they had done in graduate school.

So journalism studies now has its own journals. It has its own section of the ICA. It has its own book series though different university presses. It has some affiliations with outside fields. It's notably mixed up with political science through a jointly sponsored journal, *Political Communication*. I think political science especially has been a strong influence on it over the years.

But sometimes I do feel that my younger and intellectually talented colleagues settle too comfortably into "journalism studies" as the world that defines them. People are too content to focus only on journalism as if it were the whole universe. Journalism's a very important institution. But so are political parties. Party systems matter. And so on and so forth. The economy matters. And if you are thinking and writing only about journalism, you're going to miss stuff. And I think media-centrism is an endless danger in journalism studies. Looking at the culture of cultural studies, or the study of culture, more widely would help but so, you know, so would knowing a little about political power. There's a lot besides the news that makes a difference. I once told graduate students that the concept most sorely absent in communication studies is the concept of "institutions." Institutions matter, both in and around the media.

**JC:** I totally, with you on that journalism scholars sometimes are too satisfied with the field. You know, in China, we even give PhD degrees on just journalism to people and there are a lot of scholars have been advocating for, like a pure journalism studies field for many years. So, maybe these are very different contexts, but still, I think the symptoms are alike everywhere.

My next question is about this special issue, which takes a look at web metrics. There's an argument that web metrics contribute to the potential rationalization of journalistic work, a la Max Weber. But the politics of the last three years seem anything but rational. So is rationalization still a viable thesis in journalism or elsewhere? Or are we in a different era? One that goes beyond this rationalization framework?

**TG:** There are still elements of journalistic practice that conform to Weber's model of rationalization — which doesn't mean that the products are rational. It means that there are impersonal procedures which are brought into play by the practitioners. They are *instrumentally* rational. There are usually unwritten rules of the form: If X happens, you should do Y. If you talk to one witness about an event you should talk to another witness. Those are rational procedures. Those still apply.

However, the entire ecology of journalism has been transformed by the proliferation of the means of media. Now, I argued in Media Unlimited that such transformations are not entirely unprecedented and that if we look at the history of consumption in the West, and the role of media in helping to constitute experience, we see a continuity of development in which new forms develop, new technologies develop, and then take their place among the other technologies. At different times, different ones come to the fore and others retreat into the background.

But the spirit or the sensibility of media is governed by a hunger for speed — speed of transmission and speed of apprehension — and by a search for what I call disposable emotions. The astounding multiplication of media that was taking place in the late 1990s was both new and not new. I mean the magnitude of it was new, the ability to publish, the ability to start a platform with no capital, et cetera, but within a framework of technology diffusion in general.

Let's look at the early history of radio. Radio was first developed in the US as both a military communication device and then as a commercial device. But during that period between World War One and 1927, radio was basically an amateur pursuit, decentralized, a sort of hobby, using shortwave. And it was completely chaotic, which is why the US government stepped in, with the Federal Radio Act in 1927, to rationalize it so that broadcasters did not interfere with each other's frequencies. So even in the case of radio you have this diffusion of initiative. You have this decentralization of the use of media.

And then there was a largely successful attempt by institutions, in that case the state, and of course also commercial enterprises, to rationalize the allocations through licensing. So when you look into that history, what happened in the late 1990s is not quite so surprising. You have a dynamic of expansion and also a dynamic of control and concentration.

**MS:** I'm struggling with this question. And I did not go back to my Weber see how much he saw rationalization as a description of what was happening, or as normative, something that was good. And maybe we still have that question. Is rationalization a good thing or not? I mean for him it was clearly part of modernization, part of the, as he said at least in the English translation, the "disenchantment of the world," rationality and schemes and systems of rationality and reasoning on the basis of data like people keeping credit and debit account books in businesses as they had not done before the 19th century.

I don't know. Weber wrote at length about religion, he was very interested in religion, and whether he saw the displacement of religion as a good thing I don't know. A Weber scholar would probably be able to answer that, but leaving aside what Weber thought, we can see web metrics and such as a good example of rationalization. Let's leave less to chance and guesswork. Let's know how many people are out there reading how much and for how long and we can measure our impact. You know, we do it too in academia with journal "impact factors." Maybe we should eliminate and forbid the reporting of journal impact factors and just make our own judgments about whether this journal or that one publishes good work or not.

