Media and Communication
Open Access Journal | ISSN: 2183-2439
Volume 6, Issue 4 (2018)

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Editors

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COGITATIO

Media and Communication, 2018, Volume 6, Issue 4
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Published by Cogitatio Press
Rua Fialho de Almeida 14, 2º Esq.,
1070-129 Lisbon
Portugal

Academic Editors
Oscar Westlund, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway
Mats Ekström, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Available online at: www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication

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2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 1–10
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1775

Editorial

News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media

Oscar Westlund [1,2,3,*] and Mats Ekström [3]

[1] Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University, 0130 Oslo, Norway;
E-Mail: oscar.westlund@oslomet.no
[2] Department for Journalism, Volda University College, 6103 Volda, Norway
[3] Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden;
E-Mail: mats.ekstrom@jmg.gu.se

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 8 October 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
The link between journalism and participation has since long been envisioned and argued to be an important one. However, it is also a complex link. It encompasses how the news media and their social actors actively work towards enabling and engaging citizens as active participants through the digital infrastructures of their proprietary platforms, as well as the ways citizens potentially make use of such opportunities or not in their everyday lives, and how this affects epistemologies of news journalism. However, to date, journalism studies scholars have mostly focused on positive forms of participatory journalism via proprietary platforms, and thus fail to account for and problematize dark participation and participation taking place on social media platforms non-proprietary to the news media. This introduction, and the thematic issue as a whole, attempts to address this void. The introduction discusses three key aspects of journalism's relationship with participation: 1) proprietary or non-proprietary platforms, 2) participants, and 3) positive or dark participation.

Keywords
digital intermediaries; epistemology; participatory journalism; social media

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

Let us begin by borrowing the concept of 'taken for grantedness', as sociologically developed in a book focusing on how clocks, cars and mobile phones over time have become taken for granted aspects of everyday life and society (Ling, 2012). Mobile *devices* are indeed essential to the everyday life for most citizens; for communication, for information, for entertainment, and also for the functioning of society more generally. People rely on their mobile devices, and as long as they function as intended and as long as others are accessible via them, we tend to take them for granted. Mobile devices have become like air to humans and water to the fish; fundamental to everyday life and yet something we are rarely cognizant of being there. The act in which a person takes something for granted has both its advantages and disadvantages. As humans we clearly need to take certain things for granted in our everyday lives, and develop routine behaviors to avoid spending extensive cognitive effort in assessing information and making decisions. Feeling that we are able to take something for granted thus comes with certain advantages, such as when by depending on our smartphones providing us with the means to communicate, we get informed and entertained (alongside a plethora of additional contributions) literally at almost any time and at any place. Disadvantages become especially salient when sudden or organic changes cause

disruptions. For example, when there is a societal crisis causing telecom networks or the power grid to go down, we quickly become aware of exactly how much we depend on our mobile devices. Such 'taken for grantedness' extends beyond the private realm to how diverse organizations rely on technologies such as mobile devices. It also applies to much wider phenomena, including but not limited to people taking for granted that professionally produced and published 'journalism' will continue to be available. Similarly, it might be the case that people assume citizen's participatory practices, via news sites, mobile applications, social media platforms etc. will be marked as largely positive as opposed to 'dark participation' such as when people spread misinformation, engage in media manipulation or online harassment (see Quandt, 2018). Dark participation differs from 'dark social media', such as Facebook groups and messaging apps that are not open to the public (Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2018). Moreover, people may also take for granted that social media platform companies will manage private data carefully, whilst providing a range of services 'for free'. The mere act in which a person takes something for granted essentially means this person makes an *assumption* about how things are or how things work. Such an assumption, as a statement we assume is either true or false, leads us to conclude things are in a certain way. It is disadvantageous if people in general, and scholars and journalists more specifically, hold on to such assumptions which perhaps rather should be brought into scrutiny.

This thematic issue has emerged based on a perceived need to question and re-assess our assumptions about the so-called participatory journalism. Scholars have typically focused on positive forms of participatory journalism via *proprietary* platforms, and thus fail to account for and problematize *dark participation* and participation taking place on social media platforms *non-proprietary* to the news media. Research into participatory journalism has often departed from an assumption that it will be closely linked to civic engagement and democracy. It has focused on the ways in which news media and journalists enable (as opposed to disable) active forms of participation in the news through proprietary digital platforms (especially the news site). For example, Robinson and Wang (2018) convincingly conclude that the civic act of participation in the news has not done much to democratize the flows of information in society, and also that those in control of platforms have much power in relation to network infrastructures and maintaining specific interests. Robinson and Wang (2018) do well in pointing out that such power certainly varies in different transnational contexts. Thus, while platform companies such as Facebook and Google have exceptional power and influence on some markets, the governments in certain countries (such as China) have enforced regulation that diminishes such power. This can also take place in the European Union (EU). For example, September 12th might become remembered as the day when the EU killed the free internet as we know it, voting in favor of the "Copyright Directive" that would mean enforcing rules that prevent sharing of non-copyrighted materials, etc.

Social media platforms have largely taken over as the sites where active participation with the news takes place. Welcomed or not by the news media, these platforms also involve direct exchanges between journalists/editors and citizens. The news media are actively customizing and publishing news for non-proprietary platforms, via for example branded Facebook groups and Twitter accounts (see, e.g., Cornia, Sehl, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018), while at the same time struggling with not becoming too dependent on these platforms. Journalists themselves also use diverse platforms to brand themselves, conveying both personal and professional information, as well as relatable and reliable information (Holton & Molyneux, 2018). Journalists who have many 'followers' on social media platforms like twitter are likely to attract audiences for their news material, and may also, as Kligler-Vilenchik and Tenenboim (in press) shows, enroll them into the news production processes.

This thematic issue also addresses the role of platforms, that there are many participants in diverse forms of contemporary journalism, and that the subsequent outcomes of participation are not necessarily positive but also take shape as 'dark participation'. In this editorial we turn now to discuss the core concept 'journalism'. This provides an essential point of departure for the subsequent discussion of how journalism intersects with participation across proprietary and non-proprietary platforms. We then turn to three key aspects of journalism's relationship with participation: 1) proprietary or non-proprietary platforms, 2) participants, and 3) positive or dark participation. Throughout the article we discuss key findings and contributions from the articles in the thematic issue, by way of relevance to these key aspects (as opposed to the running order conventionally used in an editorial).

2. Journalism: A News Production Process

Institutions of journalism are often seen as one if not the most important knowledge-producing institution in society, because they continuously scrutinize and report on what is happening in society, and thus make it possible for citizens to be informed. Scholars, practitioners, pundits and the public in Western democracies have largely taken for granted that journalism is and will remain being a key feature of democratic countries in the future. Many scholars in journalism studies and political communication have been working under the assumption that journalism functions as a 'Fourth Estate' successfully scrutinizing politics and power (e.g., Peters & Broersma, 2016), and also that the news produced by the so-called professional journalists plays a crucial role in informing the citizenry, so they can participate in democratic processes in society. Many scholars have debated that one should

not uncritically assume journalism is a fourth estate in society just because it normatively claims it should be and wants to be. There is a wealth of research taken for granted as support of journalism and the news media having had great significance in society (i.e., decades of research in highly regarded communication journals). For example, various studies witness how citizens who frequently access political news are also more interested and informed about politics and more likely to engage in specific kinds of democratic processes, such as voting. With much of this research building narrowly on surveys and panels, therefore closely linked to problems in survey responses and normative assumptions in such responses, it would be fruitful to assess passive trace data on what news people actually turn to, how long they spend with it, and link this to different kinds of activities related to democracy. A recent special issue in *Digital Journalism* focused on measurable journalism, i.e., how analytics and metrics are being integrated into news work, and how this enables future research to address inquiries in news ways, including the impact different kinds of journalism *really* has for participation in democratic processes (Carlson, 2018; cf. Powers, 2018). Measurable journalism means news media companies are increasingly equipped to monitor and analyze the diverse ways people consume and actively engage with the news via sharing, commenting, etc. (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015), and through their behaviors—whether consumers accept or reject the epistemic knowledge—the journalists' claims made in the news can now be measured in more diverse and sophisticated ways (Ekström & Westlund, in press).

Whatever the role is that we may ascribe to journalism in society up until now, the situation for journalism appears to be worsening, and thus our expectations of it definitely are in need of modification. We should not take for granted that all legacy news media in the future will have the resources to maintain well-staffed newsrooms and highly skilled and knowledgeable journalists who are granted time and resources to carry out high quality journalism. The business model of legacy news media such as newspapers has shown to have a diminished performance. This has been attributed to changing patterns in news consumption, transforming advertising models and expenditures while also stiffening competition from platform companies such as Facebook and Google (Nielsen, 2016), which offer their platforms for nearly anyone to produce, publish and access news and other content. Moreover, in many instances these are now functioning as digital intermediaries between producers and audiences of the news.

The 21st century has indeed been marked by debates, studies and speculations about the future of journalism. Interestingly, not only is the 'future' of journalism uncertain and bringing forth diverging viewpoints, but also the very idea of what 'journalism' is. In response, boundaries of journalism which have been contested have been maintained by journalists and institutions of journalism in diverse ways (Carlson & Lewis, 2015), and the journalists seek to maintain journalistic authority in many ways, including through a meta-journalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016, 2017). When it comes to defining news journalism it has been commonplace to define it as closely interlinked to institutional news organizations (i.e., legacy news media such as newspapers, television and radio broadcasters) and industry associations (e.g., World Association of Newspapers) that accommodate 'professional journalists'. Basically, such a definition of 'what journalism is' concerns what journalists in these specific institutional arrangements do. Importantly, scholars have called for the broadening of our understanding of journalism, arguing that one should go beyond the individual journalist and institutional news media organization (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). Thus, the traditional definition essentially helps conserve the legitimacy of these institutions, but beyond that it helps little in defining what journalism really is. This definition is narrow in defining who does journalism. In the past, journalists in relatively few news media organizations produced and published news material in a medium they owned and controlled (i.e., proprietary platform), and in several cases the reach was very high and thus translated into being a mass medium (e.g., Lewis, 2012). Nowadays there are a plethora of actors producing 'news', some of whom shift between human and computational ways of producing, some of whom attempt to be neutral, and others who try to make personal gains. These actors may also publish their 'news' for proprietary and non-proprietary platforms, and call to mind the diverse ways we may now think of 'news'.

In our view, 'journalism' does not simply translate into something being done by journalists, nor is 'news' equal to the outcome of journalism. News can be seen as a public knowledge claiming to report on current events in the world, but with many different genres, there are many different kinds of events covered in news. As a 'product' that is published, news can take many different forms and can be the result of different news production processes. Consequently, we make a call for conceiving of journalism on the basis of the ways in which the news, as a form of knowledge, is being produced. We argue that news journalism is based on what diverse *social actors* or *technological actants* do in the processes of making news (cf. Lewis & Westlund, 2015).

In extension of this argument, our basic definition of journalism reads as follows: *news journalism concerns performing a news production process with ambitions towards the publishing of truthful accounts of current events in the world*. This definition does not presuppose that journalism can only be accomplished by those working for institutional news media (or having formal journalism education), but rather it is open to considering anyone being able to perform acts of journalism (including automated journalism). This of course does not mean that everyone has the competence, resources and time to produce and publish news, nor the platforms to reach

a wider audience (and this definition does not limit itself only to proprietary platforms). In extension of the above, things clearly become more complex; can we take for granted that everyone who is a journalist or works for a news publisher indeed engages in a journalistic news production process? How are we to perceive materials that look just like news from diverse actors, including but not limited to 'alternative media (see Holt, 2018) and independent news producers, who produce 'news', 'information' as well as 'misinformation'? Moreover, and as shown by Ferrer and Karlsson (2018), also native advertising is produced to look similar to news.

