cogitatio

ARTICLE

A See-Through Curtain of Varying Texture: Negotiating Power and Material Realities in Engaged Journalism

Bissie Anderson ⊙

Department of Linguistics and Communication, University of Birmingham, UK

Correspondence: Bissie Anderson (b.z.anderson@bham.ac.uk)

Abstract

Acknowledging the networked nature of journalism and shifting power relations between actors in the hybrid media system, this article invokes the metaphor of "the curtain" that separates journalists and external actors/forces in discussions on journalistic autonomy (Coddington, 2015) and applies it to the engaged journalism practices of four media startups. It places "the curtain" in the hybrid media systems paradigm and its relational ontology (Chadwick, 2017) to examine to what extent that concept applies to engaged journalism, a participatory media practice that, by definition, involves publics in journalistic processes. Drawing on interviews with engaged journalism producers in Pakistan, Romania, Malaysia, and the UK, this comparative cross-border study explores the power relations within the actor constellations involved in journalistic co-creation. The outlets examined favour a relational approach to knowledge production, in which they prioritise mutual listening and learning—together with their communities. However, there is still a separation between journalists and audiences/publics. Examining the power negotiations that shape engaged journalism in different parts of the world, this study sheds light on the unique texture of each hybrid media space of co-creation. It offers a nuanced conceptualisation of hybridity, suggesting that engagement can lend itself to varying degrees of openness. The study findings challenge idealistic notions of participation by showing that, even in engaged journalism practice, participation remains tightly controlled by journalists and is subject to their negotiation of capacity-enabling and capacity-limiting forces within the constraints of the context-specific material realities.

Keywords

audience engagement; community journalism; engaged journalism; hybridity; journalism; journalistic autonomy; participatory journalism

---

1. Introduction

The concept of autonomy is central to journalism's professional claims as the independent arbiter of truth and knowledge. Journalism has never existed in a vacuum but has had to contend with external forces—the state, the market, changing technologies, and audiences, while simultaneously working hard to preserve its boundaries (Carlson, 2015; Lewis, 2015). Recognising that complete autonomy is impossible, scholars have theorised the relationship between journalism and its environment through a hierarchical model of influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Recently, there has been a reconsidering of this hierarchical conceptualisation towards a more relational positioning of journalism within a networked media ecology (Örnebring & Karlsson, 2022; Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). Chadwick (2017, p. 25) argues that, rather than being a top-down process over-determined by macro-forces, media logic is forged in hybrid networks, through a relational process of co-creation "by media, political actors, and publics." In his hybrid media systems paradigm, Chadwick advances the idea that power and agency in social production can only be examined through the relations and interactions between various actors and forces. Similarly, in their update of the hierarchy of influences model, Reese and Shoemaker (2016, p. 406) acknowledge that the networked nature of newswork within hybrid media systems requires a conceptual and analytical focus on the "complex assemblages of modular units—journalists, technologies, and political actors which can be understood only in their relationships with each other."

Journalism's incessant efforts to maintain its autonomy from external actors and forces have traditionally been captured by the metaphor of "the wall"—the "collective institutional mechanisms that regulate the relationship between journalism and its environment" (Örnebring & Karlsson, 2022, p. 286) and a discursive acknowledgement of the need to build defences against, and distinguish itself from, ever-encroaching outsiders. But the hybrid nature of the 21st-century media ecosystem has made wall-building and fortification an untenable task and made scholars question the explanatory power of "the wall" separating journalism from external actors and forces. Coddington (2015) argues that, in the hybrid media ecosystem, the relationship between journalism and external forces is most aptly captured by the metaphor of "the curtain." The curtain metaphor implies a degree of permeability and openness; while a wall denotes a solid boundary as a fixed, immovable object, a curtain is flexible and adjustable and can be opened or closed. The curtain is an especially fitting concept to apply in discussions of the relationship between journalists and publics, whose power dynamics have shifted with the rise of active audiences and interactive media. As Chadwick argues, publics now have the agency to "play direct and instrumental roles in the production of media content through their occasionally decisive interventions" (2017, pp. 26–27). What is interesting is to explore this dynamic in practices of engaged journalism which, by definition, actively involve publics/audiences in the journalistic production process. Engaged journalism is an ethic of participation and a practice of engaging communities in collaborative knowledge production. It places an emphasis on "facilitating more reciprocal relationships with the public" (Schmidt & Lawrence, 2020, p. 5) and usually involves publics with lived experience of an issue generating data or sharing their knowledge or experience as an integral part of journalistic reporting. But how open to participation is this type of journalism and are there any material constraints that shape this practice in reality?

2. Literature Review

The changing dynamics between journalism and audiences in the hybrid media system have had a dramatic impact on journalistic knowledge production practices, which are now more open to the public. Indeed, over the last two decades, the opportunities for the public to participate in the news-making process have increased exponentially, as indicated by the variety of emergent concepts that have sought to theorise this participatory philosophy—public journalism (Glasser, 1999), "produsage" (Bruns, 2008), ambient journalism (Hermida, 2010), network journalism (Heinrich, 2013; Russell, 2016), and citizen journalism or citizen witnessing (Allan, 2013; Dickens et al., 2014). Whether it be online news commenters (Robinson, 2015), NGOs (Powers, 2015), or publics sending user-generated content (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015), digital journalism has enhanced the opportunities for interaction between journalists and non-journalistic actors, thereby contesting the boundaries between journalists and publics. The demands to narrow the distance between media producer and consumer have also increased in newsrooms across the world (Hanusch & Banjac, 2019), as the reader now arguably takes on a more active role in the production of knowledge. How journalists construct the image of, listen to, and connect with, their "imagined audience" (Nelson, 2021) has become central to their legitimacy and epistemic power.

2.1. Participatory Journalism: Rhetoric and Practice

Despite the rhetoric of audience engagement, the early literature on embracing participatory culture in newsrooms points to a grudging willingness to extend news production practices to the public; audiences were still viewed as media consumers rather than collaborators, and early-day user-generated content practices were driven by political economy, brand-strengthening, rather than democratic, motivations (Domingo et al., 2008; Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Singer et al., 2011). Engelke's (2019, p. 37) systematic literature review of studies of online participatory journalism since 1997 found that journalists have mostly remained in power in the formation and interpretation stages of news production, therefore reinforcing journalism's gatekeeping function. Furthermore, journalists have been seen to engage in protecting the boundaries of their profession where participatory practices are concerned and still dictating the rules of the game by co-opting and segregating user-generated content (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015) and shaping how stories originating from NGOs are told (Powers, 2015). This has led to claims that the participatory potential and democratising vision of digital media are far from being realised in digital journalism (Josephi, 2016). Scholars have repeatedly called for opening journalistic processes to the public, and an increased transparency (Domingo & Le Cam, 2015; Hermida, 2015; Singer, 2015). Singer (2015, p. 32), for instance, argues that tearing down normative walls between journalists and citizens, relinquishing the notion of gatekeeping control, and a more open, adaptable approach based on transparency, could be "the key to the survival of a profession that can no longer thrive in splendid isolation." Singer (2019) points out that journalists could do more to facilitate better connections with audiences and embrace collaboration by involving members of the public in the production process.