We have not ultimately rationalized how we, at least here in the United States, deal with hiring and promotion of faculty. It's peer review. And there's some wonderful research on how peer review is conducted and what kind of factors influence it and I have just spent three years on a committee at Columbia that is advisory to the university provost on all tenure decisions across the university. And there's no question there: the numbers matter. And for a scientist, dollars matter: how many and how big the grants are that you've received (ideally from the federal government from NIH or NIMH or NSF. All of that does count, but it is not all that counts. In the end, I would say from my experience, people still ask and want answers to the question of, did this person's work make a difference in this person's field or subfield? I mean my first book is my most cited work. It's not my best work, but it's the most cited one. It would also be very interesting to know whether cited work is cited accurately. From what I have seen, maybe 20 or 25% of those who cite my claims in *Discovering the News* misunderstand what I claimed! So what? Well, when it comes to what matters in tenure decisions, that's not what matters or what should matter. What matters is whether the work is intellectually sound work or not, of a quality deserving of a permanent position at this or that college or university. The numbers help but they don't answer the question.

**JS:** Well, I like to respond a little bit to your comment about your first book. You know, as your official Chinese translator of that book, I did my very best to at least make the translation clear and accurate. But I don't know how people are going to cite it. But I still think it is a very good contribution. And maybe even if when people are setting it in the wrong way, they still get inspired and enlightened by the book. So maybe it's not that bad thing. That is just my opinion.

**MS**: You're right. I hope you're right.

**JC:** Well, it seems that many of the most passionate critics of the institutional press have in the past decade become its defenders, at least in its ideal form. So why do you think this might be?

**TG:** My goodness. That's a good question. I would say because the political and cultural landscape has changed so dramatically. When I and people like me criticized the mainstream journalism in the 1970s, we were in a sense presupposing the model of rational discourse. We believed that media should be judged by immanent critique. That is, we had in our minds a model of journalism as an approach to transparency in relation to the truth. We then criticized existing journalism against that standard. We pointed out that, contrary to naïve ideas of objectivity, there were frames. Judgements were being made through institutions that had their preferences and priorities, not necessarily self-consciously.

We had, in a funny way, an ideal not so different from Habermas's idea of the ideal speech situation. That is we believed in not only the goodness but the practicality of a model of rational critical discourse, as Habermas called it. So then we held *The New York Times* or CBS or any other institution to account *against* that standard. But we were naïve about how durable that standard was. At just the moment when we were criticizing the performance of the media, the basis for that standard was eroding. Nobody imagined the internet. Now if we go forward to the 1990s, it's clear both in the politics in the US and many other countries, and also throughout the cultural apparatus, that the standard has dissolved.

Now we're contending with the world of competing propaganda. Let me go back for a second. The model of journalism whose development Michael wrote about in his book governed a certain period of American journalism. In fact, it ran more or less from the Progressive era through the evolution of television up through the 1970s. That triumphalist model exalted journalism at its most heroic. Journalism as the institution that exposes the king, that stands as an independent force to hold power accountable. There was a golden age, institutionally so, so that at the time when I was writing in the 1970s about how CBS covered the 1960s, the three network news broadcasts accounted for more than three quarters of the viewing public.

So when Walter Cronkite, the renowned anchorman on CBS, closed his broadcast by saying, "That's the way it is," he was articulating a norm which had a great deal of credibility. Of course some people disagree: there was a right-wing critique of him. But the norm was reinforced by the great successes of American Journalism in those years. Number one, reporting on Civil Rights activity. Number two, critical reporting on the Vietnam War, which was slow to develop but then did develop very aggressively. Third, coverage of the crimes of the Nixon administration.