First of all, research must delve into epistemologies of journalism. Throughout the world we find journalists who clearly subscribe to ideals and norms of being neutral watchdogs that report 'facts' about important events taking place. Importantly, journalists do not simply gather and report 'facts' as news, but engage in a process of producing the news. News production is, in this line, a form of knowledge production, and in the case of journalism, epistemology—the study of knowledge—is the study of how those producing the news not only know what they know, but also know of the evaluation, articulation and justification of their knowledge claims. News take shape as different forms of knowledge, depending on genres, length, etc. (see., e.g., review in Ekström & Westlund, in press). Most importantly, let us proceed by contending that news journalism has been associated with authoritative and verified public knowledge about current events (Carlson, 2017; Ekström, 2002), but also that there are different epistemologies of journalism, with differences between TV, print and online journalism (Ekström & Westlund, in press). In extension of this, we also find different epistemologies of digital journalism. Structured journalism, for example, puts its emphasis on completeness and accuracy, compared to giving priority to immediacy as is the case with much online journalism, and especially so when it comes to live blogging (e.g., Thorsen & Jackson, 2018).

3. Participation across Proprietary and Non-Proprietary Platforms

Having discussed 'journalism', let us now turn to how it intersects with diverse forms of public participation. There are several epistemologies of journalism, and thus we should ask what the epistemologies of participatory journalism are, and also what is participatory journalism to start with? Participatory journalism has been defined and approached as a form of journalism where a specific actor, such as legacy news media (or other established institutions of journalism), open up their organization, their news work and their proprietary platforms to the public for them participate in. More generally, Anderson and Reevers (2018) discuss that the epistemology of news participation concerns how journalistic knowledge emerges on the basis of both professional expertise and public interaction (i.e., participation). A key contribution of theirs involves turning to the key epistemological question of how journalists know what they know, then moving forward with the idea that their knowledge could improve if they were to get involved with a participatory public. Their largely retrospective article brings forth an analysis of four important moments in the ongoing transformations of participatory epistemology, from Indymedia to diverse initiatives aimed at professional adaptations to participatory journalism, on a path towards what the authors refer to as quasi-participatory platforms (like Facebook). The fourth and final moment is described as a sort of participatory apocalypse by Anderson and Reevers (2018). It is embodied by the example of Pepe the Frog, the meme cartoon character that became a key symbol for the alt-right movement (cf. Holt, 2018, on alternative media).

It has often been held that in the public there are billions of eyes, viewpoints and competencies and that all, and increasingly easily, can feed into journalism and thus help enrich it (Borger, van Hoof, Costera Meijer, & Sanders, 2013). Based on this understanding of what participatory journalism is, early and influential cross-national research concluded that participation for most part was confined to the very first stage of the news production process, with the public providing journalists with tips, pictures and videos, and the final stage when news materials were published and the audience commented on the articles (Singer et al., 2011). Research reviews have made apparent the great tensions between professional journalists desire and need for control, as opposed to open participation. By ceding control over some aspects of news production and circulation, journalists thus open up their traditional gatekeeping purview over what's classified as news (Lewis, 2012). Throughout the 2000s many news publishers experimented with, and developed, functions for participatory journalism. These primarily involved users providing journalists with source material, such as photos and videos, as well as possibilities for adding their interpretation through comment functions. Very few allowed citizens to participate in other stages of the news production process, and many news publishers have ceased to offer comment functions, as difficulties in maintaining a good tone overwhelmed their provision. Numerous news media companies have struggled with members of the public engaging in hate speech, bullying, racism and other forms of the so-called dark participation (see Quandt, 2018). Others keep on working towards fostering public participation, but are more strategic in the ways they involve the audiences. A German study of Spiegel Online, the biggest news media forum in the country, employed automated content analysis to examine a total of 673,361 user comments. The analysis included all incoming comments, finding that a prominent moderation strategy involved deleting user comments (more than one third of all comments were deleted). The rationale for deleting user comments was closely connected to of-

fenses being made in relation to 20 politically sensitive topics, while offenses on other topics (even swear words) were still published (Boberg, Schatto-Eckrodt, Frischlich, & Quandt, 2018). Longitudinal research has found that audience participation, including commenting on articles on news sites, initially rose for several years but then fell back down (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast, 2015). It is potentially dangerous to assume such developments mean that the audiences are in fact disinterested in participating in journalism, as the actions of audiences should also be analyzed in relation to how social actors are in fact enabling or restricting the affordances for participation offered by news sites and other proprietary platforms (i.e., the technological actants). The social actors can tailor their proprietary technological actants to enable as little or as much participation as they would like, and thus are in charge of setting the scene. This should be taken into account whether news publishers implement affordances for participatory journalism or not, and whether the digital design of their platforms carry incentives for the public to participate or not (cf. Novak, 2018). Robinson and Wang (2018) write, "the very definition of 'participation' morphs according to the locality and its political and information infrastructure; each place has its own structuring system with varying formal/informal relationships as well as different restrictions and allowances for participation in mediated spaces" (p. 92). Other scholars have argued there should be a sort of reciprocity in the relationship between journalists and their audiences (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014), then it cannot come as a surprise that empiric studies find relatively 'limited' participation.

As part of the impetus for this thematic issue we argue that a key problem here is that journalism scholars treat 'participatory journalism' too narrowly, essentially in terms of their news sites. Over the past decade there has been tremendous research on participation activities, starting with blogs and accelerating with social media, allowing people to act as *produsers*, switching back and forth between being producers and users (Bruns, 2012). Lewis and Molyneux (2018) review and critically discuss a massive body of research focusing on the intersection of journalism and social media over the past decade. They intentionally seek to provoke and question participation in their article, which unpacks three problematic yet very influential assumptions in research about social media in journalism studies. They challenge assumptions: 1) that social media is a net positive; 2) that social media reflects reality; and 3) that social media matters over and above other factors. They conclude "these assumptions, even while implicit, may be clouding our collective judgment and obscuring issues that otherwise call out for our attention" (p. 19). Among the areas potentially where our judgement is clouded, we find the power of platform companies.

Importantly, research into social media in journalism has largely been disconnected from the core research positioning itself as focusing on participatory journalism. While there may be many reasons for this, it seems plausible to us that until recently journalism studies scholars have largely perceived participation in journalism and news through social media as something distinctive from participatory journalism. If so, we encourage scholars to consider changing their perceptions. By bringing in social media into our understanding of what participatory journalism is, we can significantly change some of the conclusions we have made, including that the public is disinterested in engaging in discussions about news (cf. Swart, Broersma, & Peters, 2018).

To date, scholars in the field of journalism studies have done little to distinguish between the proprietary platforms of the news media and the platforms which are non-proprietary to them (e.g., social media). Yet the news media, journalists and other news producers, actively and frequently turn to social media platforms to publish and distribute their news content, and/or enable the public to share and discuss their news material. A news publisher may well have decided to restrict any form of participatory functionalities on their proprietary site, for various reasons, while they on the other hand have created and maintain official and branded pages and channels for non-proprietary platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat and Telegram. In all of these cases the institutions of journalism are running and supporting somewhat controlled environments for participation, albeit in non-proprietary platforms, and in different ways depending on what Robinson and Wang (2018) call transnational context. Should institutionally supported enabling of participation in platforms non-proprietary to the news media count as 'participatory journalism'? We would say 'yes', and certainly think this makes sense since social media platforms have developed and put on offer platforms with affordances for news publishing and news participation.

Indeed, we have seen institutions of journalism that have both encouraged and set restrictions on how their journalists approach and act on social media in terms of participation. Belair-Gagnon's in-depth study of developments at the BBC, for example, showed how there were increasing expectations on their journalists to create and actively use social media in their work (Belair-Gagnon, 2015). There is a wealth of research on how journalists use Twitter. For example, how journalists engage with the public or are extracting information from the public. A study focused on how one journalist, Andy Carvin at the NPR, used Twitter in diverse ways during the Arab Spring. For example, he frequently turned to his base of Twitter followers (around 50,000 at the time) to get their help in comprehending different kinds of information (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014). All in all, quantitative content analysis showed that non-elite actors were used as sources more often than elite sources, as opposed to what otherwise is common (cf. van Leuven, Kruikemeier, Lecheler, & Hermans, 2018). A recent multimethod study from Israel documents how an individual journalist established a WhatsApp community through

which she engaged a diverse set of citizens as participants and co-constructors of journalism in literally all stages of the news production process (Kligler-Vilenchik & Tenenboim, in press). These studies differ in terms of time periods, countries, and social media platforms. The common denominator, however, is that individual journalists use non-proprietary platforms that enable the public to participate in the news production processes. This leads us to the next theme, namely the participants.

4. Participants in Journalism

Let us return to the question of who performs journalism, and who participates in such news work. Once upon a time journalists would more or less run the entire show at the newspaper or broadcaster, from deciding which beats to follow and make news stories about, to which to publish. In the past, newspapers were typically organized as silos, separating the editorial department from the market/business department, but many have re-configured. With several news publishers now having developed and maintained digital journalism for 25 years, not only have their portfolio of publishing platforms expanded and their business changed, they have also had to acquire different technical and human resources, as well as re-organized themselves. In short, ten years ago news publishers started involving technologists in both daily routines and practices, and in innovation projects ranging from the development of blogs (Nielsen, 2012) to mobile news services (Westlund, 2011). Making a call for a more holistic approach, Lewis and Westlund (2015) have encouraged journalism scholars to not only study the perceptions and actions of the journalistic *actors*, but also technologists and businesspeople, and in relation to technological *actants* and *audiences*. Why? Well, because many news publishers are hiring or involving more and more technologists in their news work (such as digital developers, UX designers, data scientists, database developers, etc.), and are also working towards more collaboration between journalists and businesspeople. For example, a study of data journalists and civil technologists shows four different ways in which these work with data together, and create new entanglements (Baack, 2018). In building on recent scholarship on interloper media and the journalistic field (Eldridge, 2018), Holton and Belair-Gagnon's (2018) article identifies and makes distinctions between a set of three key 'strangers' (i.e., social actors) that bring diverse expertise into their participation in news production, acting as either disruptors or innovators. First, *explicit interlopers* are the "non-traditional journalism actors who may not necessarily be welcomed or defined as journalists and work on the periphery of the profession while directly contributing content or products to the creation and distribution of news" (p. 73). Second, *implicit interlopers* have less clear associations with journalism per se, yet make important contributions to it, and thus can be more easily welcomed. Third, *media intralopers* are defined as working for news media organizations, "bringing non-traditional journalistic expertise and perspectives to news organizations and disrupting news production through advancements in digital and social technology" (p. 73).

Building on this, one may ask if involvement by diverse 'strangers' and 'social actors' such as technologists, inside or beyond the news producing institution, should be conceived of as a form of 'participatory journalism'? Our answer is: it depends. In the case of involving civil technologists, who are working with technology that may enable civic participation (Baack, 2018), the answer is 'yes', because they constitute a form of public with special expertise. When it comes to journalists involving technologists in news production the defining criterion to consider concerns whether they collaborate on something intended to facilitate one or several forms of participation on behalf of the public. These discussions of participatory journalism are closely related to 'citizen journalism', as well as 'alternative media'. These categories include heterogeneous forms of news and information production and are marked by being carried out by others than traditional institutions of journalism (those typically referred to as legacy news media). In our perception of what counts as journalism, and the boundary work that surrounds those doing it, one often finds simplistic demarcation lines between those performing journalism, and others. Importantly, those "others" comprises a heterogeneous group of actors. For the salient case of 'alternative media', Holt's (2018) article discusses how these oftentimes are lumped together and perceived, collectively, as similar to one another, whilst their orientations, intentions, epistemologies and so forth may in fact diverge substantially. In an attempt to forward the heterogeneous characters of alternative media, Holt posits a 2×2 matrix that builds on the notion of anti-systemness, distinguishing between ideological anti-systemness and relational anti-systemness. While 'alternative media' often are successful in enrolling certain groups of citizens in participation, this does not mean they represent a form of participatory journalism by default. Alternative media clearly produce and publish one-sided stories and perspectives, whereas others are trying to adhere to common principles and routines for news production.

5. Positive and Dark Sides of Participation

As discussed at the outset, many are the scholars (and also practitioners, pundits and policy makers) who have worked under the assumption that the enabling of participation in news will have positive effects for civic engagement and democracy. Normatively it would of course be great if citizens were to engage themselves in diverse democratic processes, being enthusiastic about sharing their expertise and investing their time in assisting the news media in producing news, by checking facts, sending diverse materials and so forth. Clearly, by now we can make a list of instances around the world where this has happened, and especially situations where there

has been some sort of benefit for the citizens in doing so (such as financial reimbursement or personal recognition). However, the once optimistic visions for the future of participatory journalism have not materialized in the ways once envisaged (see, e.g., Borger et al., 2013; Singer et al., 2011). The reasons for this are found not only in looking at the interest in doing so among the *audiences*, but also in taking into consideration the perceptions and actions of social *actors* such as journalists, and the enabling and disabling features of the technological *actants* as such.