More recently, there have been pronounced efforts to actively embrace publics in the production stage of the journalistic process through participatory, audience-centred, or community-focused practices called "engaged journalism" (Guzmán, 2016; Schmidt & Lawrence, 2020; Schmidt et al., 2022; Wenzel, 2020; Zahay et al., 2020) as an antidote to journalism's traditional retrenchment in boundary work. Schmidt and Lawrence (2020, p. 2) define engaged journalism as "interactive, participatory, or collaborative practices of journalism

that treat audiences as active users and even co-creators of news...that attempt to bring the public into earlier stages of news production...and that are aimed at building relationships with communities." This philosophy is in stark contrast with much of the literature on participatory journalism, in which audiences were found to be passive recipients of news who are mostly involved in the interpretation stage, rather than the formation or dissemination stage, of the news production process (Engelke, 2019), and whose online behaviour is tracked and measured for transactional purposes. Deep audience engagement, collaboration, and empowering publics by involving them at all stages of the journalistic production process are the key characteristics of engaged journalism, under the aspirational banner of public-powered journalism (Guzmán, 2016). Engagement is seen as a cyclical, open, and inclusive process, a feedback loop, with the audience involved in all stages of communication—from inception and ideation to distribution. Schmidt and Lawrence (2020) suggest that engaged journalism practices genuinely create opportunities for deep and meaningful audience involvement but realising that potential is contingent on material factors such as technological and organisational resources. Addressing the conceptual limitations in audience-centred journalism research and practice, scholars have proposed viewing its many dimensions on a relational-transactional continuum (DeVigal, 2017). At the "relational" end of this scale, dialogism and deep engagement, sought in practices such as community-centred journalism, are seen as a vehicle for civic participation and rebuilding trust by empowering and connecting to an increasingly disengaged public. A relational approach, defined by a dialogic relationship with the audience, could ultimately rebuild public trust (Lewis, 2020). At the "transactional" end lies "reciprocal journalism," a philosophy of mutual exchange between journalists and audiences, which Lewis et al. (2014, op. 229, 236, 238) argue could lead to more meaningful engagement of journalists with their communities, thereby accomplishing journalism's normative goals—increasing connectedness and trust—and realising participatory media's full potential. Embracing engaged journalism also changes journalistic perceptions of the audience. A comparative case study of two American public media newsrooms' audience engagement practices, for example, found that, through an emphasis on reciprocal practices of journalism, news organisations are starting to make a distinction "between the communities they cover *in their reporting* and the audiences they *reach with their reporting*" (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019, p. 571, emphases in original). This finding has implications for the ways journalists envision their audiences and communities, respectively, presenting a step change from existing conceptualisations, which mostly conflate the public and the audience. Brants (2013, p. 22) makes a convincing argument for a multidimensional conceptualisation of the audience based on the "responsive measures and strategies" journalists have introduced to restore public trust. Brants (2013, p. 23) explains that these strategies differ, depending on what journalists want from their interactions with the audience: For example, when trying to connect with the public as citizens to find solutions to perceived problems and learn through interaction, journalists engage in civic responsiveness. There is also the strategic type of responsiveness: where the public is addressed as a consumer, the empathic type—when the public is addressed "as one of us"; and the populist type—which addresses the public as disaffected individuals (Brants, 2013, p. 23). Thus, any conceptualisation of the audience must be nuanced and contextual, reflecting both producers' motivations for engaging with their audiences, and how these intents are expressed in the various forms of journalistic practice. A clear line must also be drawn between constructive forms of community participation and oft-disruptive practices of audience engagement such as user comments (Ksiazek & Springer, 2020).

2.2. Hybrid Media Spaces of Co-Creation: Journalists and Publics as Knowledge-Production Collectives

As the two traditionally distinct "interpretive communities"—those of producers and consumers (Zelizer, 1993)—become "drawn together by the circulation of news" and are increasingly enmeshed in the process of knowledge co-creation (Eldridge & Bødker, 2019, p. 286), scholars have argued that journalistic practice should be studied through the relations between a variety of actants, human and nonhuman, physical or abstract (Domingo & Wiard, 2016), recognising and detailing the "plenum of agencies at play" in the process (De Maeyer, 2016, p. 467). The relational ontology of hybridity is instrumental in that regard. A hybridity ontology, Chadwick (2017, p. 25) argues, views 21st-century media logic as a product of relational co-creation, "a force co-created by media, political actors, and publics." A relational conceptualisation of journalistic knowledge production pays attention to what capacities and agencies are generated in "the entire ensemble of individuals, organizations, and technologies within a particular geographic community or around a particular issue, engaged in journalistic production and, indeed, in journalistic consumption" (Anderson, 2016, p. 412). It is in the interactions between actors and actants taking place in hybrid media spaces that knowledge is produced. This relational way of viewing social production eschews dichotomous either/or thinking and boundary work, which is prevalent in traditional studies of journalistic autonomy, in favour of "not only, but also" thinking (Chadwick, 2017, p. 17). Freed from viewing the world in terms of boundaries, walls, and binary oppositions, scholars working within a hybridity ontological framework can explicate "the relative power of actors in a media system" (Chadwick, 2017, p. 19). As Chadwick explains, power and agency are conceived of as relational, contingent and in flux, an ontological perspective that eschews structuralist conceptions of power as a pre-determined and established, top-down structure of relations. Systems are not fixed but rather "always in the process of becoming as actors simultaneously create and adapt" (Chadwick, 2017, p 23). By examining the relations between journalists and publics, we could shed light on how power is negotiated in these hybrid media spaces of co-creation.

While hybridity can be instrumental as a sensitizing concept, there have been calls for moving "beyond hybridity" in studies of journalistic practice. Some scholars (Hallin et al., 2023; Witschge et al., 2019) have critiqued the theory's explanatory power. Hallin et al. (2023) warn against using hybridity as a "catch-all" term that glosses over the nuance and specificity of individual journalistic practices and contexts. A move "beyond hybridity" in analyses of networked journalistic practice means being open to capturing heterogeneity, contingency, and flux, in all its subtlety, "messiness and all" (Witschge et al., 2019, p. 656). It means peeling back the layers of journalistic knowledge production, which can only be achieved by examining them in situ and in journalistic practice. While hybridity can sensitize us to boundary-blurring in journalism, we should seek to flesh out the specificities and the nuanced, context-specific ways hybridity is enacted in the relations between journalists and publics while taking into account the material realities in which these encounters take place. Viewing engaged journalism knowledge production through a hybridity ontological frame, then, means examining the process through the relations and interactions between journalists, their audiences, and publics who engage in participatory journalistic practice. Going "beyond hybridity" as a catch-all term requires conceptualising all participants in the process as a collective, while at the same time nuancing each participant role (journalists, audience members, members of the public) through the "curtain" metaphor (Coddington, 2015) to examine the knowledge-production process' degree of openness to participation and explicate each participant's relative power and agency. We should aim to capture not just the manifestations of hybridity, but more importantly, the unique texture of each hybrid media space woven in the interactions between journalistic and non-journalistic actors and actants, not only

for the sake of documenting it, but in order to explicate who has the power and agency to effect change (in both journalism and society) and how that power is shared and negotiated.