Those were the years when young people flocked into journalism schools because now a journalist was a hero, as in "All the President's Men." That world is gone. Because it's gone, those of us who were critical of the mainstream for its distortions and omissions, came to realize the degree to which we actually depended on an assumption of common grounding, a common standpoint that more or less rational people could share and on the basis of which we could make judgements and come to act, as Walter Lippmann famously wrote in *Public Opinion*.

I would just add to what you said before about the golden age of journalism. As you know, the myth of American journalism is that it was always a truth-seeking operation, that it was an enlightenment product, that it was proof of our conviction that you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. But in fact, that's not how American Journalism began. American Journalism was scandalous, wild, often deliberately misleading in order to both accomplish political missions and also to increase readership. In fact, the Golden Age is not typical of the history of journalism in America. It's the exception. And we've now gone back to the period of the 1790s and 1800s and 1810s and 1820s when the news was polemical, partisan, rather hysterical, frequently misleading or straight-out deceitful. In this longer view of the history of American journalism, the golden age of journalism is a parenthetical period. It's not the norm. We have now returned to what was originally the norm, which was wild.

**MS**: Yeah, I like that question. I think that the premise of the question is right. And I remember noticing that in the British case, when much of the most interesting academic work on the news media was highly critical, it came from scholars on the political left (and that's still the case). But at a certain point as British politics moved to the right in the Thatcher years, some of those scholars started to think, maybe the BBC isn't as bad as we said! And maybe its "even-handedness" is not selling out, maybe it's actually upholding some kind of unintentional modesty that accepts fairness as a professional ideal and turns out to be useful to society.

Journalism has moved strongly (especially since the late 70s in the United States) to a more interpretive style. And I think the extent to which it has done that has not been recognized by American journalists. And I think insufficiently recognized in journalism studies as well. We still worry about what I would like to call an "old fashioned notion of objectivity problem." My own contribution to this was with a former graduate student, Katherine Fink, on the rise of what we called *contextual journalism* and the extensive move towards providing the audience more contextual information. And there are half a dozen other published papers by other people with comparable results, showing that "Hey, guess what? The criticism of standard objectivity from the 1960s and 1970s, took hold! Somebody listened! They listened less to the academics then than to other journalists who were making similar criticisms. But the criticisms took hold; if you're just saying,"he said she said," and not making your own judgments about what actually happened, you're not doing the public a favor. You have the new journalists who are experts in science, sometimes in medicine or public health, or politics in particular. They may have PhDs or M.D.'s but, more often, they don't. They're just smart and savvy writers with a close acquaintance with the people who do help produce new expert knowledge. And these journalists are in a position to say, "some things are plausible, some things are wrong." And today journalists need to say that, obviously in the US with a president who can't stop lying, when the leader of the world's most powerful nation has an unending thirst for winning attention and for just winning, and not a passing thought for making a distinction between what's true or what is likely to be true and what's sheer fantasy or self-serving wishes. Well, "he said, she said" doesn't do the job.

I think more journalists should take courses, or at least listen to a lecture or two on the recent history of journalism. In the US they like to say, "oh, well, journalism all goes back to the First Amendment and the founders believed in the press as watchdogs on government." Well, not really. Thomas Jefferson — who stands as a statue outside Columbia Journalism School — thought prosecuting newspapers for libel was a fine idea: only the states, not the federal government, should do it. You don't hear that very often. Jefferson had very different notions about what the press was about, and the press they were talking about has changed dramatically over time, especially in the last fifty years. And we don't recognize that.

**JC**: Okay, thank you for this. I wanted to get a bit more contemporary now. Particularly I want to talk about several very big protests that have been shaking both journalism and the word, the #metoo movement or the more recently Black Lives Matter. And it seems that journalism is increasingly taking aside in these political disputes. Do you agree that this is happening?