This thematic issue comprises studies focusing on both positive and dark forms of participation, looking both backwards and onwards. Ruotsalainen and Villli (2018) present us with a discourse study of how 41 entrepreneurial journalism outlets have presented themselves (in their 'About Us' pages), focusing on participatory tendencies and their journalistic ethos. They find ideals closely connected to identity, niche, network and change, but also linked to 'traditional journalism' (cf. Witschge & Harbers, 2018). Altogether Ruotsalainen and Villli (2018) conclude that there is a form of 'hybrid engagement', essentially translating into the difficulties of simultaneously adhering to traditional values and criteria of journalism on the one hand, and maintaining a participation and dialogue friendly approach on the other. Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018) proceed by sketching out four different possible scenarios for entrepreneurial journalism for the future, some which entail a dialogue with the public, and others which put little emphasis on such elements. While Ruotsalainen and Villli (2018) approach participation as a mostly positive phenomenon that news media industries may choose to work with or not, other articles in the thematic issue have critically examined the more heterogeneous nature of participation, and especially, the darker sides of it.

Anderson and Reevers (2018) chart an analysis of how participatory journalism has emerged and developed over time, including unexpected developments affecting cultural values as well as epistemologies. They discuss how public interaction has brought change to journalistic knowledge and professional expertise. This is something which they here refer to as *participatory epistemology*, and which they analyze by means of four key moments, which taken together point to how the concept of participation has transformed from being largely utopian to becoming more dystopian. Their article goes in harmony with the 'Dark Participation' article by Quandt (2018), which reviews and critically confronts much previous literature into journalism and participation. Quandt presents us with a rhetorically strong review, taking us on a critically marked journey into the positive and dark ends of participation. With a personal address, Quandt discusses how numerous scholars (including himself) approached citizen participation with naively positive mindsets and theoretical concepts beginning in the 1990s. He discusses how academics and others largely idealized human condition as well as social reality, writing that "media managers' economic fantasies of a willing, free workforce were equally misguided as the rather naïve academic notions of a revitalized journalism in direct debate with its active users; both sacrificed empirical realism for fantasies that were driven by their own goals and hopes resulting in either a greedy or an idealistic projection" (p. 37). His article makes salient how study after study, in diverse fields, have painted an increasingly dark picture of participation. Quandt (2018) discusses, for example, how hateful messages, incivility, manipulation, information wars, misinformation, bullying and trolling have all gained traction in various ways, on the comment fields of proprietary news sites, and/or on a multitude of social media platforms. The article systematically discusses a set of five key dimensions through which the diverse kinds of dark participation can be approached and analyzed: 1.) actors, 2.) reasons, 3.) objects/targets, 4.) audience(s), and 5.) processes.

Ultimately, this thematic issue has attempted to unpack critical issues often overlooked in journalism studies. As Usher and Carlson (2018) put it: "there was much we did not foresee, such as the way that this brave new world would turn journalism into distributed content, not only taking away news organizations' gatekeeping power but also their business model. This is indeed a midlife crisis" (p. 107). Quandt's (2018) article, similarly to those by Lewis and Molyneux (2018) and by Robinson and Wang (2018), offers a systematic and critical review of key issues in much of the research produced over the past decade in the realm of journalism, participation and social media. These articles also set forth important areas that future research can and should look further into.

6. Closing Words

In recent decades, many scholars have taken for granted that participatory journalism is positive in nature and that it takes place via the proprietary digital platforms of the news media. This thematic issue presents us with conceptual, critical and empirical articles that should lead us to re-assess our understanding of participation and journalism in an age of social media. This thematic issue has focused on two diverse forms of participation, and the often overlooked importance of who designs, controls and capitalizes on platforms. By accounting for these, this article suggests scholars should rethink what participatory journalism is. In essence, participatory journalism takes place when institutional or individual news producers seek to involve the public in positive forms of participations, whether via proprietary- or non-proprietary platforms, in news production processes or published news materials that strive towards being truthful accounts of world events. Epistemologically speaking, the important matter concerns how journalists and the public interact in processes of news production or in relation to the news material published, and it matters less if such interaction takes place on platforms proprietary or non-proprietary to the news media.

Altogether, this thematic issue stresses that diverse forms of public interaction taking place on the digital platforms of news media, as well as on non-proprietary social media platforms, are important for the epistemology of participatory journalism. The invited scientific commentaries authored by Katz (2018), Kligler-Vilenchik (2018), Novak (2018), and by Usher and Carlson (2018), each offers important contributions that synthesize the nexus of journalism and participation. Future research should look further into positive and dark participation across diverse platforms. Journalism studies, more specifically, should critically assess the political economy of platform companies in relation to the news media. This relates to how the news media are seeking to enable vis-a-vis disable platform companies in maintaining a dominant role for news distribution and public participation. Many news media have struggled to enable and curate positive forms of participation. After years of giving away news content to social media platforms, as well as enabling the public to engage with the news via non-proprietary platforms, some news organizations have started questioning the long-term consequences of doing so. While Google and Facebook help direct substantial amounts of traffic to news sites, Facebook does less so nowadays. Moreover, this traffic has not led to success on the advertising market, nor do random and non-loyal news users necessarily convert into paying subscribers. Thus, not only should scholars question the nature of participation (which certainly can be dark), or how participation takes place across non-proprietary platforms, but also whether the news media can take for granted that their current strategies for social media platform companies actually bring more positive than negative outcomes. To us, one thing is clear: reader revenues are increasingly becoming more important than advertising revenues for news media organizations, and to succeed with this audience engagement is more important than reach. Consequently, there are news media strategically working with audience engagement on their proprietary platforms, and deemphasizing non-proprietary social media platforms. Importantly, this does not necessarily mean these news media will work towards facilitating active participation with the news.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Scott Eldridge II, Seth C. Lewis and Edson Tandoc Jr. for their invaluable comments on earlier versions and sections of this editorial. The authors thank the Swedish Social Science and Humanities Fund for supporting the work with this thematic issue, and the managing editor of the journal for support throughout the process.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Oscar Westlund (PhD) is Professor at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo Metropolitan University, where he leads the *OsloMet Digital Journalism Research Group*. He holds secondary appointments at Volda University College and University of Gothenburg. Westlund specializes in journalism, media management and news media consumption for proprietary news media platforms such as news sites and mobile applications, as well as with regards to social media platforms. Westlund is the Editor-in-Chief of *Digital Journalism*, and has also guest edited special issues for a handful other leading international journals. He currently leads a research project called *the epistemologies of digital news production*, funded by the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences.

Mats Ekström (PhD) is Professor at the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University of Gothenburg. His research focuses on journalism, media discourse, conversation in institutional settings, political communication and young people's political engagement. Recent publications include "Right-wing populism and the dynamics of style" (*Palgrave Communications*, 2018, with Marianna Patrona and Joanna Thornborrow); "Social media, porous boundaries, and the development of online political engagement among young citizens" (*New Media & Society*, 2018, with Adam Shehata) and *The Mediated Politics of Europe: A Comparative Study of Discourse* (Palgrave, 2017, with Julie Firmstone).

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 11–23
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1562

Article

A Decade of Research on Social Media and Journalism: Assumptions, Blind Spots, and a Way Forward

Seth C. Lewis [1,*] and Logan Molyneux [2]

[1] School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, USA; E-Mail: sclewis@uoregon.edu
[2] Klein College of Media and Communication, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA; E-Mail: logan@temple.edu

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 2 May 2018 | Accepted: 14 August 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
Amid a broader reckoning about the role of social media in public life, this article argues that the same scrutiny can be applied to the journalism studies field and its approaches to examining social media. A decade later, what hath such research wrought? In the broad study of news and its digital transformation, few topics have captivated researchers quite like social media, with hundreds of studies on everything from how journalists use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat to how such platforms facilitate various forms of engagement between journalists and audiences. Now, some 10 years into journalism studies on social media, we need a more particular accounting of the assumptions, biases, and blind spots that have crept into this line of research. Our purpose is to provoke reflection and chart a path for future research by critiquing themes of what has come before. In particular, our goal is to untangle three faulty assumptions—often implicit but no less influential—that have been overlooked in the rapid take-up of social media as a key phenomenon for journalism studies: (1) that social media would be a net positive; (2) that social media reflects reality; and (3) that social media matters over and above other factors.

Keywords
audience; journalism; news; research; social media

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

In 2015, when the first author visited a U.S. metropolitan newspaper in the throes of trying to reinvent itself for the digital era, a management ultimatum had recently been delivered to the few reluctant late-adopters there: Be an active contributor on social media, or else. The message went something like this: "If you're not on Twitter, get an account already—and make sure you have at least a few hundred followers by the end of the year. We'll be tracking your activity" (Personal communication, July 9, 2015; newspaper name withheld by agreement). The intensity of the message matched the urgency that the newspaper's managers felt—an urgency about meeting audiences where they were (increasingly on social platforms outside the newspaper's control) and thereby steering those audiences back to the newspaper's own proprietary platforms (its website and apps). The hope was that social media, once a curiosity beginning with MySpace in the mid-2000s and now suddenly *the* dominant means of public conversation, might be just the thing to save news organizations—to revitalize, and hopefully monetize, audience attention in a world awash in attractive alternatives to news. To be active on Twitter and Facebook, as well as Snapchat, Instagram, and the rest, was seen by many news managers as an obvious and necessary step in journalism's digital-first transformation.

In many cases, journalists actually were ahead of their bosses as early and eager adopters of social media, embracing the opportunity to develop a personal

brand, follow and converse with fellow journalists, seek new sources and ideas, and enjoy a metric-based manifestation that people indeed liked and shared their work. For many journalists, being on social media also meant being exposed to unruly publics and their criticisms, and feeling obligated to manage yet another platform around the clock. But the general story of social media and journalism, as told through metajournalistic discourse and by now scores of academic studies published in the past decade, is one of journalists readily adopting and navigating an intriguing new space, overall adapting it to meet their needs and reaffirm their journalistic authority (cf. Carlson, 2017). More to the point, the collective hope for social media and journalism over the past decade, as painted especially in the trade press but also in the academic literature, has been one of implicit positivity: that, on balance, social media would be a net benefit for individual journalists, for journalism as an institution, and for society as a whole.

How things have changed. Social media, once heralded for its role in democratic uprisings around the world and seen as a critical point of passage for activism in the digital age (Tufekci, 2017, 2018), is now being reevaluated for its social impact, amid broader questions about data privacy, hacking, and government surveillance, as well as doxing, harassment, and hate speech online (Gillespie, 2018; Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Particularly in the United States but elsewhere as well, the public narrative about social media changed dramatically after the 2016 election of President Donald J. Trump, which brought to the fore concerns about widespread malfeasance on social media—from "fake news", propaganda, and coordinated disinformation to bot-based media manipulation and alt-right trolling and misogyny (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Summing up the increasingly sour mood by the end of 2017, *The Economist* (2017) was led to wonder, "Do social media threaten democracy? Facebook, Google and Twitter were supposed to save politics as good information drove out prejudice and falsehood. Something has gone very wrong".

Perhaps the same could be said about the intersection of social media and journalism. At one level, there is the institutional threat of social media, as Google and Facebook vacuum up digital advertising revenue at an unprecedented rate, leading some observers to conclude that "the influence of social media platforms and technology companies is having a greater effect on American journalism than even the shift from print to digital"; this because of the widespread takeover of traditional publishing roles by platforms that "have evolved beyond their role as distribution channels, and now control what audiences see and who gets paid for their attention, and even what format and type of journalism flourishes" (Bell & Owen, 2017, p. 9). But where publishers once embraced platforms as a new and possibly superior distribution method, many are now seeing referral traffic decline and some are even quitting Facebook, saying, "It's been good for Facebook, but it hasn't been good for us" (as cited in Patel, 2018). At another level is the lived experience of journalists on social media. While journalists have always faced criticism for their work, and while violence and intimidation against the press can be far more acute in repressive regimes (Carlsson & Pöyhtäri, 2017), there is growing evidence that online culture generally and social media interactions specifically are contributing to a growing level of hostility and harassment for journalists in the West (e.g., Chen et al., 2018; Macomber, 2018; Spike & Vernon, 2017), particularly at a time when leading politicians in supposedly "safe" countries actively question the legitimacy of journalists and their work (Boczkowski & Papacharissi, 2018).