This article, therefore, seeks to address the following central research question, followed by two sub-questions:

> RQ1: How do engaged journalists negotiate power relations and material realities in the process of knowledge co-creation?

> RQ2. How do engaged journalists imagine their audiences, respond to them, and involve publics in knowledge production?

> RQ3. How open to the public are engaged journalism knowledge co-creation practices, and what are the factors that shape participation on the part of journalism startups?

3. Method

Empirically, the study draws on 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with journalists from four independent media startups—*The Current* (Pakistan), *DoR* (Romania), *New Naratif* (Malaysia), and *Bureau Local* (UK), respectively. The four media outlets are examples of an emergent trend of non-mainstream entrepreneurial journalism that, Deuze and Witschge (2020) argue, often leads the way in redefining what journalism is and could be. Being small and agile, untethered to legacy processes, media startups have more flexibility to experiment with storytelling processes and practices, yet their existence is precarious and subject to multiple material constraints (Salaverría, 2020). A case in point is the short lifespan of *The Correspondent*—an ambitious digital media platform that promised to "unbreak the news" through collaborative, constructive, deep reporting, but failed to become sustainable and folded in the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study participant selection process involved a mix of convenience and snowball sampling, and the inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Independent media startups that employ innovation rhetoric in their public-facing metadiscourse (website and social media channels);
2. Outlets that practise audience-first, public-powered, participatory journalism;
3. Media organisations located in different journalistic cultures.

The convenience sampling stage involved field mapping and creating a longlist of journalistic outlets through attending seven industry conferences dedicated to independent media and public interest journalism between late 2018 and late 2020, with the interviews taking place in the period October 2020–May 2021. The conferences were organised by various institutions based in Europe, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, and the majority were streamed online during the pandemic. After the initial mapping process, a shortlist was created through interviews with some of the event organisers: Rishad Patel and Alan Soon, the co-founders of Splice Media, a Southeast-Asia-based organisation that supports media startups and media innovation in Southeast Asia; and Jakub Gornicki, co-founder of Outriders, an investigative journalism

collective based in Warsaw that also organised the Outriders Stage conference in November 2019. The Splice Media co-founders had presented at the Outriders Stage conference and subsequently ran two online international journalism festivals in 2020—Splice Low-Res and Splice Beta. Once several organisations were identified and the first interviews conducted, I employed snowball sampling, asking participants in each organisation to identify further interview participants. The final sample includes a range of roles within each journalism startup (Table 1).

The mean duration of the interviews was 53 minutes. During the interviews, the participants were asked to reflect on: (a) the journalistic knowledge-production process, their role in it, and how they work

Table 1. Interview participants and roles within the respective startup.

Code	Organisation	Role
BL01	*Bureau Local*	Reporter/community organiser
BL02	*Bureau Local*	Community organiser
BL03	*Bureau Local*	Journalist
BL04	*Bureau Local*	Journalist
DoR01	*DoR*	Editor-in-chief
DoR02	*DoR*	Reporter
DoR03	*DoR*	Visual editor
DoR04	*DoR*	Reporter
DoR05	*DoR*	Digital editor
DoR06	*DoR*	Web developer
C01	*The Current*	Editor-in-chief
C02	*The Current*	Politics editor
C03	*The Current*	Food and drama review reporter
C04	*The Current*	Entertainment editor
C05	*The Current*	Graphic designer
C06	*The Current*	Co-founder
C07	*The Current*	Art director
C08	*The Current*	Tech news editor
C09	*The Current*	Lifestyle editor
C10	*The Current*	Political reporter
C11	*The Current*	Lifestyle reporter
C12	*The Current*	Intern
C13	*The Current*	Cameraperson
NN01	*New Naratif*	CEO
NN02	*New Naratif*	Illustration editor
NN03	*New Naratif*	Membership engagement coordinator
NN04	*New Naratif*	Reporter
NN05	*New Naratif*	Social media manager
NN06	*New Naratif*	Design editor
NN07	*New Naratif*	Editor-in-chief

collaboratively; (b) how they "imagine" their audiences and the role audiences play in the knowledge-production process; (c) how they engage with members of the public, and whether and how publics get involved in co-creating journalistic stories; (d) how open the editorial process is to the public and what material and structural factors shape public participation in co-creation. The interview data was analysed through the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each case of engaged journalism is operationalised as a hybrid media space, in a multiple case study research design, which allowed for the comparative analysis of the ways knowledge is co-produced across different contexts and locations. The interviews shed light on the relations and interactions in each hybrid media space (*Bureau Local*, *The Current*, *DoR*, and *New Naratif*, respectively).

3.1. About the Startups

The Current is an independent news-lifestyle platform for millennials based in Lahore, Pakistan. It was the first journalistic platform in Pakistan to be funded by the Google News Initiative. *The Current* has sought to establish its brand as "Pakistan's most credible, young news platform" (The Current, n.d.). *The Current*'s raison d'etre is to simplify news for Pakistani millennials (its target audience), contribute to a "more informed life," report on "all the issues that matter," and that its readers care about. *The Current* emphasises its editorial independence in its metajournalistic discourse and is part of a wider pattern of pioneering digital journalism in Asia. It operates in a developmental journalistic culture with low press freedom and in conditions of censorship, where journalists are likely to act as "agents of change, aspiring to contribute to national development" and advocating for social change and democratization (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, pp. 300–302).

New Naratif is a journalism think tank that identifies itself as a movement for democracy in Southeast Asia. *New Naratif* openly promotes itself on its website as a platform that actively seeks to "engage, educate and empower Southeast Asians" (New Naratif, n.d.). It bridges the gap between information and action by fostering an inclusive Southeast Asian community and encouraging Southeast Asians to engage in building democracy. *New Naratif* operates in the wider context of a "collaborative" journalistic culture, characterised by a partnership with the state, high trust in institutions, and limited press freedom (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). As an independent media outlet, *New Naratif* exists as an antidote to this journalistic culture, and as a result, it has been subjected to pressure and harassment from the authorities, having to move its headquarters from Singapore to Malaysia.