**MS:** Yes, I'd agree for the most part. Granted my reading is limited, particularly since the pandemic. The newspaper I read most carefully, *The New York Times*, has long been criticized for being too liberal. At one point, (July 25, 2004) Daniel Okrent, the first "public editor" at the paper (whose task was to fearlessly assess criticism of and complaints about the paper and publish his conclusions) asked in a headline, "Is *The New York Times* a liberal newspaper?" and answered in the column's first sentence: "Of course it is." This was an informal look, not a quantitative study, and he emphasized that the paper was liberal on social issues, notably on same-sex marriage. That was a very interesting column for a *New York Times* insider to write, pointing to a one-sidedness to the kinds of issues and topics that get taken up in in the paper. It doesn't mean you don't quote people accurately, it doesn't mean you don't occasionally have a profile of an interesting anti-abortion activist, but in the preponderance of the news, the liberal bias was obvious 16 years ago. So in that sense, I think, yeah. It might be more even-handed in some other mainstream news media, likely the broadcast television networks, but public editors there would probably still find a liberal tilt.

**JC**: But the fact that mainstream journalism is more and more taking a position, do you think it is good or bad for democracy?

**TG:** Is mainstream journalism increasingly taking sides? Yes, with a caveat. The major news organizations are socially liberal, not economically liberal. So for quite a while, in part because of the social classes from which the media elites emerge, they were (eventually, at least) sympathetic to feminism, they were sympathetic to equal rights activities, to gay rights, to the disabled, to minorities of different kinds. Liberal on social questions — not on economic questions. On the subject of economic inequality, the public is actually to the left of the media. But on matters that directly connect to the social experience of the news organizations, they are liberal. So it's not astonishing that the #metoo movement would find a welcome within mainstream media. And if we look at coverage of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, I see a direct continuity from coverage of the Civil Rights movement and violations of Civil Rights in the late 1950s to the coverage of the murder of George Floyd in the present.

Now we have videos, so we get more intimate and more decentralized images, but the effect of the broadcast of, let's say, the Rodney King beating in 1992 and then the Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown killings, and so many others, all the way up to George Floyd and Jacob Blake. The coverage of those events conforms to the premise that journalism is obliged to show abuses of power. And so the coverage of the Birmingham demonstrations in 1963, which were electrifying, where we saw police dogs used against demonstrators, we saw high velocity fire hoses being used as weapons, that coverage which was very important to expanding the Civil Rights movement and sympathy for what African Americans were going through — the same spirit is at work now. The difference is that now there are many more points of entry to large audiences, so that a George Floyd video becomes immense even though (or maybe partly because) it was recorded by amateurs.

The scale of these uprisings is of such magnitude that I have to say, even against the background of what I've described, I'm astonished at how widespread the coverage has been and how receptive in spirit, if not always in detail, it's been to the demands and the activities of Black Lives Matter. So that very quickly we saw it became the big story. Now, of course, there are many reasons why that story spread. I don't have a hypodermic model of why that happens. But very quickly it became clear that this was to be a big story. Anguish, horror, and rage erupted from just beneath the surface. Perhaps the movement of 2020 was also swept along by all the thwarted energy — pent up by the pandemic and quarantine — finding an affirmative outlet. Journalism's attention to Black Lives Matter was immense and surprising. But the outlines were not brand new.

**JC**: But the fact that mainstream journalism is more and more taking a position, do you think it is good or bad for democracy?

**TG**: I think that the commitment of mainstream journalism to truth — primarily the truth that is discomforting, uncomfortable, disturbing — that commitment is absolutely essential. Sometimes mainstream journalism goes rather too far in its alignment with the vocabulary or the spirit of the protests, whether it's the #metoo movement or Black Lives Matter or others. But in general I think that it's a step forward to demolish the fantasies about objectivity which were always overrated, always overambitious. All the more so because of the rise of the right-wing propaganda, committed to lying and distortion and falsehood, that took hold of a segment of our population. Then mainstream journalism, obsessed with a need for "balance" and "nonpartisanship," learn how stupid — how distorting — it is to say: "Well, some people say the moon is a rock 240 000 miles from earth and some people say it's made of green cheese." Some have learned, some haven't — not enough.

When the green cheese caucus is so large, it's essential to try to arrive at the truth. Now that doesn't mean you abandon the ideal of fairness. It doesn't mean that you write falsehoods. It doesn't mean that you neglect contrary views. No, it's important to resist the appeals of propaganda. But still and all, when even the aspiration to truth is being trampled thousands of times every day, I think it is a matter of enlightenment conviction to recommit bringing the truth to light.