This moment of reckoning, both about social media and public life as well as social media and journalism practice, can be extended to include academic inquiries as well: A decade later, what hath research wrought? In the broad study of journalism and its digital transformation, few topics have captivated researchers in the past 10 years or so quite like social media—its use by journalists, its interstitial role between journalists and audiences, its ambient, ephemeral, and spreadable nature, and so much more. Now, after hundreds of studies on journalism and social media, we need a more particular accounting of the assumptions, biases, and blind spots that have crept into this line of research. To be sure, the research thus far has been far-reaching and richly informative, and a comprehensive review of such literature is beyond the scope of this article (for overviews, see, e.g., Hermida, 2016, 2017). Rather, our purpose is to offer a provocation for future research by critiquing themes of what has come before. In particular, our goal is to explain and untangle three key assumptions that have been overlooked in the rapid take-up of social media as a key phenomenon for journalism studies: (1) that social media would be a net positive; (2) that social media reflects reality; and (3) that social media matters over and above other factors.

2. Background

First, a brief word about how we are defining terms and contexts. The term "social media" has a history longer than the one we investigate here (Fuchs, 2017). In its broadest sense, it could be applied to any medium that enhances interpersonal communication, from CB radios to Google Hangouts. In the early 2000s, blogs and then specific sites such as Friendster and MySpace were early social media ventures that shaped expectations for a participatory Web. But we classify "social media" the way it is now used colloquially, which is to refer to social networking sites, apps, and platforms. These, as defined by boyd & Ellison (2007), allow individuals to create a public profile, build a network of connections, and "view and traverse" these connections and profiles (for elaboration, see Carr & Hayes, 2015). By far the most popular and powerful of these, and indeed the standard by which all other social media are measured, is Facebook. Thus, social media as we know them took hold in 2006, the year

when Facebook and Twitter, two of the most widely used social media platforms today, both became available to the general public.

At that time, the relationship of social media to journalism was not immediately clear; researchers and industry observers were captivated by the potential of blogging, and the term "social media" wasn't common parlance. When Facebook launched its algorithmically generated News Feed in 2006, becoming a dominant distributor of *news* was never the company's desired goal (Carlson & Lewis, 2018). But just a few years later, in the midst of a global recession, newsrooms everywhere—but particularly in the United States, where the prevailing news business models were heavily reliant on advertising revenue—began shrinking as advertisers and consumers cut their spending (Edmonds, Guskin, Rosenstiel, & Mitchell, 2012). The question quickly became what could "save" journalism, and the immediate and expedient answer was social media (for some context, consider Beckett, 2011). These platforms were experiencing exponential growth (Twitter, for instance, ballooned from a few million active users in 2008 to more than 100 million in 2011), and newsmakers rushed to follow audiences there (Parr, 2009). The thinking was that this new method of communication would enhance news distribution and enable stronger connections between journalists and their audiences (Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Christian, 2012). Indeed, such hopes were the culmination of burgeoning expectations in the 2000s, on the part of industry professionals and academics alike, that citizen engagement in news-making would rejuvenate journalism and democracy. Those expectations, as Quandt (2018) explains in his article on "dark participation" in this thematic issue, have since proven to be wildly mistaken: "Media managers' economic fantasies of a willing, free workforce were equally misguided as the rather naïve academic notions of a revitalized journalism in direct debate with its active users; both sacrificed empirical realism for fantasies that were driven by their own goals and hopes resulting in either a greedy or an idealistic projection" (p. 37).

Now, a decade after social media was seen in some quarters as journalism's savior as well as a vital catalyst for connection and social change broadly, it is being decried as a cesspool of misinformation and fake news (Frish & Greenbaum, 2017; Haig, 2017). This rise and fall of social media is but one example of a tendency in journalism's trade discourse to prop up a succession of technologies as the means of saving journalism (or at least markedly improving it). Over the years, multiple innovations have emerged as the thing that would rescue journalism, only to be replaced by the next idea: multimedia storytelling, customization and personalization, online video (especially for newspapers), mobile devices (at one time, the iPad was the future of newspapers), mobile apps, paywalls, and now virtual and augmented reality. Each has come with overinflated expectations that were eventually tempered by a more modest appraisal (Creech & Mendelson, 2015). Social media, however, has proven particularly persistent among journalists. Nearly all of them use social media in their work, and many say it is essential (Weaver & Willnat, 2016).

In parallel, researchers studying journalism and social media also jumped in with both feet in 2008, and have not lost interest. According to Google Scholar, the number of new research works mentioning social media and journalism to some degree nearly doubled each year from 2008 (993 articles) to 2011 (5,440 articles). The number of new articles, chapters, and books peaked at 16,600 in 2016 (see Figure 1).

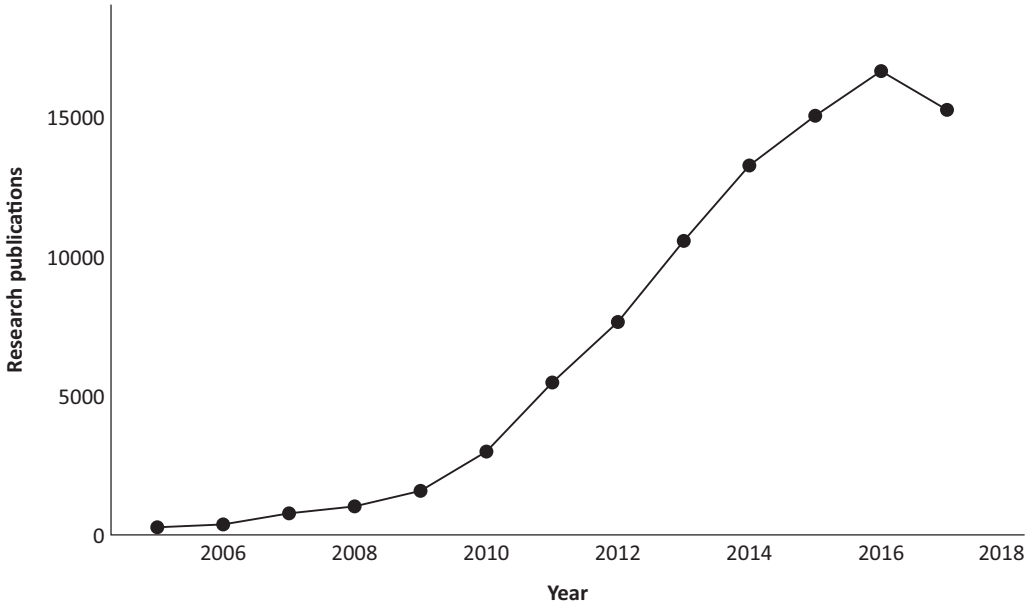

Figure 1. Number of search results for the query "'social media' journalism" in Google Scholar, accounting for new research publications, chapters, books, and so forth published in each of the years 2005 through 2017.

This body of research on journalism and social media has multiple homes, including connections to sociology, behavioral economics, and psychology, as well as contemporary pursuits in political communication especially as well as media and communication studies broadly. Our assessment focuses on work within journalism studies, a field defined not merely by its topical focus on news but particularly by its exploration of the many contexts and processes through which journalism emerges (Carlson, Robinson, Lewis, & Berkowitz, 2018). This narrower focus on journalism studies has two reasons. First, journalism studies has become recognizable as its own field, distinct from others adjacent to it, much more recently than those mentioned above (e.g., the field's two oldest journals, *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies*, were both founded in 2000). It is therefore incumbent on those working in this field to continue articulating and clarifying its basis for research, including especially the assumptions that underlie this work (for a full discussion, see Carlson et al., 2018). Second, the field's unique identity has been profoundly influenced by the study of journalism and social media, partially because journalism studies has grown up in the social media era. Thus, while other fields also study social media and journalism, the assumptions described here are of particular relevance to journalism studies and have not been examined explicitly within that field. This is particularly true of research that examines how social media are affecting journalism—e.g., studies of social media content that journalists produce, how journalists integrate social media into their work, social media as publishing platforms, and (to a lesser extent) news consumption on social media.

These areas of research have by now developed consistent themes based on the assumptions outlined here. Studies of social media and journalism frequently rely on two overarching narratives, one addressing normalization and one addressing control. Normalization focuses on changes in how journalists themselves relate to their profession and its institutional role, while control focuses on changes in journalists' relationships with their audiences and content. In both cases, the focus is on change, with the advent of digital communication—and specifically social media—being the fulcrum about which these changes have occurred. For instance, a greater adoption of social media is usually juxtaposed with a diminishing emphasis on "traditional" journalistic practices or roles.

The narrative of normalization suggests that journalists using social media have in some cases imposed existing journalistic norms on the new platforms and in others adopted elements of social media as newly journalistic (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). This has been called a "hybrid normalization" (Bentivegna & Marchetti, 2018) as new platforms become more deeply integrated into journalistic routines. The focus, then, is to learn which things change and which do not as social media platforms mesh with journalism. Thus far, it appears that journalists still prefer to separate themselves from their audiences (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017) but are willing to offer more opinion and personality (Bane, 2017; Molyneux, 2015). The new normal on social media is also characterized by the hybrid mixing of contexts and practices as boundaries collapse between personal and professional, public and private (Hermida, 2016). In sum, longstanding journalistic conventions are being reconfigured on social media networks (Hermida, 2017).

The narrative of control explores who is in charge of news selection, construction, and distribution. With respect to news audiences, researchers have treated social media as a boon, one resulting in more access, more personalization, more interactivity, and the possibility to embed news and conversations about it in social networks (e.g., Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012). This increase in the audience's power comes in part as journalists' gatekeeping and agenda-setting influences wane (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010; Russell, 2017; Singer, 2014). When news is created and distributed outside the institutional logic of journalism (Hermida, 2016), tensions arise between journalists' desire for professional control and audiences' abilities to circumvent it (Lewis, 2012). These tensions are exemplified by the question of who is a journalist and what qualifies as journalism in a world where the boundaries seem less fixed and more fluid (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). In recent years, however, the question of control has become particularly pronounced in the context of publishing and distribution (Ananny, 2014): once news is made by journalists, who controls how it moves and where it appears across various platforms (legacy and new, proprietary and non-proprietary, etc.) as well as how it is monetized accordingly? As digital intermediaries, especially Google and Facebook, control the primary distribution channels as well as an ever-larger share of digital advertising revenues, they exert wider control over the public visibility and economic viability of news. This is much to the confusion and consternation of news media organizations that simultaneously fear missing out on the massive audiences offered by such platforms but also worry about the long-term trade-offs of allowing technology companies to supersede them as publishers (Bell & Owen, 2017; Nielsen & Ganter, 2017). In all, social media has been understood as a conduit by which audiences and social media firms themselves have siphoned off some of journalists' power and control over news production and distribution by shifting these processes to platforms that news organizations don't own.

Against this backdrop of a decade of research on social media in journalism studies, we ask: what has not been accounted for adequately? This essay identifies three assumptions embedded in this line of research that need further questioning. At times, journalists, policymakers, and pundits also make assertions based on these assumptions, but we are concerned here with identifying what these assumptions mean for journalism studies particularly. As researchers seek to track and explain key developments in this area, what scents, as it were,

have been lost amid the prevailing winds? There may be other assumptions embedded in the literature that merit scrutiny; these, however, appear to be the most salient and also the most likely to inhibit a more realistic and reflexive agenda for the study of social media and journalism moving forward. Finally, as authors, we are not immune to critique in this process. Having published many studies in this area, including one of the most-cited works on journalists' use of Twitter (Lasorsa et al., 2012), we are well aware that we have contributed to the some of the problems outlined below and thus, like others, are "dealing with the mess (we made)" as self-critically as possible (cf. Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, & Hermida, 2018).