DoR is an independent print/digital publication, which operated for 12 years in Romania's capital Bucharest. As a transitional democracy, Romania has weak media protections and low trust in institutions, a wider trend across Eastern Europe (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 300). There is a strong emphasis on advocacy in these countries, with the democratisation process driving journalists to "involve themselves in political struggles rather than act as disinterested bystanders" (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 300). *DoR* fits well in this "advocative" journalistic culture in its role conception as an actor of change—both in terms of reimagining journalism and transforming society, as expressed in its mission statement:

> We want our stories to provide people with tools and solutions so they can live their lives better and be actively involved in transforming their communities….Internally, we encourage each other to be an active part of change: we have the freedom to innovate, to experiment, to challenge the state of affairs, to ask and do new things. (DoR, n.d.)

Bureau Local is a local investigative journalism outlet based in the UK that is known for its grassroots processes of community engagement and partnerships with local and national media. *Bureau Local* defines itself on its website as a "people-powered" collaborative network aiming to "support quality journalism, set the news agenda and spark change from the ground up" (Hamada, 2020). The principles of community care, pioneering different journalistic practices, and inclusivity ("making sure news is working for everyone") lie at the core of its mission. *Bureau Local* operates in a media landscape that is defined by the Western liberal approach to journalism and combines a free and well-regulated public broadcasting system (the BBC) and a highly commercialised press. Therefore, the outlet is free to perform a "monitorial" role associated with journalism's Fourth Estate public service function of holding power to account (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, pp. 297–298). UK journalism enjoys relative independence from political powers, which, as Hanitzsch et al. (2019, p. 297) explain, is "a defining element of democracy."

4. Data Analysis

4.1. How Engaged Journalists "Imagine" Their Audiences: Types of Public Responsiveness

The analysis of the ways engaged journalists imagine their audiences and the types of responsiveness they employ in the process suggests that the outlets examined in this study oscillate between at least two types of responsiveness vis-à-vis members of the public and engage in them to varying degrees (Table 2 shows the types of responsiveness in order of prominence, as per Brants' 2013 classification). *The Current* actively seeks to narrow the distance between its journalism and its (loyal) audience by integrating its readership into the knowledge production process, making that process as transparent as possible, and presenting itself as a relatable and reliable journalism outlet that readers can trust. It strives to be "*the* platform where readers can have their say and they can give their story to the world" (C09) in a media landscape defined by a lack of trust, especially in legacy news media. Thus, *The Current* mostly addresses its readers as "one of us" (empathic responsiveness), then as consumers (strategic responsiveness)—seen in its efforts to attract paying members and its reciprocal engagement plans—to invite paying members to co-produce content and access training and events. Additionally, the outlet addresses its readers as citizens (civic responsiveness) when it reports on issues it deems important that are in line with its pro-democracy editorial policy. For example, the editorial team feel it is important to cover the annual women's rights marches and human rights stories as a service to society, despite the fact they are controversial topics in Pakistan. *New Naratif*'s responsiveness can be described as mostly civic (in its democracy-building mission), then empathic (when addressing community members as a transnational imagined collective), and to a lesser degree, strategic. Publics are mainly addressed as citizens, but also as "one of us" in *New Naratif*'s community-building efforts, and to a lesser degree, also as "consumers" when the outlet seeks to encourage readers to become paying members in its drive to become a sustainable business. *DoR*'s engagement is mostly empathic, as it strives to establish deep connections and collective empathy, followed by civic, and then strategic—as it relies largely on paying members to keep running. *Bureau Local* engages in mostly civic, followed by empathic, responsiveness—in its focus on community empowerment and sparking change. The *Bureau Local* journalists and community organisers stressed that they sought to build deep, symbiotic relationships with the communities they cover, an example of what Brants refers to as "one-of-us," empathic responsiveness. What is notable in the case of *Bureau Local* is its relative lack of strategic responsiveness—that is due to the fact *Bureau Local* is relatively well-resourced and is in the privileged position to not have to rely on running membership campaigns and therefore, it can afford not to address people as consumers. It is important to note that neither of the

outlets studied employs the "populist" type of responsiveness and addresses its audiences as "disaffected individuals" (Brants, 2013).

A significant nuanced finding across the cases is how they envision the relational object of their epistemic practice. Here, the differentiation between "the mass," "the public," and "the audience" (Ahva & Heikkilä, 2016) has been useful in teasing out how the engaged journalists in this study view all the participants and their roles in the journalistic knowledge production process. Engaged journalists de-aggregate and re-aggregate publics into individuals, audiences/readers, paying subscribers, non-paying supporters, communities they report on, and wider networks of contributors. *Bureau Local*'s Scotland-based freelance community organiser, for instance, explained that the team "don't just think about the audience as one-way recipients of our work" and, in fact, they would rarely use the word "audience." These findings are consonant with Belair-Gagnon et al.'s (2019) conclusions that journalists practising relational journalism make a distinction between audiences and communities—a step change from existing conceptualisations that conflate the two. But this study shows an even more complex process of de- and re-aggregation of publics into many different entities, which is significant as it problematises the concept of the audience as a hitherto monolithic entity.

4.2. Relations Between Journalists and Publics in Knowledge Co-Production

The cross-case analysis of interview data (Table 2) suggests that engaged journalists enact hybridity in the process of journalistic knowledge production through the mobilisation of an imagined collective around their journalism. They focus on "together-ness" and seek to build relations across their networks, further aggregating all participants in the journalistic knowledge production process—communities, engaged citizens, supporters, paying subscribers, and any interested parties. That imagined collective can be a transnational democracy-building community (*New Naratif*) or a "network of networks" (BL04) involving anything from media partners and campaigning groups to community supporters (*Bureau Local*). Mutual listening, learning, and understanding lie at the core of the relations between engaged journalists and communities as engaged journalists seek to build closer and deeper connections with their networks and the communities that they cover by coming together to collaborate. This dialogic process can involve experimenting to see what works for audiences and gauging their opinion (*The Current*), community feedback on how to better package stories for social media (*New Naratif*), soliciting story ideas and consulting supporters on the most relevant approach (*DoR*), or flipping the editorial process, inviting publics to participate in journalistic knowledge production from start to finish (*Bureau Local*). Engaged journalists favour a dialogic, inclusive, non-extractive approach when reporting on communities (especially those mis- or under-represented), embedding themselves in local communities with care and respect, driven by their public service mission, and often completely reimagining the journalistic knowledge production process from the ground up (in the case of *Bureau Local*, and to some extent, *DoR)*. Journalistic knowledge production, thus, becomes a collective and relational endeavour, grounded in lived experience, human dignity, and care, with journalists seeking to foster community agency and empowerment. In so doing, engaged journalists challenge the traditional "journalist knows better" (C01) mindset, as at least four of the interview participants acknowledged (C01, NN01, DoR01, BL01), embracing the "crosspollination" of voices, ideas, and perspectives (BL04) in their hope to (re-)build trust with members of the public.