**MS:** When I was teaching undergraduates at UC-San Diego, and these are very good students, they were top of their high school classes in California, they did not understand there was a difference between an editorial and a straight news story and a news analysis. For them, it was basically, it's either in the newspaper or it's not in the newspaper. But from inside journalism, there's a big difference. And newspapers were, you know, advocates of policies and persons and parties for several hundred years. But the rise of a notion of objectivity more or less amounted to "let's separate what we advocate as a news organization in relation to our politics and our citizenship, and what we describe as going on in the world and keeping people up to date with what's going on in the world." That was the first change. And then at some point accelerating quickly in the 1970s there was, as I said earlier, an increase in overt interpretation, or contextualizing of the news. Half or more of each front page these days is interpretation — interpretation is sort of taken for granted as part of the job of journalism. How otherwise could an ordinary reader understand this complicated and quickly moving world of ours?

Within some kind of limits that I can't define, that's good for democracy. I think that the move toward interpretation has been good for creating news that goes deeper and communicates more fully than the flat (and frankly boring) news I read in the 1950s and early 1960s.

**JC:** Should that be without limits?

**MS:** You know, I think that that's a question that journalists themselves know is on their agenda. If I were in a decision making role in a news organization, I think I'd have to figure it out. Day by day and moment by moment and situation by situation. I don't have a general ruling.

I do think it's a question for journalists to figure out — without government intervention. There are other issues about the publication of hate speech and the publication of sheer lies that the big online platforms have to deal with every day and I think it would be a public service for them to share publicly how they go about this, how they define the principles by which they make their judgments. I haven't thought through the whole question here where European countries are quite different from us in terms of forbidding hate speech. I mean, at present, it doesn't look like European policies been any more successful than the US government's more "hands off" policy in preventing resurgence of not just hate speech but hate parties.

**JC:** Okay. All right. Okay. That's pretty much about mainstream journalism in the US. And my next question is of special interest of mine. It's about so many readers of this journal are very interested in the tensions between China and the United States and how it has been increasingly playing out in the realm of speech.

**TG:** Correct.

**JC:** We see that journalists are being expelled and technology companies subject to increasing pressures from the State and so on. So do you think we are headed to another Cold War, which is a very hot topic here in China at this moment?

**TG:** I think it all depends on the decisions of the leadership of the two countries. I think it could go toward a bitter, more polarized Cold War. Probably not military conflict, though perhaps skirmishes at the edges. But I think the situation is also manageable if leadership is wise on both sides. Obviously our current political leadership is the opposite of wise. It is both belligerent and stupid, a toxic combination. Relations will be complicated and difficult but neither the United States nor China is going to go away.

**JC**:: No.

**TG:** They're both immense and powerful within different spheres. And they are also, as we all know now, or should know, deeply interdependent.

**JC:** Yeah, that's true.

**TG**:: What is an American corporation? What is a Chinese corporation, etc.? My computer came here from China. And I don't know where Skype came from. I don't know who invented Skype. In any event, I think the most likely scenario is one of managed conflict and managed cooperation simultaneously. And wise leadership can contain the antagonisms.

**JC**: So what role should journalism play in managing this new superpower of confrontation?

**TG:** Well, I think journalists should do what they should be doing in any case. They should be trying to hold power accountable, they should be trying to explain realities. Journalism in the US anyway, in the West in general and perhaps in China too, is too often imprisoned in events rather than social and institutional developments.

So the very existence of supply chains, so crucial to understanding what's happened in China-US relations over the recent decades, needs to be described and explained. And not just once. Again and again and again because there are illusions. First of all, that China is "stealing our jobs." There's some truth there, but it's exaggerated. There is the illusion that the US must bow down to dictatorship. There is the illusion that the US is golden and China is wicked. All this stuff has to be stopped and the picture needs to be filled out as it evolves. Sometimes Chinese leaders and people will be angry at why the Americans are so interested in the Uighurs and sometimes Americans will be angry because they think Chinese propaganda is undermining our democratic system.

