Editorial

Editorial: Journalism, Activism, and Social Media: Exploring the Shifts in Journalistic Roles, Performance, and Interconnectedness

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Abstract
The emergence of the Hybrid Media System (Chadwick, 2017) has changed the actor constellations between political journalism, active members of the audience, and sources. How journalism responds to activism, pressure from politics, and emerging forms of connective action around news events is an important theme in journalism research. This thematic issue brings together seven articles that look at these developments from different angles in a rapidly changing communication ecosystem. The focus is on journalistic authority and legitimacy, journalism and interpretive communities, and changes concerning journalistic roles and practices.

Keywords
activism; journalism research; journalistic legitimacy; journalistic roles; political journalism; social media

1. Introduction

Journalists perform their task in an increasingly networked and politically fragmented public sphere, populated by old and new types of political actors who struggle for discursive power (e.g., Chadwick, 2017; Jungherr et al., 2019). Political interest groups often use social media to shape public opinion and, not least, present their agenda to professional journalists. Some argue that the very institution of journalism is being redefined in this hybrid, networked context (Reese, 2022). The changes in the political media ecosystem are profound, and political communication cultures are under pressure (Esser & Pfetsch, 2020). Media and journalists are increasingly drawn into struggles fought out on social media over the meaning of events. As various contributors nowadays shape contemporary media systems, the discourse about journalism is also being re-rendered. Journalistic practices and norms are being questioned and challenged from within and through external forces. As a profession, journalism has come under attack, especially in more polarized environments, where journalistic authority and legitimacy are increasingly contested.

Against this background, this thematic issue aims to shed greater light on the place and role of journalism in this emerging ecosystem of political communication. We put the focus specifically on shifting journalistic roles, working routines, and information networks in different national contexts. Nowadays, journalists can easily become publicly involved in the political debate as individuals (Bruns & Nuernbergk, 2019). On the one side, this may blur the boundaries between their journalistic role and advocacy, but on the other, they can more actively participate against competing or delegitimizing narratives. If journalists adopt a more politically engaged style via social media (Schumacher et al., 2021), the journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality might easily clash with the promotion of narrow interests and

political views. Hence, negotiating political and emotional engagement with professionalism becomes a challenge in journalism. This tension looms particularly large for valence issues, which are "hijacked" by activist-NGOs pushing for more radical policy. The creation of new forms of journalism whose declared aim is to actively promote (political) solutions epitomizes the influence of political pressure on journalism. Furthermore, journalism becomes more sensitive to the audience's reactions to stories and topics, which are now measurable in real-time. This may induce a commercially driven uniformization of content that "sells" on social media platforms as well as new dynamics of agenda setting and framing in which journalists might become (all too) responsive to popular content among social media users.

In this thematic issue, we assemble contributions addressing the above-mentioned debates from different perspectives and cultural contexts.

2. Delegitimizing "Mainstream" Journalism and Journalists' Reactions

In their article, Schapals and Bruns (2022) examine how journalists perceive delegitimizing attempts and how they react to them. Based on interviews with journalists from mainstream and emerging digital-born outlets in Australia and the UK, they show that "fake news" accusations arouse "significant concerns" in the profession but also lead to concerted initiatives and counterstrategies to revive journalism as a trusted institution. These include self-reflection on how journalism itself might change through transparency efforts and how it explains the value of journalistic standards to audiences and provides them with insight into editorial operations. The interviewees consequently outline the importance of strengthening the audience's media literacy to cope with the "fake news" phenomenon. Since competing forces from both within and outside journalism influence the audience, research must also be alert to how partisan actors are infiltrating political journalism.

The problem of delegitimation is also at the core of Dowling et al.'s (2022) study about two conservative/far-right podcasters in the polarized American political context who engage in critical metajournalistic discourse. Based on in-depth readings of a carefully drawn sample of the podcasts and other relevant texts, their analysis unravels the many references and continuities with ideologically close predecessors on talk radio. It also examines how popular podcasters attack and threaten the principles of journalism and even "advocate for the destruction of the institution of journalism" (p. 24).