While all four outlets in this study emphasise the relational and collective production of knowledge in engaged journalism, there is a slight nuance in the ways this approach manifests in each context. For instance, while it prioritises its paying members, *DoR* actively seeks to embed its reporters in, and work with, local communities (in schools, cities, or rural areas). In 2019, *DoR* organised a "pop-up newsroom," an editorial project in Târgu Mures, Transylvania, where the team moved for a week, ran events such as writing and photography workshops, and produced stories involving the local community. The editor-in-chief explained the rationale behind the "pop-up newsroom" was to "try to integrate people from the non-editorial side of the magazine in our editorial work, so they could understand more of what we do when we go report on stories" (DoR01). The team organised six community events during which they discussed what local people would like to see covered and what they thought people in Romania's capital Bucharest needed to know about their region. One of the most salient examples of *DoR*'s relational knowledge production process is its work on "Fear Was Already Here," a story it published after two teenage girls were kidnapped and killed in Romania, a crime that shook the nation. Instead of covering the story the traditional way, *DoR* decided to speak to teenage girls around the country. The idea for this approach was partly born inside the *DoR* community as *DoR* supporters wanted to understand what this incident meant to young women in the country. The social reporter, who worked on the story, sent out emails to schools around the country inviting girls to talk about how they felt after the kidnapping incident. She ran eight roundtables with 30 high school girls, listening to them talk and share their feelings and emotions, thus "facilitating a space" where they could talk freely about safety (DoR01), so the reporter "wrote [the story] in their voice" (DoR04). Romanian teenage girls actively participated in producing the visuals for the story too by sending in their paintings, photos, or illustrations expressing how they felt about the kidnapping case, which were then blended and used to add to the visual effect of the story. The editor-in-chief explained that "Fear Was Already Here" was an example of *DoR*'s dialogic, inclusive, and relational approach, which, he stressed, was transforming the team's conceptions of what journalism is.

Similarly, the *Bureau Local* has moved from a more traditional top-down approach where journalists would do all the "digging away at the story for months" and solicit tips and ideas from its network through crowdsourcing and callouts, to, more recently, "managing bottom-up investigations" (BL03). The Wales-based community organiser stressed that *Bureau Local* was making "a transition from what they call traditional journalism to deeply engaged journalism" (BL01)—flipping the typical editorial process around by involving members of the public from the very start at all stages, from ideation, story selection, and story idea pitching to co-production. This, he explained, goes beyond the concept of audience or community engagement towards an epistemic practice that is more inclusive, as it involves members of the public in knowledge production as collaborators and co-creators. He sees grounding the process in lived experiences as a vehicle for building trust with communities. An example of *Bureau Local*'s bottom-up community-led knowledge production process is its project on insecure work "Is Work Working?," which was the first time *Bureau Local* had involved members of the public in the process in a more structured fashion, but also in a way that tapped into what BL04 referred to as the *Bureau*'s "networks of networks"—media partners, unions, engaged citizens, activists, academics, and experts—to ensure they maximised the impact and reach of the investigation. The *Bureau* opened the process to the public at an "Open Newsroom"—an online event designed to generate a public discussion on the broader issue of insecure work. The community organisers who supported the investigation explained that community engagement was "threaded through the whole process" (BL02). As one of the first projects investigated how much British online food delivery company Deliveroo paid its delivery riders, *Bureau Local* involved the riders in carrying out the research alongside

Bureau journalists. The riders contributed by sharing their invoices to shed light on how little they were paid during their shifts. Acknowledging the Deliveroo riders' equal status as co-creators of journalism, *Bureau Local* interview participants stressed that they call them "participant journalists."

Table 2. Relations between actors (journalists, audiences, community, network) in each engaged journalism hybrid media space.

Case	Relations between actors	Type of responsiveness in order of prominence*	Engagement in journalistic knowledge production
The Current	Together: "a family" Imagined collective Audience first: social listening and seeking to form a bond with audiences	1. Empathic 2. Strategic 3. Civic	Mutual learning: experimenting to see what works and gauging opinion Audience engagement feeds into story selection and format development Audiences not involved in editorial processes, but there are plans to open them to paying members in future A see-through curtain, sometimes lifted: taking the audience behind the scenes
New Naratif	Transnational network of collaborators Imagined collective: democracy-building community Paying members Audiences	1. Civic 2. Empathic 3. Strategic	Co-creation with freelancers (artist-writer network) Mutual learning: the community can feedback on how content can be improved through surveys Reporting embedded in local communities: non-extractive, careful, and respectful A thick, opaque curtain, opened slightly: community not involved directly in journalistic knowledge production
DoR	Pools of audience: loyal community, readers, followers, and members of the public	1. Empathic 2. Civic 3. Strategic	Mutual learning (with audiences and community) Collective process of co-creation within the team (e.g., workshopping stories) Relational and inclusive reporting process: reporters embed themselves in local communities A sheer, lacy curtain, closed: no co-production per se but soliciting story ideas and consulting readers and supporters on the most relevant approach
Bureau Local	Fluid roles in the team "Networks of networks": media partners, supporting members, experts, campaigning groups, and various stakeholders	1. Civic 2. Empathic	Mutual learning: A constant process of experimentation A sheer curtain, pulled right open: inviting communities to participate from start to finish

Source: * Brants (2013).

4.3. Journalistic Autonomy and the (Semi-)Permeable Boundaries of Engaged Journalism

A notable nuance that emerged in this study is the extent to which engaged journalists open the process of journalistic knowledge production to the public—whether that be specific communities or people with lived experience, their paying subscribers, freelance collaborators, or members of the public, which has implications for discussions of journalistic autonomy and the boundaries of journalism. This study found that the curtain metaphor applies to engaged journalism knowledge production, as the boundaries of engaged journalism are relatively more permeable compared to traditional journalism. The curtain that separates journalists from publics or audiences, however, is characterised by varying thickness and degrees of openness, which are context specific. While the curtain separating engaged journalists and members of the public remains, it is a rather "see-through curtain" as engaged journalists seek closer relations with communities and take a transparent approach to knowledge production. Engaged journalists often "lift the curtain," taking audiences behind the scenes (e.g., *The Current*) or "pull the curtain right open"—as in the case of *Bureau Local*, which flips the editorial process around, inviting communities to join in all stages of the process and stay part of it from beginning to end. The data analysis shows that this relationship between the actors in engaged journalism is still tightly regulated by journalists, but it is fluid and contingent. *The Current*, for instance, had plans to become an incubator for journalists of the future in Pakistan, thus granting its subscribers agency and voice to co-produce knowledge in a quid pro quo membership subscription model. In its experimental editorial process, *Bureau Local* assembles, and deeply embeds, communities in all stages of knowledge production. While its reporters and editorial staff still manage that process and regulate their relationships with members of the public, the traditional wall separating journalists and community members is replaced by a "sheer curtain" that *Bureau Local* pulls right open and invites communities and other partners to not only to peek behind but join in, thus giving them agency and a voice, and empowering them.