Trump, accused on the basis of much evidence of collaborating with Putin, now conjures a fantasy of millions of fraudulent ballots being deposited by the Chinese government in American mailboxes. This is insane. So all such crazy claims need to be cleared away. But there'll continue to be US-China frictions. There are different ideas about journalism, about Hong Kong, about other matters. That's okay. We'll see what evolves. But I do think journalism can inflame things. We saw that in the early Cold War and in the 1950s very dramatically in both the US and the Soviet Union. But it needn't go that way. It needn't fan the flames of just raw, stupid hatred — and shouldn't.

**MS:** Well, look, the optimist in me is strong. Look at the news this month. The first woman of color to be on a major party ticket in the history of the country is a sign of progress. I mean, it's more a sign of progress if Biden and Harris get elected and that's yet to be seen. But I think a second four years of a person as ill equipped to lead a constitutional democracy as Mr. Trump could be really disastrous for this country and for the world and certainly for US-China relations. So far as I know Trump still thinks that COVID-19 is a Chinese invention. There was the Eisenhower cabinet officer who said what's good for General Motors is good for the country. Trump seems to think what's good for Mar-A-Lago is good for the country. If he actually thinks about what's good for the country at all.

Trump will pull out all the stops to be reelected. I think this would be dreadful for US-China relations. And that would be very bad for the world. Would there be a new kind of cold war? I think right now it's mostly an economic cold war which is not the same thing as a cold war. Trump's views about the Coronavirus notwithstanding. I don't think fighting the Chinese is as much on his mind as appeasing Russia seems to be.

You know, every time that a journalist is expelled from China, the western news media are horrified. But at the same time. any time physically attacking a reporter is encouraged by the President of the United States, every journalist in the country is also horrified. So when the police enter a newsroom in Hong Kong, it's on the front page of *The New York Times*. Even if it's pure, old fashioned, here's what happened reporting. You have to make a judgment about where in the paper that belongs. And they made a judgment and it was the front page. That's a value judgment. You can't escape value judgments in journalism. And that's what the academic analysis of ideology and ideal of objectivity (including my own) has never fully come to terms with. And now it's in our faces. And somehow we have to come to terms with that.

**JC:** So my last question would be what can both sociology and the study of news contribute to the situation?

**TG**: Well, Sociology is always, I think, called upon to try to clarify the dynamics of societies, to clarify what's at stake in history, which entails trying to see events within a context of processes and institutional power. Parenthetically I think Sociology would be far more successful and influential in America if it were less jargon-ridden and more concerned with accumulating a popular public, which is not technically proficient but which deserves to have a deeper view than simply the hysteria of the moment. So I think Sociology would be all the more effective if it reached out to a larger public.

And to some extent we're seeing this. I mean one of the fascinating things in the Black Lives Matter period is how some social scientists have gotten an important extensive hearing for their explanations of, and debates on, the history of racism in America. The idea of institutional racism, which used to be highly controversial (as counterposed to "prejudice," which was strictly a matter of individual consciousness), is far more acceptable today. You now hear politicians speaking of it. Twenty years ago, it would have been a taboo, left-wing phrase. Sociologists can take some credit for altering the discourse for the good.

**JC:** And what could the study of news, the journalism studies, could contribute?

**TG:** It's always important to see how the institutions actually work as opposed to how they say they work and I'm sure this is true in China as it's true in the United States. So if we understand that news doesn't come from nowhere but that it's a product of social decisions, that institutions are at work, that human beings are producing the news, and that the news is not growing on trees, that's enlightening. The details are enlightening.

At the same time, journalism has a serious struggle today because it is itself an embattled institution. It's embattled mostly by commercial pressures, in particular the collapse of the newspaper industry. So, in addition to trying to make mainstream journalism more thorough and smart, journalists also need to create new platforms for reaching people and attempting to explain why we're in this crisis and what might be done about it.