3. First Assumption: Social Media Would Be a Net Positive

If the main narratives around social media in journalism studies focus on change, it is usually assumed that such change will be for the better. Researchers have suggested that social media would become a primary enabler of greater transparency (Phillips, 2010; Revers, 2014), reciprocity (Borger, van Hoof, & Sanders, 2016; Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014), and openness in journalism (Lewis & Usher, 2013). Social media should allow journalism to achieve a wider reach (Hermida et al., 2012) and greater immediacy (Ytreberg, 2009; Zeller & Hermida, 2015). Some of this potential has been realized, but much of it has not. Social media has been a gold mine of source material (Diakopoulos, De Choudhury, & Naaman, 2012), with some limited evidence that it may upend journalists' traditional reliance on official sources (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014; Paulussen & Harder, 2014)—though the use of social media for sourcing tends to happen more in extraordinary events rather than in everyday reporting (Belair-Gagnon, 2015). And, social media platforms play an indispensable role in circulating breaking news, particularly in crisis situations (e.g., Vis, 2013). But, on the other hand, the torrent of information is often so extreme that rather than attempt to verify content on social media, some journalists simply wait for other, larger news outlets to do so (Brandtzaeg, Lüders, Spangenberg, Rath-Wiggins, & Følstad, 2016). Social media provide the possibility of a new form of "live" journalism (Ytreberg, 2009; Thorsen & Jackson, 2018; Thurman & Walters, 2013), and yet journalists live-tweeting the 2012 U.S. presidential debates spent less time fact-checking candidate claims and more time making jokes (Coddington, Molyneux, & Lawrence, 2014).

Beyond the problem of unrealized potential is the concern that major lines of research have all but baked in implicit optimism regarding social media. Researchers tend to assume, for example, that virtually all forms of journalist-audience interaction—by various approaches labeled engagement (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2017; Napoli, 2011; Nelson, 2018), participation (Ahva, 2017; Borger, van Hoof, Costera Meijer, & Sanders, 2013), reciprocity (Coddington, Lewis, & Holton, 2018; Lewis et al., 2014), and more—are positive, in part because such interactions contribute to diminishing the much-maligned mask of objectivity, neutrality, and detachedness behind which journalistic work is black-boxed to public view (for a fuller discussion of notions such as "transparency is the new objectivity", see Vos & Craft, 2017; cf. Belair-Gagnon, 2013). There are, of course, pro-social outcomes that may flow when audience members interact with journalists, such as the improvement in civility that emerges after journalists actively engage with the public in online comment sections (Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman, & Curry, 2015). But, based on our fieldwork, interviews, and observations, journalist-audience interactions may be overwhelmingly negative for journalists (let alone for users), and in ways not fully captured in the literature thus far.

Perhaps most salient among these problematic interactions are the many forms of harassment that are endemic to social media generally and increasingly a concern for journalists as well. Journalists on social media—particularly female and minority journalists, and particularly on Twitter—are frequently targeted by trolls and other malicious actors (Macomber, 2018; Spike & Vernon, 2017; Warzel, 2016). "They're smart, they're relentless, they'll find you," one *Washington Post* journalist told us about the trolls (Personal communication, 28 February 2018). While researchers have begun to study harassment and the forms it takes for journalists on social media (Chen et al., 2018), journalism studies has yet to reconcile what this means for the larger power dynamics on social media: who gets to speak, with what impact, and with what degree of accountability. For example, Robinson (2017) suggests that power and privilege play a far greater part in negotiating roles among journalists, activists, and publics than previously acknowledged in journalism studies. And, what if, as increasingly appears to be the case, being on social media has predominantly meant putting oneself at the potential mercies of the "Twitter mob" (Williamson, 2018)—a form of moral outrage that, while as old as the human species itself, has become accelerated in the age of social media (Crockett, 2017). Moreover, Massanari's (2015) study of the #Gamergate controversy, while not directly about journalism, points to two missed opportunities in journalism studies on social media: the relative neglect of Reddit as a social platform for study as well as the misogynistic subcultures that from Reddit spread to far parts of the social web. In all, in focusing on the journalistic practices and audience interactions afforded by social media, journalism scholars have assumed positivity and thereby misread toxicity, particularly when it comes to gendered harassment.

The assumption that social media would be a net positive for journalism is also manifest in the industry logic that everyone should be there, which is felt keenly by journalists (Lawrence, 2015). This normative "should" extends to research as well, especially when those studying technology adoption in newsrooms or other jour-

nalistic routines assume that those who do not use social media will be left out or left behind. The danger in this, of course, is that social media amplify journalism's pack mentality (Crouse, 1973) in both scope and force, a fact sometimes overlooked in journalism studies. Journalists are regularly accused of piling on (focusing too much on one thing) or being thoroughly distracted (focusing on the wrong thing). The case is particularly acute when the president of the United States, already a subject of intense journalistic attention, has a habit of making provocative and controversial statements on Twitter (for a discussion of the broader impact of this, see Turner, 2018). The upshot is that journalists now consider social media spats to be urgent, breaking news—prompting them, for example, to send push notifications to smartphone users informing them that Donald Trump and his former FBI director are calling each other names. Indeed, an experiment among journalists suggests that they treat news encountered via anonymous Twitter posts with the same regard as headlines from the AP wire (McGregor & Molyneux, 2018).

This pack mentality on social media remains understudied by journalism scholars, as does a related problem: the journalist's relationship to the so-called "filter bubble." Seeing only part of the world because you are ensconced in an echo chamber was initially a point of concern regarding citizens in going online (Sunstein, 2018). But following a flurry of studies on the phenomenon of fake news after the 2016 United States presidential election (among them, Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), it appears likely that echo chambers are more evident among journalists themselves, rather than ordinary users of social media. Audiences are actually exposed to a wider range of opinions and sources than might be expected (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018), while journalists talk mainly to each other (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017; Usher, Holcomb, & Littman, 2018). Moreover, network science research has found "a modest correlation between the ideologies of who a journalist follows on Twitter and the content he or she produces" (Wihbey, Coleman, Joseph, & Lazer, 2017)—a connection that has yet to be explored in journalism studies.

The industry logic that everyone must be on social media plays out at organizational and institutional levels as well. Our own fieldwork and interviews have shown that journalists are strongly encouraged or even forced to use social media, as supervisors begin to count how often journalists post and how widely these posts spread. (In such a climate, some journalists, like other public personalities, have turned to "social media's black market" to buy followers, likes, and retweets [Confessore, Dance, Harris, & Hansen, 2018].) Surprisingly, given the time involved in developing a social media brand (Holton & Molyneux, 2015), the return on this time investment is rarely questioned, either in the trade press or in the research literature. A notable exception is Chyi's work examining the value of online news, mobile news, and social media relative to other forms of news consumption and engagement (Chyi & Chadha, 2012; Chyi & Yang, 2009; Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014); the findings often suggest that returns are well below the industry's hopes. Is it possible that audiences don't want or aren't impressed by journalists' online engagement (Nelson, 2018)? Or, even in the best case, where journalists use social media to the full potential that scholars attribute to it, is it possible that the benefits to journalism are small relative to other investments of effort? Or simply that the power of social media platforms and their control over data collection and revenue generation make it unlikely, if not impossible, to build a business model under such conditions (Bell & Owen, 2017)? Overall, journalism studies has not sufficiently accounted for the time displacement of journalistic labor caused by a focus on social media. For example, it's worth considering: what are journalists *not* doing because they are managing social media? Such a question may be purely hypothetical, but it bears asking when assumptions of positive results from social media can lead researchers away from evaluating the tradeoffs of time, talent, and attention.

4. Second Assumption: Social Media Reflects Reality

It is now common for journalists to point to social media posts, particularly tweets, as an indicator of what people are saying (Beckers & Harder, 2016; Broersma & Graham, 2012; Farhi, 2009). The logic is that Twitter is a modern version of person-on-the-street interviews, or even a journalistic stand-in for actual polling. While this was never a reliable way of gauging public opinion, the fact that Twitter makes these *vox populi* searchable and embeddable vastly reduces the effort that it takes to collect and call upon them. Its use has proliferated to the point that journalists see Twitter as a reliable source of news (McGregor & Molyneux, 2018). Indeed, as the *Columbia Journalism Review* acknowledged, in reporting on many news organizations erroneously embedding tweets from the infamous Internet Research Agency in Russia, "American media outlets have a Twitter problem. The problem is not journalists' notorious addiction to the platform—it's their use of tweets as a way to include opinions from 'ordinary people.' Often, these ordinary people turn out not to be 'ordinary' or 'people' at all" (Tworek, 2018).

In a similar vein, researchers have too often assumed that social media networks are a reasonable approximation of public opinion or other aspects of the (offline) social world. This is manifest in the use of social media to represent public sentiment in agenda-setting studies (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015; Frederick, Burch, & Blaszka, 2015; Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2015; Neuman, Guggenheim, Mo Jang, & Bae, 2014), even while many such studies readily acknowledge that they may not be accurate representations of the public. More broadly, several studies have attempted to use social media chatter as a predictor of election results (for a review, see Gayo-Avello, 2013), and, in general, scholars have turned to social media posts and related trace data as evidence

of what people are thinking or feeling. The problem, as Hargittai (2015) shows, is that bigger data is not necessarily better data: because people do not choose to use particular social media platforms at random, samples drawn from such spaces are inherently limited in their generalizability.

As such, Twitter, the most popular platform for journalists in the United States and the most popular for studies of journalism on social media, is demonstrably not representative of the public (Jungherr, Schoen, Posegga, & Jürgens, 2016; Mellon & Prosser, 2017; Mitchell & Hitlin, 2013). It's more appropriate to think of Twitter as *a* public, rather than *the* public. While that concern is by now well understood, the broader composition and representation of social media publics is more complicated still, and has eluded many researchers examining social media and journalism. For example, some studies suggest that power dynamics and hegemony at work on social media shape which voices are present and which are heard (Parmelee, 2013; Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). Media and other elites, in particular, have greater power and reach than the average social media user—even in cases, such as Andy Carvin's use of Twitter during the 2011 Arab Spring, when journalists presumably might be sourcing more non-elite opinion than usual (Hermida et al., 2014). In fact, it is common for social media metrics to quantify one's "influence", and in some cases this authority is institutionalized and made visible through a "verified" status (as in the blue checkmark on Twitter). In all, a more direct reckoning with the sharp differences that can exist among users has often been overlooked in this line of research. While some have attempted to separate groups in analysis of Twitter content (McGregor, Mourão, & Molyneux, 2017), it is far more common to see social media publics treated as homogeneous wholes. To develop such broad characterizations obscures the power differentials that shape both who speaks and, more importantly, who is heard on social media (for further discussion, see Robinson, 2017). It also may disregard subcultures and minority groupings such as Black Twitter (Richardson, 2017); these sub-networks are embedded within larger social media publics but may have unique characteristics and behaviors of their own (Clark, 2014). This is to say nothing of those groups that are not online and thus simply are left out of any analysis of social media content.

The larger question is whether social media content, in any of its forms, is in fact an accurate representation of reality as it is lived and experienced by those creating the content. As journalists draw on evermore user content to gauge public sentiment and to tell stories about events at home and abroad, they are being trained to follow elaborate procedures for checking and verifying social media content as factual in a news context (Belair-Gagnon, 2015; Thorsen & Jackson, 2018). But it may be worth researchers' effort to consider whether social media content, even most of the time, is posted in good faith (Hedrick, Karpf, & Kreiss, 2018). Efforts to manipulate public opinion in recent elections are an obvious example of this concern (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), but it appears at least possible that many social media users are motivated not by a desire to *accurately* express themselves or their observations but to perform an identity as a way of belonging (Carlson & Lewis, 2018). These performances, as all front-stage social performances (Goffman, 1959), are curated and crafted to achieve a particular end. This is particularly evident among social media "influencers" who go to great lengths to make their vlogs, Instagram photos, and selfies appear as natural and therefore "authentic" as possible, thereby influencing the narrative that journalists convey about how "ordinary" people might get lucky and strike it rich as a YouTuber, while also masking the actual labor, precarity, and always-on performativity behind the scenes (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). It might also be that people simply act differently when online than they do in other social settings, emboldened by an "online disinhibition effect" (Suler, 2004). Altogether, what people think and feel, and what they post on social media, may be two different things. Researchers should not only acknowledge these limitations but avoid research designs that treat social media content as a reflection of reality.