New Naratif favours a "thick, opaque curtain" approach but "pulls that curtain open slightly" for freelance contributors to join in and for its supporter community to feedback on content, while carefully managing that process. Despite addressing community members as "one-of-us" (Brants, 2013) and stating in its manifesto that it "actively involves our members in the journalistic process," *New Naratif* does not co-produce content with its members/audiences, preferring to maintain its editorial independence. While readers and community members could feedback on stories and their insights are used when packaging up content for various platforms, they do not drive the editorial agenda as *New Naratif* editors believe their readers trust their editorial judgement. *DoR*'s knowledge-production process is characterised by a "sheer lacy curtain" that remains closed but anyone could peek behind—while it does not co-produce stories with its community members per se, it favours a two-way dialogic approach and involves them at the pre-production stage when it solicits story ideas, consults them on the most relevant approach, and sometimes invites user-generated content from members of specific communities (e.g., teenage girl artists for the "Fear War Already Here" story). While *DoR* has not involved its community in co-production per se, it has solicited story ideas and consulted readers and supporters on the most relevant approach to covering a story. *DoR* opens the editorial process to its supporters by asking them for tips, telling them what stories it is working on, or running events and classes in their towns or cities. Dialogue lies at the core of *DoR*'s ethos; the team feels a duty to involve their community as much as possible in their editorial decision-making, through listening to them and trying to produce journalism that meets their needs.

4.4. The Varying Textures of Engaged Journalism: Material Factors Shaping Participatory Knowledge Production

The motivation to engage publics in journalistic knowledge production lies at the core of the four startups' self-perception, mission, and values. A common feature across the four cases is that non-mainstream journalism producers deem their editorial orientation (what matters to journalists) and community imperatives (to serve communities through their journalism) as the strongest of all factors that shape their practice, showing a clear link between their vision, perceived mission, and practice and pointing to a strong perception of autonomy. But there are certain material constraints and external forces that these startups must contend with, which limit in a way what engaged journalism can do, or how much participation is realistically possible beyond the rhetoric found in the interview data and the four outlets' public metadiscourses. These material factors are structural—political, financial, and sociocultural—and as this study found, they are stronger in non-Western contexts. The two case studies based in Asia (*The Current* and *New Naratif*) showed a greater number of structural capacity-limiting forces they must negotiate in the knowledge production process. These findings echo the *Worlds of Journalism* study, which showed that journalists in economically poorer, developing-democracy contexts with censorship and lower press freedom "perceive political and economic influences as stronger than…their counterparts in other regions of the globe," especially Western countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2019, p. 288). The precarious funding situation and the strained financial and organisational resources emerged as the strongest of the restrictive factors, as seen in the cases of *The Current*, *New Naratif*, and *DoR*. The financial aspect (and organisational, in the case of *DoR*) was by far the strongest limiting factor in three of the four cases studied, with the notable exception of *Bureau Local*, pointing to the precarious nature of non-mainstream journalism organisations' business models and the need to find workable solutions so these startups, and their pioneering engagement practices, become sustainable.

The Current has to contend with financial, political and sociocultural constraints that often limit what it can do in terms of knowledge production. The startup, which has a progressive editorial orientation, operates in a country with restricted press freedom and must navigate censorship, so it seeks to build a balanced platform presenting all voices, creating a space for dialogue and laying the groundwork for future social change. *The Current* also navigates sociocultural factors such as conservative social values and polarization to produce stories with social impact, ones that raise awareness of structural issues, such as gender-based violence and women's rights, or amplify voices that its journalists and editors think matter. It negotiates the oft-conflicting imperatives to inform its community and audiences and to entertain them, aware that they prefer light-hearted content, by creating content formats that bridge the serious and the entertaining: for example, lifestyle video interviews with politicians alongside coverage of marches for women's rights. The strong structural influences mean that *The Current* often walks a fine line between opening its editorial processes to the public and protecting its journalists, as it occasionally lifts the curtain to take the audience behind the scenes of its editorial processes. *New Naratif* bravely navigates the rising threats to press freedom in Southeast Asia in its mission to expand the space for freedom of expression in the region, through reporting on underreported topics, deep and relational storytelling, and being "openly subjective": i.e., being transparent about its values, reflexive and engaged. While it finds it challenging to reach across borders and engage communities in all the countries it covers, it nevertheless continues its efforts to build bridges of solidarity across borders and a transnational collective, thus bridging the local and the regional. *New Naratif* also has to negotiate strong political factors, but far from letting them circumscribe its epistemic

capacities, it openly engages in advocacy, pushing back on these forces. *New Naratif* navigates an ever-hostile environment, so its knowledge production process is embedded in a culture of anticipating risk as it openly resists authoritarianism and seeks to create citizen capacities for democratic action. This may explain why it favours a "thick, opaque curtain" approach to public engagement—prioritising the safety of its journalists and communities and being careful not to expose them to the risk of harassment and persecution.

DoR's editorial mission to connect people across Romania finds expression in actionable stories that seek to mend the disconnect between rural areas and the capital city Bucharest, and between communities, as seen in its focus on "the afterlife" of its stories, which it takes to communities through events such as its pop-up newsroom and journalism on stage. *DoR*'s journalists navigate readers' empathy fatigue through an ethos of care: taking care when crafting their content about how they represent people and communities, and how the reader would best experience a story. DoR's main material constraints lie in the need to adapt to multiple challenges that it faced during the pandemic: trying to maintain its ambitious engaged journalism practices at a time of limited resources, diminishing membership contributions, and fast-changing ways of working. These factors have affected how open to participation DoR could be; while it seeks transparency and accountability by soliciting story ideas and consulting its readers and supporters on how to cover a story, there is no co-production per se, as *DoR* carefully regulates the editorial process. *Bureau Local*'s main material constraint is political and has to do with the media infrastructure in the UK, defined by a high concentration of media ownership and the erosion of local media in the country. *Bureau Local* seeks to support local and community media through open resources to its investigations, which it encourages its local media partners to use, but that cooperative approach is often hindered by these partners' lack of time and effort. The outlet also faces sociocultural challenges that are unique to the UK—the stigmatisation and lack of fair representation of minority groups in the British media. *Bureau Local* seeks to redress this epistemic injustice by giving agency to mis-/under-represented communities to get involved in journalism, but it often needs to draw the line between journalism and activism, especially when its investigations deal with issues such as homelessness, where it is impossible to help all affected beyond the political impact of the investigation. *Bureau Local*'s privileged position as a media outlet in a full democracy with relatively high levels of press freedom means that it is able to both remain transparent and pull the curtain right open, inviting communities to participate in the editorial process from start to finish in its goal to produce valuable stories.