**MS:** I think what journalism does — various forms of journalism, from the most professionalized objective journalism to advocacy journalism and all the things in between- they are all trying to make sense of information in an incredibly interdependent globalized world.

I keep teaching and keep going back and reading Walter Lippman's *Public Opinion*, which has been pretty heavily attacked in recent years. I mean, he's dead, but so it doesn't matter to him, but various scholars have attacked him for being an elitist, for wanting experts to rule; he never wanted experts to rule. He did say that none of us in a world that has become so complicated can take in and assimilate all the information that bombard us. He was writing long before Twitter. And he felt overwhelmed, overwhelmed by how much information there was. And he noticed members of Congress couldn't absorb it all, let alone the rest of us for whom politics is not a full-time job. And — I think he was wrong about this — but he also said there was a world of small, self-contained communities where people had enough knowledge of everybody else in town, and everything else going on in town, that they could make well informed judgments about what to do.

But he assumed that the problem was *not* the people were stupid. The problem was that the world had become overwhelmingly complex. And that, you know, we have lives to lead, we have jobs to do, we have children to take care of, we have elderly to take care of, we have lots to do. And we can't be spending the entire day reading *The New York Times*, or better still 10 other news outlets, or these days easily 100 other news outlets that that's just not within human capacity. And that's the problem. That's why we have to rely on experts who devote their lives to trying to get a fair handle on some specific small micro domains so that somebody knows how to do a colonoscopy and somebody else knows how to teach freshmen composition and on and on. And that's why we need journalists, to translate for us to help translate for us. Journalists can't do it all and they won't do all of it. But they do take a remarkable lunge at this unbearably large task and that's why journalism matters so much. We'd like it to be as good as possible. And the world is not about to get less complicated, as we can see.

**JC:** OK, thank you both. I think that's pretty much all the questions that I want to ask. I would like to thank you for all these very inspiring and enlightening comments you just give, especially for me, a journalism researcher in an authoritarian country, striving to stay optimistic. So I want to really, you know, show my appreciation for your time and your energy.

**Jiang Chang:** Shenzhen University (China)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8992-5410
criver@protonmail.ch; https://szu.academia.edu/JiangCHANG
Jiang Chang, Ph.D., is Distinguished Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Shenzhen University, China. He's currently working on the politics of digital countercultures in contemporary China, and the theorization of digital journalism. He has published three books and over eighty research papers in Chinese, English and French, and won several awards for his academic achievements, including Outstanding Young Scholar of the China Communication Academy Awards and the Swiss Government Excellence Scholarship. He could be reached via e-mail: criver@protonmail.ch.

**Todd Gitlin:** The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and Chair of the Ph.D Program in Communications (United States)
http://toddgitlin.net
Todd Gitlin has written eighteen books, including history from the last century (*The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*) and contemporary (*Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street*), sociology (*The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*); communications theory (*Media Unlimited*); and four novels, including *Sacrifice*, which won the Harold Ribalow Award for fiction on Jewish themes, and *The Opposition*, to be published in 2021 by Guernica Editions. He is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and other periodicals.

**Michael Schudson:** The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism (United States)
https://sociology.columbia.edu/content/michael-s-schudson
Michael Schudson received a B.A. from Swarthmore College and M.A. and Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard. He taught at the University of Chicago from 1976 to 1980 and at the University of California, San Diego from 1980 to 2009. From 2005 on, he split his teaching between UCSD and the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, becoming a full-time member of the Columbia faculty in 2009. He is the author of eight books and co-editor of four others concerning the history and sociology of the American news media, advertising, popular culture, Watergate and cultural memory. He is the recipient of a number of honors; he has been a Guggenheim fellow, a resident fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, a MacArthur Foundation "genius" fellow, and has received honorary degrees from the University of Groningen (Netherlands) and Hong Kong Baptist University. His most recent books are *Journalism: Why It Matters* (Polity, 2020), *The Rise of the Right to Know: Politics and the Culture of Transparency 1945-1975* (Harvard, 2015) and (with C.W. Anderson and Leonard Downie, Jr.), *The News Media: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford, 2016).