5. Third Assumption: Social Media Matters over and above Other Factors

The assumptions outlined so far suggest that, in the broad literature on journalism and social media during the past decade, there has been a two-part implicit expectation in many studies. First, that social media would be a net positive for journalism as an institution, for journalists as individuals, and for closer interactions with community members. And, second, that social media activities reflect something meaningful about the social world—that while Twitter publics and the like are by no means pure proxies for the populace, they are reasonable approximations that are therefore worth taking seriously. As we have noted already, both of those assumptions could be true in certain cases, and they are implicit in our own work (e.g., Holton & Lewis, 2011; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2014; Molyneux & Holton, 2015). However, if we step back to question the surety of such assumptions, we are led to wonder: Has the journalism studies field paid too much attention to social media? And if so, what forces and factors in journalism's digital transformation have been neglected as a result?

Thus, the third and final assumption to untangle here is the assumption that, for the study of journalism, the phenomenon of social media matters in a singular way, over and above other factors. On one level, as with other forms of technologically oriented work in contemporary journalism, *of course social* media platforms, practices, and personnel matter. The decade-long dedication of resources, to a greater and greater degree, by journalists, their employers, and people at large virtually requires that journalism scholars pay attention to such develop-

ments. And indeed they have, as Figure 1 attests and as reviews such as Hermida's (2016, 2017) chronicle in great detail. On another level, however, that journalism studies as a field has been consumed with studying how journalists tweet, like, and share implies a certain determinism in this arrangement: that social media has made an *impact* on journalistic perceptions and practices that matters over and above other types of influence that might otherwise have been chronicled if scholars had turned their gaze in another direction. Or, perhaps with greater consequence, we as researchers have attributed to social media credit and blame that rightly belongs elsewhere, amid the many sea-changes washing over journalism in recent years.

Consider first the extent to which journalism studies has been preoccupied with social media and its associated dimensions. As Steensen and Ahva (2015, p. 1) note in their meta-analysis of the field, the latest movement in research on digital journalism has focused on the "news ecosystem", the "news landscape", and "ambient" and "networked" forms of journalism—"all of which", they argue, "have emerged because of practices predominantly related to social media". The result, Steensen and Ahva (2015) suggest, has been a widespread examination of the theories by which scholars make sense of journalism. While no doubt positive for the conceptual development of journalism as an area of study, this emphasis on practices afforded by fluid social media spaces perhaps has led researchers to overlook some pressing issues that span academic, industry, and policy concerns. For example, taking the 2017 Future of Journalism conference as an informal proxy for what journalism studies is actually studying today (and what it's not), Nielsen (2017) shows how studies of business models, innovation, and entrepreneurship are conspicuously absent. Moreover, while there is great emphasis on media practices amid social media, including emerging patterns of disinformation, he finds far less focus on the power of platform companies and their structural transformation of the information environment as a whole (see Bell & Owen, 2017; Nielsen & Ganter, 2017). Thus, time spent analyzing tweets could be coming at the expense of analyzing the logics of algorithms, the political economy of technology giants, and other organizational and institutional arrangements that are reshaping the contexts for news subsidy (some recent examples include Ananny, 2018; Gillespie, 2018; Vaidhyanathan, 2018). (It is fair to acknowledge, however, that such macro-oriented research demands greater time, resources, and access than most scholars have, and that the "hyperactive" pace of publishing [Reese, 2014], in some instances, may encourage researchers to prioritize quick-hit studies, such as analyses of tweets, over broader investigations.) The powers we observe in social media platforms may in fact be wielded by their makers, markets, or even cultural shifts that are masked by a preoccupation with social media.

Furthermore, the field's focus on social media, its micro-practices and journalist-audience interactions, assumes that such things matter because they reflect *earnest* engagement between journalism and its publics in a deeply normative sense. As Hedrick et al. (2018) deftly show, however, researchers may have been deceived in assuming an "earnest Internet". By this, they mean that "communication scholarship generally posits that people act rationally and in good faith; care about facts, truth, and authenticity; pursue ends in line with their political and social values and aspirations; and, more philosophically, are fundamentally good" (p. 1057). But then the 2016 U.S. election happened. Not only did it reveal a social media ecosystem coursing with racism, misogyny, and other ugliness, but it also revealed, they argue, that such expressions were often voiced "for the lulz"—not out of sincere political interest, but rather a more ambiguous aim of provoking for its own sake. Building on Phillips and Milner's (2017) book *The Ambivalent Internet*, Hedrick and colleagues (2018) argue that, in contemporary digital culture, "we cannot be certain of anyone's intent or motivations, meaning is indeterminate, accountability is nearly impossible, and the social and antisocial are intertwined" (p. 1058). Thus, it is ambivalence, not earnestness, that may be the orienting ethos of platforms increasingly marked by mischief, oddities, and antagonism. The upshot, they suggest, is a corrosive undermining of social trust, not merely on social media. "This goes far beyond the loss of trust in journalism or even institutions; it cuts to the heart of everyday social relations and public discourse" (p. 1058). If true, this re-evaluation calls into question the scores of studies on journalism and social media that carry an underlying assumption that social media matters—and matters quite a lot—because it represents an earnest extension of the public sphere.

6. Conclusion

To be clear, we are *not* suggesting that a decade of journalism studies research on social media has been for naught. Social media, by virtue of its vast diffusion, clearly matters for social life at large and for news in particular. In this essay, however, we *are* questioning the assumptions and associated blind spots that have developed in this research, and thus we argue that scholars—ourselves included—can be more critically reflexive in making sense of social media's impact for journalism as an institution, for journalists as individual media workers, for users/audiences/communities engaged in news, and for the character of public discourse. In journalism studies especially but in the wider realm of communication research as well, scholars have too easily assumed that social media would be a net positive, reflects reality, and ultimately matters over and above other factors. Each of these premises may be somewhat true in some circumstances, but our examination of the literature and our own extensive research in this area suggests they are not true in most circumstances. These issues are exacerbated when journalism studies fails to connect itself

to and build upon the work of adjacent fields also grappling with similar questions, including especially political communication research. These assumptions, even while implicit, may be clouding our collective judgment and obscuring issues that otherwise call for our attention. Indeed, in emphasizing the assumedly pro-social audience engagement or in fixating on the micro-practices of journalists' use of platforms, scholars too often have overlooked the gendered toxicity, the intra-journalistic insularity, and the overwhelming power of platform companies, among other concerns. Thus, in prioritizing social media activities above other factors, scholars arguably have given less attention to a number of critical issues that may be more consequential for the future of journalism—from matters of organizational innovation and business models to broader questions about how institutions and ideologies are constructing the infrastructures on which public conversations take place.

Ultimately, the explosive growth in research on social media and journalism can be linked with the similarly remarkable growth of journalism studies, a field of inquiry that is less than 20 years old as an institutionalized entity and is only now beginning to exhibit particular scholarly commitments (Carlson et al., 2018). Both are young and maturing areas of research, and are evolving in tandem with social, political, economic, and (especially) technological dynamics that can vary widely around the world. And, just as journalism studies has been dominated by perspectives from the Global North, the study of social media and journalism likewise has been limited not only by the underlying assumptions we have articulated here, but also by case studies that too often fail to include adequate diversity on matters of geography, culture, and language as well as race, class, and gender. As scholars extend their view to new contexts and conditions, they may well find additional ways of challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of social media research.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Valerie Belair-Gagnon, Alfred Hermida, Brian Creech, and Annika Sehl, as well as the thematic issue editors and anonymous reviewers, for their feedback on earlier versions of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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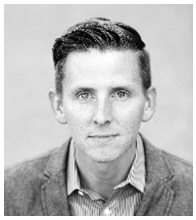
About the Authors



Seth C. Lewis is the founding holder of the Shirley Papé Chair in Emerging Media in the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon. He is Vice Chair of the Journalism Studies Division of the International Communication Association (ICA), and is an Affiliated Fellow of the Yale Information Society Project. He studies what emerging media technologies mean for journalism—for how news is made, how it moves, and how people make sense of it.

Logan Molyneux is an Assistant Professor of journalism at Temple University's Klein College of Media and Communication. His research focuses on journalistic practice, especially relating to mobile and social media. He also studies changing habits of news consumption and the ways in which emerging media technologies shape communication and public life. His PhD is from the University of Texas at Austin.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 24–35
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1492

Article

From Counter-Power to Counter-Pepe: The Vagaries of Participatory Epistemology in a Digital Age

C. W. Anderson * and Matthias Revers

School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK; E-Mails: c.w.anderson@leeds.ac.uk (C.W.A.), m.revers@leeds.ac.uk (M.R.)

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 23 March 2018 | Accepted: 22 June 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
This article reconstructs the evolution of societal and journalistic meta-discourse about the participation of ordinary citizens in the news production process. We do so through a genealogy of what we call "participatory epistemology", defined here as a form of journalistic knowledge in which professional expertise is modified through public interaction. It is our argument that the notion of "citizen participation in news process" has not simply functioned as a normative concept but has rather carried with it a particular understanding of what journalists could reasonably know, and how their knowledge could be enhanced by engaging with the public in order to produce journalistic work. By examining four key moments in the evolution of participatory epistemology, as well as the discursive webs that have surrounded these moments, we aim to demonstrate some of the factors which led a cherished and utopian concept to become a dark and dystopian one. In this, we supplement the work of Quandt (2018) and add some historical flesh to the conceptual arguments of his article on "dark participation".

Keywords
Andy Carvin; Buzzfeed; citizen journalism; Indymedia; meta-discourse; memes; participatory epistemology; Pepe the Frog; populism; trolls

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

As Kreiss and Brennen (2016) have perceptively noted, "participation" is one of the guiding normative values of journalism in the digital age. "To overcome the industrial production of journalism and culture", they have argued "[journalism] reformers elevated participation as a primary democratic value" (Kreiss & Brennen, 2016, p. 301). This conclusion about the importance, and ultimate fragility, of the participatory concept is echoed by Quandt (2018). In this article, we attempt to expand on the manner by which this central value has evolved and transformed over the course of the internet's three-decade existence by reconstructing the evolution of societal and journalistic meta-discourse about the participation of ordinary citizens in the news production process.

It is one of the central arguments that this desire for a more authentic participatory community is inherently political and is much older than the internet itself. It can at least be traced back to the New Left's call for greater public involvement in politics and the more circumscribed call for a political, participatory journalism. One of the New Left's more general aims for participatory democracy was "that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation" (Students for a Democratic Society, 1962). The Port Huron Statement further laid out the institutional arrangement required for realizing this

vision, which we would nowadays associate with participatory media spaces, amongst other places:

> Mechanisms of voluntary association must be created through which political information can be imparted and political participation encouraged....Institutions should be created that engage people with issues and express political preference,…which carry political influence (appropriate to private, rather than public, groupings) in national decision-making enterprise. Private in nature, these should be organized around single issues (medical care, transportation systems reform, etc.), concrete interest (labor and minority group organizations), multiple issues or general issues.…They would be a significant politicizing and educative force bringing people into touch with public life and affording them means of expression and action. (Students for a Democratic Society, 1962)

In an attempt to probe the discursive and political nexus in which these various notions of participatory journalism emerged and evolved, we follow in the footsteps of Fred Turner's research on the relationship between the "hippie" values of 1960s and 70s California and the early notion of a radically free, communalist internet (Turner, 2006). We think there is a parallel, more East Coast-oriented story to be told about how journalistic participation evolved and the way that the "do-it-yourself" (DIY), radically anarchistic media production of the 1990s, spawned, uneasily, today's weaponized meme-warfare and culture of "fake news". In telling this story we do not mean to condemn all varieties of participatory journalism or to claim that they are all the same. We do mean to complicate the history of journalistic participation and thus further problematize this "participation" as a journalistic value and an underlying journalistic epistemology. It is also important to note that it is not our argument that there has been an inevitable "descent" of participatory epistemology from utopian heights to a sordid and "dark" reality (Quandt, 2018). Rather, the conversation surrounding journalistic participation has, indeed, grown darker. But why, and to what end?