5. Conclusion

The study findings indicate that engaged journalism in startups materialises in a relational approach to knowledge production, in which journalists prioritise mutual listening and learning and actively seek to involve their communities, but participation is subject to power relations and negotiating material constraints. Engaged journalists form hybrid media spaces of collective creation, stressing the agentic capacities generated in the interactions between various actors in the process. Knowledge co-production is a thoroughly relational process that orbits around building an imagined collective and a circle of care around storytelling, aimed to form a bond and build trust and deep connections with communities. Mutual learning and understanding lie at the core of the relations between journalists and publics. Knowledge production is a two-way, and even multi-way, dialogic, inclusive, and non-extractive process, grounded in communities' lived experience as engaged journalists aim to amplify the agency and voices of those harmed by, or underrepresented in, legacy media. Engaged journalists employ a unique mix of public responsiveness styles (Brants, 2013), oscillating between empathic, civic, and strategic, depending on their circumstances and

editorial priorities (business models, editorial orientation, mission, and values). Thus, a reader can be addressed as "one of us" and a "citizen" while at the same time as a "consumer" but is never addressed as a "disaffected individual." What this study adds to the literature on hybridity in the journalism studies field is a multilayered view of the actors in hybrid media spaces, moving beyond a consideration of audiences as a monolithic block. Each engaged journalism space creates its own unique imagined collective, through de- and re-aggregating publics into various entities—paying supporters, networks of networks, freelance contributors, and transnational communities, where everyone has a clearly designated part. This process of de- and re-aggregation points to the need for a more nuanced view of audiences and publics that aligns with their place in the hybrid media space and the role that they may or may not play in journalistic production, whether they are readers, subscribers, local communities, or third-sector partners.

Despite the well-meaning rhetoric of co-creation, the study findings indicate that the process remains selective and tightly controlled by journalists and editors, and there are material and structural constraints to participation (financial, organisational, political, sociocultural), which limit how much engaged journalism can do. The study adds to the literature on the boundaries of journalism by suggesting that the separation between journalists and publics remains (even in engaged journalism). While knowledge production is more open to the public to engage in co-production, journalists still carefully manage and regulate that process by providing editorial oversight, thus preserving, to a degree, journalism's normative gatekeeping and gate-watching role (Bruns, 2003; Vos & Thomas, 2019). Publics engaged in co-creation occupy a paradoxical position as both co-creators and journalistic sources and it is the journalists and editors that get the final say. The transparency and openness of knowledge production to the public can be best described through the metaphor of the "curtain" (Coddington, 2015), which can be periodically lifted or pulled right open, or it could be a thicker or sheer, see-through curtain, depending on the context explored. As this study has shown, the curtain can sport varying textures, woven in a push-and-pull between capacity-generating and capacity-limiting forces in each hybrid media space. It is in these negotiations that epistemic capacities are produced, and the conditions of possibility for engaged journalism to achieve its democratising and empowering potential forged. This is a fluid and contingent, rather than static, relationship as media startups continue to experiment with bringing publics into the process of co-production, while continually navigating capacity-enabling factors—such as their editorial orientation and their motivation to involve communities and build deeper relations with them—and capacity-limiting ones—such as political challenges to press freedom, sociocultural norms, and strained financial and organisational resources. As a result, the process of co-creation takes varying forms and textures, which are context-specific; the stronger the structural influences, the thicker the curtain's texture and the less open to public participation the knowledge production process.

Moving beyond hybridity, as the study data suggests, means acknowledging the context-specific material limits that are beyond journalists' control but leave a material imprint on the texture of the "curtain" between journalists and audiences/publics in the process of co-creation. Power in the knowledge production process lies in the negotiation of editorial orientation, community engagement imperatives, and sociocultural, political, and financial structural factors. Still, structural and material factors are not overdetermining and they cannot, in and of themselves, explain the knowledge production process and why engaged journalism takes the shape that it does. The findings suggest that engaged journalism practice is the result mostly of negotiation, and sometimes a response or a solution to, structural factors—whether that be political, social, or economic—where engaged journalism can act as a form of collective resistance. In some

cases, knowledge production can be the direct product of resistance to such forces (for instance, attacks on press freedom for *New Naratif* and the erosion of local media infrastructure and the high concentration of media ownership for *Bureau Local*). This study, therefore, presents a more realistic material framework of engaged journalism that acknowledges how the push-and-pull of multiple factors in each context of engaged journalism practice affects the agentic capacities to empower publics through practices of co-creation. But it also calls into question the very notion of participation and to what extent participation, as a normative good, is possible and even desirable. In contexts with stronger political influences—censorship, surveillance, or low levels of press freedom—it may be dangerous for community members to engage in acts of journalism. And, even where the structural influences are not as strong, limited financial resources and weaker organisational structures can make ambitious practices of community engagement unfeasible. An important caveat to note is that the study design and methodology limit the generalisability of its findings. Being grounded in interviews with journalists from a small number of organisations, the study does not capture the full richness of engaged journalism practices out there. Exploring the process of knowledge co-creation in different national and organisational contexts would likely paint an even more nuanced picture of this process. Future research should also seek to examine the important perspective of publics participating in engaged journalism, which is not captured herein. Ethnographic methods, such as observation, would shed more light on how power relations are negotiated during co-creation, including who has agency and to what extent publics are empowered in the process.

This study raises some important questions for future participatory journalism practice and research. If a veil between journalists and publics remains, even in ambitious experimental participatory practices of engaged journalism, future studies should seek to focus on the purpose of these relations rather than the degree of openness of the knowledge production process. To what end are journalists involving communities in co-creation? Does it matter if publics do not engage in editorial processes from start to finish? Could mutual listening, learning, and being responsive to publics or audiences be considered an integral part of co-creation? And how can journalism writ large better serve the public by adopting these participatory practices strategically and within material constraints?

Conflict of Interests
The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Ahva, L., & Heikkilä, H. (2016). Mass, audience, and the public. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 315–325). Sage.

Allan, S. (2013). *Citizen witnessing: Revisioning journalism in times of crisis*. Polity.

Anderson, C. W. (2016). News ecosystems. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 410–423). Sage.

Belair-Gagnon, V., Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2019). Audience engagement, reciprocity, and the pursuit of community connectedness in public media journalism. *Journalism Practice 13*(5), 558–575.

Brants, K. (2013). Trust, cynicism, and responsiveness. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking journalism: Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape* (pp. 15–27). Routledge.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Bruns, A. (2003). Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: Collaborative online news. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy*, *107*(1), 31–44.