Peres-Neto's (2022) piece about Brazilian journalists confronted with Jair Bolsonaro's administration shows that Twitter, in particular, can be an enabler for oppositional journalists. In essence, Peres-Neto digs out how journalists take advantage of different affordances of Twitter to influence political narratives. His interviewees observe that tweeting turns journalists partly into influencers and allows them to rebut attempts at delegitimation of the media voiced on social media platforms. Using Twitter to comment on and contextualize news stories enhances journalists' voices in a politically polarized environment where parts of the audience show no trust and politicians aggressively attack the press. With their Twitter handles, individual journalists try to countervail the shrinking credibility of their outlets with their personal reputations. This echoes the Reuters Digital News Report, according to which Brazilian news users expect journalists to express personal opinions (Newman et al., 2022).

3. The Handling of Emotions and the Formation of Networks in Political Journalism

Responding to the "emotional turn" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020) in journalism and social media research, Medeiros and Makhashvili (2022) explore how Twitter communities establish an emotionally-charged counter-discourse to the tone of the TV coverage about a terrorist attack targeting people with a migration background in Hanau (Germany). They conceptualize emotion and affect as forms of public communication. Their study focuses on shared emotions in response to the event, which are performative, political, and discursively constructed. They compare how public broadcasters and Twitter users create distinct forms of shared emotions.

The thematic issue then shifts to networked communities emerging through the interaction with and the following of alternative media on Twitter. Nachman et al. (2022) study how key outlets covering Chinese politics exhibit differences in their framing and how these variations contribute to the formation of almost non-overlapping network audiences. Although the two media outlets under study both connect to left-wing issues and can be each considered as a part of left counterpublics, competing interpretive communities are likely to evolve around them. Nachman et al. found this by combining a qualitative frame analysis with a Twitter follower network analysis that included location and profile data. Their computational approach is an intriguing example for investigating the public forming around media discussing foreign policy on Twitter. It also sheds light on how Twitter can be used to shape political opinion on foreign authoritarian regimes through alternative media outlets in the diaspora.

4. Trends in the Professional Mindset and the Work Routines of Political Journalists

The digital transformation of journalism potentially creates new professional role orientations that deviate from that of a neutral observer. This is explored in Krüger et al.'s (2022) article about the role orientations of constructive journalists in Germany. Constructive journalism is a strand of journalism that emphasizes reporting on solutions to societal problems. Constructive journalists

are almost inevitably under some suspicion that they mix their journalistic activity with political advocacy. However, their cognitive orientations and professional values are so far unknown. Krüger et al. reveal a remarkably high agreement with interventionist goals in this community of journalists. Concerning their political orientation, they place themselves clearly left of center.

The final article by Ruffio and Hubé (2022) probes the assumption that the availability of audience metrics for news stories increases the commercial pressure in journalism and induces changes in work routines. Focusing on the coverage of criminal cases, the authors base their analysis on a comparative qualitative survey with editors in France and Germany. They find that metrics are a double-edged sword: On the one hand, metrics induce a "sheepish" behavior among journalists in the sense that they follow the crowd and produce uniform content that attracts clicks. On the other hand, publishing on social media platforms enhances the autonomy of reporters vis-à-vis their editors.

5. Conclusion

Several articles in this thematic issue illustrate how journalism adapts to a changing media ecology. The scholarly work assembled in this issue illuminates the wide range of possible influences. Particularly alternative media outlets, whose independence is partly unclear, and partisan actors from within and outside journalism who challenge the established journalistic culture and authority in their attempt to control political information flows to serve their interests. Via social media, those new actors find and co-create affective publics. In these publics, competing (emotional) narrations unfold through connective action and within interpretive communities. All this together challenges the institution of journalism. Among the response patterns of journalists, there seems to be a more interventionist understanding of their role and more proactive communication of journalistic standards as a strategy to counter the attacks on journalism's integrity. We also see an increased level of audience orientation within journalism. However, it seems that the broader socio-political contexts and media systems moderate the impact of these patterns.

Acknowledgments

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