In this spirit, and in the pages below, we chronicle four key discursive inflection points through four brief genealogical case studies. We begin by briefly defining what we mean by "participatory epistemology" and outlining how the normative value of "participation" was fused with an epistemological and professional understanding of what participation meant for what journalists could possibly "know". We then turn to our first case study, the Independent Media Center movement, a collective of linked websites launched in 1999 in the aftermath of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle to provide coverage of anti-globalization protests from an activist point of view. As one of the first websites to allow news events to be uploaded to the world wide web as they occurred (Anderson, 2013; Wolfson, 2015), Indymedia would spawn a variety of affiliated "citizen media" projects. This article discusses how Indymedia's primary accomplishment was to enable the fusion of DIY cultures of craft production and identity-based community media initiatives, both of which reached their peak in the pre-internet days of the early 1990s.

Early DIY digital journalism work was largely the domain of the political left and was specifically framed in opposition to professional journalism. Our website "will focus on the protests, actions and issues ignored by conventional media sources", Indymedia organizers wrote. Soon, however, professional journalism itself would attempt to adopt a participatory mindset. In light of the dire economic situation of legacy news organizations and the loss of discursive influence with the rise of user-generated and other news-like content, journalists in the US were compelled to open up to more participatory forms of communication around 2010, especially on Twitter. Besides the possibility of live coverage, tweeting meant that journalists, at the very least, could become more personally involved and accessible to other users in the process of creating news. But this did not exhaust social media's participatory affordances, especially the role assigned to citizens, not only as interlocutors but also sources and co-creators of news. We discuss Andy Carvin as a role model of this more expansive conception of participatory journalism. In contrast to this, media scholars were mostly dissatisfied with the adoption of social media in practice, which reflected fundamental tensions between participatory and professional cultures.

The importance of Twitter in the above narrative highlights a third evolutionary change in our story—the emergence of internet "platforms" as the dominant mechanism of digital communication and the accompanying massification-individualization of participatory media making. With the growth of Facebook and Youtube (and to a lesser extent, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram) creating and sharing journalistic content moved from a fringe activity to a mass activity, with industrial level developments affecting formerly "alternative" media patterns. While there is an entire academic genre of "platform studies" (Bogost & Montfort, 2009; Gillespie, 2010; Helmond, 2013), this piece analyzes this shift obliquely, by briefly considering the career and ideological work of Jonah Peretti, the founder of Buzzfeed and a key link between older genres of media production and newer, more capital-intensive notions of participatory production and sharing.

Our final case study takes us up to the present day, looking at how the conversation around participatory platforms have again evolved in the aftermath of Brexit, Donald Trump, and the rise of 4Chan and Reddit. While platform power sat uneasily within older strands of production that also valorized the actions of ideologically committed citizens, the combined impact of populism, propaganda, and misogyny have soured even the most optimistic takes. Academic arguments about media and participation have also broken out of their media studies cul-de-sac and are also now the domain of "more se-

rious" branches of scholarship such as political communication and more critically minded researchers of race, gender and social class. We conclude by reviewing these developments and discussing some paths forward for future scholarship.

2. What Is "Participatory Epistemology"?

The following pages largely discuss participation as a normative ideal; that is, as a way of thinking about an emerging relationship between citizens and journalists that, over time, accreted a certain set of values. But audience participation in the journalistic process also carried with a particular understanding of what journalists could reasonably know, and how their knowledge could be enhanced by engaging with the public in order to produce journalistic work. Participatory epistemology, defined here as a form of journalistic knowledge in which professional expertise was modified through public interaction, was largely based on two separate but related notions of how citizen engagement in the news process could improve journalism. The first is largely "cybernetic" in orientation and sees the relationship between news producers, products, and consumers as part of a series of feedback loops in which digital communication acts as a functional bridge that improves the accuracy and relevance of news products. The second is largely deliberative, in which digital journalists are understood as embedded in a "conversation" with citizens, one that produces a journalism more likely to incorporate the perspectives and points of view of ordinary people. Both these epistemologies functionally denigrate traditional journalistic knowledge, seeing it as inadequate or incapable of maintaining its relevance in the 21st century digital media environment.

We now analyze how this participatory epistemology, defined above, emerged and developed over time by briefly looking at four case studies.

3. Indymedia and the DIY Moment

Once a major object of study amongst critically-inclined journalism scholars and internet theorists, academic research on the Indymedia phenomenon has waned in tandem with the decline and disappearance of the movement itself.[1] In one of the earliest articles on Indymedia, Platon and Deuze (2003, p. 337) described what they called "a radical way of making, selecting and sharing news...published on a website, which has possibilities for archiving and structuring incoming news in a way that traditional media (print, television and video) cannot". They and other early scholars chronicle an "open-source news process" in which left-wing, largely anarchist media activists used both structured community participation (in the form of an "open newswire" to which anyone could upload breaking news or political commentary) and editorial oversight (with centrally and collectively chosen "feature stories") to create a participatory news website particularly active during moments of political protest and unrest. At its peak Indymedia websites existed in over 230 locations on six continents, with a small group of regular editors providing curated content touching on a variety of left-wing activist concerns and a larger group of contributors congregating on the site during local protest actions and moments of high political drama (in New York City after September 11, 2001, for instance). The flat structure of IMC network allowed content to be shared across different sites and also encouraged a central website (indymedia.org) to act as a content curator that could highlight different local stories. Since at least 2006, however, the network has experienced almost a complete collapse, with sites shuttering and many others existing in a sort of "ghost" status. Ironically, the decentralized and anarchistic nature of Indymedia governance makes actually closing these potemkin sites difficult, making it difficult to determine the exact health of the network. And although she argues that the Indymedia experiment has not necessarily failed, the most recent and optimistic scholarship on the topic by Eva Giraud (2014, p. 420) admits that "[the] network as a whole has declined".

Despite being nourished by numerous intellectual and technological predecessors (the list runs from the participatory media philosophies of the Zapatista movement in the 1990s to the BURN! Collective at the University of California San Diego; Wolfson, 2015) with the benefit of hindsight it seems clear that Indymedia was the first journalistic project to both emphasize the benefits of "participatory journalism" and capture wider public attention, particularly from other journalists. In part, this attention was facilitated by a growing interest in the participatory potentials and affordances of digital technology, which allowed networked and decentralized participation in the journalistic process from a variety of ideological actors. Wolfson, in fact, contends it was this focus on aggressively horizontal governance processes and a fetishization of digital technology that lead to the ultimate failure of the Indymedia project, particular insofar as the core of the IMC neglected to engage in any meaningful fashion with local activists and their long-term community-based concerns. Indymedia, in short, focused on politics and technology and neglected the real work of building a grounded movement culture that could be sustained over the long term (Wolfson, 2012).

We want to take slight issue with this conclusion in a way that points both backwards and forwards towards our main argument. With the benefit of hindsight and history, it seems clear that the primary accomplishment of Indymedia (along with related media forms like blogging, podcasting, and webzine production) was to bring "do-it-yourself (DIY) maker politics" out of the realm of strictly cultural practice and into the realm of both professional

[1] In 2003 Google Scholar records 462 mentions of 'Indymedia'. The scholarly citation rate reached 1020 mentions in 2010, with a steady decline to 531 mentions in 2017.

journalism and "hard" politics. In other words, there was a culture of Indymedia—a thin but globalized culture of DIY practitioners who valorized small-scale craft production in opposition to culture produced by corporations. These "alternative media makers" included the producers of 'zines, low-power radio, punk music, and community newspapers. As Ratto and Boler (2014, p. 10; see also Day, 2016) write:

> By the late 1980s and early 1990s, DIY culture had evolved with the innovative emergence of zines, a significant cultural production practice of both punk and third-wave feminist cultures....People around the globe were enacting forms of protest and direct action that increasingly wedded art and politics....Indeed, this conjunction between art and protest has only snowballed over the ensuing decades; feminist artists working in craft and activism, which continues the legacy of DIY culture.

Indymedia, then was able to act as a discursive and rhetorical bridge between these fairly marginal maker communities and the larger, more powerful spheres of digital technology and professional journalism. As Giraud (2014, p. 425) notes:

> Radical activist media projects such as Indymedia gave momentum to a celebratory narrative that foregrounded the participatory potential of digital media [see, e.g., Allan, 2006; Castells, 1997; Gilmor, 2006], but the network's position in that narrative has since been displaced with discourses of "Twitter revolutions".

We would contend that it was not an accident that Indymedia was able to play this bridging role. It was, in fact, deeply grounded in the culture of the platform itself. IMCs tapped into both an older (DIY) and emerging (techno-participatory) rhetoric that emphasized participation as a leading value in and of itself in domains of cultural production (the provision of small-scale consumerist alternatives) personal self-actualization (the pedagogic values of participatory culture, particularly in politics) and structural journalism reform (the ability to reduce the power of the corporate, ideologically blinkered media). And although these values aligned themselves to a resolutely left-of-center, anarchist politics, such an affiliation was not a given—as the following sections will show.

In his influential overview of how the origins of Silicon Valley could be found, in part, in the libertarian values of the 1960s and 70s counter-culture, Fred Turner draws our attention to the manner by which alternative modes of living and creating often serve as the incubators and harbingers of decidedly more capitalistic enterprises. While our argument here is more restricted than Turner's deeply researched account, we would argue that the origins of the participatory journalism epistemology might be found in a similar fusion of "do it yourself" values and anti-institutional politics, which itself might be traceable back to its New Left origins and perhaps even further. The next sections will elaborate the further (and surprising) evolutions of this journalistic epistemology. As blogs, podcasts, and other more digital formats of news replaced organizations like Indymedia, and as the rhetoric of do-it-yourself journalism increased in both volume and stridency, professional news organizations themselves were compelled to reckon with this participatory journalistic turn.

4. Professional Adaptation to Participatory Practices

By the early 2000s, journalism was pushed from two directions to adopt participatory practices. From above, by the underfunded organizations employing them and which were desperate for new sources of revenue and relevance on the web. From below, by the growing prevalence and increasing professionalization of blogs and other online news ventures which grew out of open source news production. Liberal political blogs in the US, like Daily Kos or Talking Points Memo, and conservative blogs, like Drudge Report and Michelle Malkin, provided quick and opinionated takes on the news to growing audiences.

After establishing online news platforms in the mid to late 1990s, which initially followed traditional production principles (Boczkowski, 2004), many legacy news organizations started blogs in the mid-2000s. Aside from journalism itself, blogging was seen as a potential paradigm shift for audience engagement in professional discourse:

> When journalism becomes a process…audiences discard their traditional role as passive consumers of news and become empowered partners with a shared stake in the end result. Weblogs offer one way to promote that kind of interactivity. (Lasica, 2003)

However, academic dissatisfaction with the practical implementation of "j-blogs" was not uncommon. They were often criticized as mere strategies to reassert gatekeeping power rather than genuine attempts to enter in a more engaged dialogue with the public (see Singer, 2005).

When they established blogs, newspaper editors had most likely their publications' survival on their minds rather than the enhancement of public dialogue. For newspapers, the possibility of more immediately breaking and shaping the news through blogging represented a promising response to the general diversion of attention on the web. They frequently accomplished this by hiring bloggers, as did the Washington Post with Ezra Klein in 2009 or the New York Times with Brian Stelter in 2007. Bloggers brought with them not only necessary practical skills, including the ability to quickly process and produce great amounts of information, but also a work ethic in which such "always on" production prac-

tices were common. They also brought with them audiences of their own.

But the real hope for a more open and public journalism happened with the rise of social networking services—particularly Twitter. With its ability to organize and generate discourse in small dosages and engage with other users directly and publicly, was seen as the breeding ground for a new type of ambient journalism, which Hermida (2010, p 298) conceived as an awareness system that "provid[es] journalists with more complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication".