Bruns, A. (2008). Reconfiguring television for a networked, produsage context. *Media International Australia*, *126*(1), 82–94.

Carlson, M. (2015). Introduction: The many boundaries of journalism. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 1–18). Routledge.

Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Coddington, M. (2015). The wall becomes a curtain: Revisiting journalism's news-business boundary. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 67–82). Routledge.

De Maeyer, J. (2016). Adopting a 'material sensibility' in journalism studies. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 460–476). Sage.

Deuze, M., & Witschge, T. (2020). *Beyond journalism*. Polity.

DeVigal, A. (2017, October 3). The continuum of engagement: Pushing the boundaries of news engagement day. *Medium*. https://medium.com/lets-gather/the-continuum-of-engagement-89778f9d6c3a

Dickens, L., Couldry, N., & Fotopoulou, A. (2014). News in the community? *Journalism Studies*, *16*(1), 97–114.

Domingo, D., & Le Cam, F. (2015). Journalism beyond the boundaries: The collective construction of news narratives. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 137–151). Routledge.

Domingo, D., Quandt, T., Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Singer, J., & Vujnovic, M. (2008). Participatory journalism practices in the media and beyond. *Journalism Practice*, *2*(3), 326–342.

Domingo, D., & Wiard, S. J. (2016). News networks. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 397–409). Sage.

DoR. (n.d.). *Despre DoR*. https://www.dor.ro/despre-dor

Eldridge, S. A., & Bødker, H. (2019). Confronting uncertainty: The contours of an inferential community. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, *21*(4), 280–349.

Engelke, K. M. (2019). Online participatory journalism: A systematic literature review. *Media and Communication*, *7*(4), 31–44.

Glasser, T. L. (1999). *The idea of public journalism*. Guilford Press.

Guzmán, M. (2016). *The best ways to build audience and relevance by listening to and engaging your community*. American Press Institute. https://americanpressinstitute.org/listening-engaging-community

Hallin, D. C., Mellado, C., & Mancini, P. (2023). The concept of hybridity in journalism studies. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *28*(1), 219–237.

Hamada, R. (2020, March 9). Why Bureau Local wants to change the story. *The Bureau of Investigative*

Journalism. https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/blog/2020-03-09/why-bureau-local-wants-to-change-the-story

Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Ramaprasad, J., & de Beer, A. S. (2019). *Worlds of journalism: Journalistic cultures around the globe*. Columbia University Press.

Hanusch, F., & Banjac, S. (2019). Studying role conceptions in the digital age: A critical appraisal. In S. A. Eldridge II & B. Franklin (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of developments in digital journalism studies* (pp. 28–39). Routledge.

Heinrich, A. (2013). News making as an interactive practice. In C. Peters & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking journalism: Trust and participation in a transformed news landscape* (pp. 89–100). Routledge.

Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *4*(3), 297–308.

Hermida, A. (2015). Nothing but the truth: Redrafting the journalistic boundary of verification. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 37–50). Routledge.

Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2008). A clash of cultures: The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic frameworks at British newspaper websites. *Journalism Practice*, *2*(3), 343–356.

Josephi, B. (2016). Digital journalism and democracy. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 9–24). Sage.

Ksiazek, T. B., & Springer, N. (2020). *User comments and moderation in digital journalism: Disruptive engagement* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Lewis, S. C. (2015). Epilogue: Studying the boundaries of journalism—Where do we go from here? In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 218–228). Routledge.

Lewis, S. C. (2020). Lack of trust in the news media, institutional weakness, and relational journalism as a potential way forward. *Journalism*, *21*(3), 345–348.

Lewis, S. C., Holton, A., & Coddington, M. (2014). Reciprocal journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *8*(2), 229–241.

Nelson, J. (2021). *Imagined audiences: How journalists perceive and pursue the public*. Oxford University Press.

New Naratif. (n.d.). *About*. https://newnaratif.com/about-us/#manifesto

Örnebring, H., & Karlsson, M. (2022). *Journalistic autonomy: The genealogy of a concept*. University of Missouri Press.

Powers, M. (2015). NGOs as journalistic entities: The possibilities, promises and limits of boundary crossing. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 186–200). Routledge.

Reese, S. D., & Shoemaker, P. J. (2016). A media sociology for the networked public sphere: The hierarchy of influences model. *Mass Communication and Society*, *19*(4), 389–410.

Robinson, S. (2015). Redrawing borders from within: Commenting on news stories as boundary work. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 152–168). Routledge.

Russell, A. (2016). Networked journalism. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 149–163). Sage.

Salaverría, R. (2020). Exploring digital native news media. *Media and Communication*, *8*(2), 1–4.

Schmidt, T. R., & Lawrence, R. G. (2020). Engaged journalism and news work: A sociotechnical analysis of organizational dynamics and professional challenges. *Journalism Practice*, *14*(5), 518–536.

Schmidt, T. R., Nelson, J. L., & Lawrence, R. G. (2022). Conceptualizing the active audience: Rhetoric and practice in "engaged journalism." *Journalism*, *23*(1), 3–21.

Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content* (2nd ed.). Longman.

Singer, J. B. (2015). Out of bounds: Professional norms as boundary markers. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 21–36). Routledge.

Singer, J. B. (2019). Populist postmodernism: When cultural critique of an enlightenment occupation goes viral. *Media and Communication*, *7*(4), 133–137.

Singer, J. B., Domingo, D., Heinonen, A., Hermida, A., Paulussen, S., Quandt, T., Reich, Z., & Vujnovic, M. (2011). *Participatory journalism: Guarding the open gates at online newspapers*. Wiley.

The Current. (n.d.). *About us*. https://thecurrent.pk/about-us

Vos, T. P., & Thomas, R. J. (2019). The discursive (re)construction of journalism's gatekeeping role. *Journalism Practice*, *13*(4), 396–412.

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2015). Resisting epistemologies of user-generated content? Cooptation, segregation and the boundaries of journalism. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism* (pp. 169–185). Routledge.

Wenzel, A. (2020). *Community-centred journalism*. University of Illinois Press.

Witschge, T., Anderson, C. W., Domingo, D., & Hermida, A. (2019). Dealing with the mess (we made): Unravelling hybridity, normativity, and complexity in journalism studies. *Journalism*, *20*(5), 651–659.

Zahay, M. L., Jensen, K., Xia, Y., & Robinson, S. (2020). The labor of building trust: Traditional and engagement. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *98*(4), 1041–1058.

Zelizer, B. (1993). Journalists as interpretive communities. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *10*(3), 219–237.

About the Author

Bissie Anderson (PhD) is assistant professor in digital media and communications at the University of Birmingham. Her research focuses on knowledge production in digital journalism and the relational dynamics between journalists and audiences. She is the co-principal investigator on the Birmingham-Leiden project Meaning-Making and Information Integrity in the Age of AI.