The scholarly literature at that time is defined by optimism (or at least recognition of the potential) regarding the affordances of social media for more democratically valuable forms of journalism, marking a shift from the earlier academic skepticism. To just give two examples: news production, Sue Robinson (2010, p. 141) predicted, "is moving from a hierarchal [sic], centralized, one-to-many, unidirectional information flow to something more distributed, decentralized, poly-directional, many-to-many, pattern". Hermida (2012, p. 662) was hopeful that "journalists adopt a more collaborative method to determining the truth that, in theory, could be reached through an iterative process played out on networks such as Twitter". To be sure, neither author was blindly optimistic, but many scholars were certainly more optimistic than seems warranted today (see, also, Quandt, 2018).

Twitter's user base grew from 30 to 117 million between 2010 and 2011 (Team, 2016). It was not only the numbers, however, which brought Twitter on the map but its role in key historical events in this period. The excitement generated by the interactive and "witnessing" potentialities of Twitter (Zelizer, 2007; Peters, 2009) helped generate a professional and technological discourse around a new, archetypical professional journalist with both traditional news and social media credibility. Enter Andy Carvin, whose Twitter feed surged to prominence during the Arab Spring in 2011 and who had been a social media strategist at NPR since 2006. Carvin had made a name of himself as an internet activist and had been involved in early efforts to bridge digital divides and integrate the internet into school education in the late 1990s, as well as several citizen journalism initiatives, particularly after 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina.

The role Carvin assumed during the uprisings in the Middle East was that of a curator, which consisted of sourcing and assessing information by means of a large network of citizens and other journalists (Hermida, Lewis, & Zamith, 2014). Though he curated remotely from the US, it was often emphasized that he had on-the-ground travel experience in Tunisia and Egypt. For media scholars who have long criticized journalism's over-reliance on official sources (Gans, 1979/2004; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978), Carvin's preference of "alternative voices" met normative expectations. He epitomized a kind of journalism which engages in "*collaborative verification, transparency and co-creation*" while conforming to established professional norms but performing more humbly and "open about the limits of his reporting" (García de Torres & Hermida, 2017, pp. 177, 190, italics in the original).

Trade publications, such as Nieman Journalism Lab, agreed and saw his work as having "turned curation into an art form, and it's provided a hint of what news can look like in an increasingly networked media environment" (Garber, 2011). A portrait in Columbia Journalism Review, titled *Is This the World's Best Twitter Account?* (Silverman, 2011), listed several tweets which exemplified how Carvin engages his social network on Twitter, using it as direct sources or to confirm or explain information he received, while carefully noting the status of its confirmation. Most importantly, in the process of verification his role was to ascribe journalistic credibility to public information.

All was not simply pure utopianism, however, particularly in the realm of digital scholarship about social media. Under the surface of the happy and democratic ambient journalism, a broader disillusionment around the absent or insufficient enhancement and equalization of democratic discourse through the internet (Hindman, 2009), was also emerging. Some scholars criticized journalism blogs as means to extend proven ways of doing journalism and to maintain gatekeeping power (Robinson, 2006; Singer, 2005). Journalism researchers found similar tendencies with Twitter (Molyneux & Mourão, 2017; Parmelee, 2013), though some to a lesser extent (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012), which suggests that the normalization diagnosis can be attributed more to institutional inertia than steadfast institutional resistance to participatory practices.

To sum up, popular and scholarly narratives about the value of participation in this period were still influenced by the early utopian visions of the internet; specifically, the notion that the liberatory power of the internet would sweep away hardened anti-democratic inertia of professional journalism. However, the vision that through social media a more public journalism would emerge was quickly paired with dissatisfaction about the practical implementation of this vision. This dissatisfaction keyed into an established theme of media criticism, which has been taking issue with journalism's incessant reliance on elite sources and its insufficient openness to citizen for at least three decades. This found further support by evidence that suggest persistent dominance of official sources in times of more technology-enabled event-driven news (Livingston & Bennett, 2003).

In addition, and finally, Twitter was not simply a website on the internet; it was a social media *platform*, and Andy Carvin made his participatory name according to the rules and affordances of that platform. The importance of the platform nature of Twitter—and of platforms in general, and how they played into larger changes in the notion of participation and journalism—will become clearer in the next section. It is with this transition that the changes in the journalistic episte-

mology of participation become both institutionalized and problematic.

5. Buzzfeed, Virality, and the Path to Platforms

In 2013, the internet got a good laugh when it discovered that Jonah Peretti, founder of the website Buzzfeed, had once attended the University of Santa Cruz, had hung around its' famous History of Consciousness program, and wrote an academic article on Deleuze, Guattari, and the production of consumer identity in late capitalism. Insofar as Buzzfeed (then best known for its viral headlines and content like "42 Pieces of Definitive Proof That You Might Possibly Be Armenian") regularly produced identity creating and consumer-oriented content, observers inclined toward irony wondered if Deleuze and Guattari could be seen as having inspired the latest wave of digital media and journalism. Around this time, and in part by following the example of new Buzzfeed model of media production, participatory interaction with journalistic and media content was largely reduced to "sharing" (John, 2013), "forwarding", "commenting on", and so on. This viral orientation, however, itself depended on quasi-participatory media platforms like Facebook and Twitter for its' reach and ultimate financial success or failure. Buzzfeed thus both prefigured the orientation of the second and far more meaningful wave of participatory media practice, as well as found itself structurally dependent on these corporate, participatory platforms. In this sense, the career of Jonah Peretti can serve as in insightful window into the transition between the earlier, more utopian discourses characterized by the first two case studies, with the more dystopian discursive turn in the years that followed.

Despite the chuckles evinced by the knowledge that the founder of a highly successful digital website had once been something of a left-wing theory poseur, the relevant moments of Peretti's career to the epistemology of participation can actually be found elsewhere. These moments include his time at the MIT Media Lab (during which he created the "Nike viral sweatshop logo" meme that would launch his career), his later tenure at Eyebeam (the New York City-based digital arts organization), and finally, the often-fraught relationship between Buzzfeed's quality journalism and Facebook. Peretti's time at UC Santa Cruz can be seen as the "Counterculture to Cyberculture-esque" link between Peretti's career and the world of Silicon Valley; his later years might be seen as the creation of an East Coast, journalism, and old-media variation of that same story.

Peretti first rocketed to media attention in 2005 when he created the "Nike Sweatshop Email", which involved him trying to convince Nike's lawyers to personalize his pair of Shoes with the word "Sweatshop", a satire that drew attention to Nike factory working conditions and landed Peretti on Good Morning America and other media shows. At the time, as Peretti writes, he was at the MIT Media Lab:

> Procrastinating writing my thesis[,] I visited the Nike ID website to check out the shoe personalization technology….The site was trumpeting the service as being about freedom and I thought this was ironic considering the way the shoes are actually made. That is how I got the idea to order a pair of running shoes customized with the word "sweatshop". (Chung, 2005)

By publicizing the rather deadpan and exchange of emails with Nike, Peretti's political stunt "went viral", a phrase which was not widely known in 2005. The experience led him towards a general interest in the qualities of digital media content that could lead to a rapid diffusion across a social network, and also to founding a second specific project, "The Contagious Media Project", house at the NYC based digital arts collective Eyebeam. The activities of the Contagious Media Group were eventually featured in a "Contagious Media" exhibition at New York City's New Museum, curated by Peretti and his sister, the comedian Chelsea, and included digital artworks like "Black People Love Us" (a parody of condescending white urbanites attitudes toward African-Americans), "The Rejection Line", (an answering machine number you could give to an unwanted solicitor at a bar or party), and the story of the original Nike email. By the moment the Contagious Media project debuted, however, Peretti had moved on to establish the Huffington Post with media entrepreneur and sometime political gadfly Arianna Huffington. From the Huffington Post Peretti would go on to establish Buzzfeed, where he would put his years of studying viral media to commercial use.

The commercial potential of the viral media experiments is obvious in retrospect; what is remarkable is how edgy and experimental they seemed at the time—experimental enough to be featured in a major New York City museum. But not everyone was impressed. As Tom Moody, a NYC artist, musician, and sometime Eyebeam volunteer wrote in his memories of Peretti's time at Eyebeam:

> I remember [Corey] Arcangel telling me about his contagious media group that met once a week, or month. I thought it sounded, to use a term from theory, "deeply full of shit". I understood that a business person or advertiser might want to study viral flow but why would an artist care about that? So you could goose your own stats? Make better animated GIFs? This was 2004. Peretti left Eyebeam to do terrible work at the Huffington Post and then terrible work at Buzzfeed. (Moody, 2014)

The final development in this transition from what we might call a "boutique" to a "mass market" understanding of participatory journalistic values can be seen in the manner by which the values of Buzzfeed, with its promiscuous mix of high-level investigative journalism, viral content, and participatory sharing, intersected with the institutions that were just beginning to colonize the me-

dia landscape in the mid 2010s—platforms (Bogost & Montfort, 2009; Gillespie, 2010; Helmond, 2015). These platforms—which include Twitter but are dominated by YouTube and Facebook—represent the full flowering of the participatory ethos insofar as their entire operational model depends on users voluntarily producing and sharing media content about themselves, their personal lives, and their beliefs. For news organizations that make use of these platforms, the key question is how to crack the algorithmic code in a way that contribute to the bottom line.

Perhaps some of these darker developments were foreshadowed in Peretti's earliest work. Black People Love Us, in particular, provoked a number of extreme and hostile reactions across the political spectrum, leading Peretti to conclude that "you can't pick your audience" when you depend on virality for distribution. While the website was designed to critique subtle racism and clueless comments made by white Americans with African-American friends:

> The site eventually spread to message boards run by white power groups who were outraged by the pictures of whites and blacks socializing. I started to get threatening phone calls from angry KKK members in the middle of the night. "May I please speak to Johnny?" one of them asked in a polite southern accent, and then he broke into a racist, expletive filled death threat. (Chung, 2005)

Despite the common tendency to see participatory media as an unallowed good, even in the high days of participatory platforms, it was clear that darker and more illiberal forces were lurking on the horizon. We turn to a discussion of those forces in the final main section.

6. Participatory Apocalypse: Pepe the Frog

The realization that capitalism has fully captured the internet was to be expected and is in itself an insufficient explanation for the most recent deflation of the value of participation. Despite the fact that platform owners learned to thoroughly monetize user engagement and steer it in directions to make it even more profitable (van Dijck, 2013), a certain faith in the progressive political potential of participatory media remained. Liberals still easily squared the possibility of promoting a more inclusive and democratic society by means of the internet with doing this in the service of the Mark Zuckerbergs of this world and their shareholders. Awareness of dark corners of the internet notwithstanding, civic life was mostly not affected by them. In media scholarship, anti-democratic capabilities of social media were mostly explored in the context of semi-authoritarian regimes (Howard & Parks, 2012).

McDonald's (2015) discussion of the conflicting orientations of digital culture captures an ambiguity of participation which has long ripened and would soon spread its more acerbic flavor: on the one hand, there is the "radical transparency" promoted by Facebook, on the other hand the collaborative initiatives exemplified by Anonymous—involving masking (iconographical as well as identificatory), embracing the ephemeral and the grotesque, and memeification. We are now in a much better (or worse) position to see different combinations of these two orientations: circulation of destructive ideas on "radically transparent" platforms, untraceable and detached from their unidentifiable originators; sowing conflict and destruction of reputation of people who are (personally or professionally) compelled to expose themselves on social media; etc. Peretti's experience with "Black People Love Us" has come to dominate participatory media space.

The rising problem consciousness of trolling and memeification in the context of various right-wing populist campaigns, particularly the 2016 US presidential election, has devalued participation in journalism. Rather than voicing citizens' concerns and fostering reasoned dialogue, the internet now appeared to drown out these voices and only amplify the most outrageous and obnoxious. The consequences of this, however, were not merely understood discursively. As Ryan Milner told The Guardian, what the Pizzagate conspiracy exemplified was "that playful buzzing participation…[may turn] into real consequences" (Wilson, 2017). The ironically distanced and boundary-crossing pose of the troll (Phillips, 2015) paved the way for loose alliances between citizens, campaign strategists, and political radicals generating attention and solidarities through memes with ambiguous messages. This created a sense in journalism that the participating public could no longer be trusted and that it perhaps should not even trust itself: "With every election cycle, the citizenry seems to amass more and more tools for bending the online political narrative to their will—or to feel as if they're doing so, anyway", reflected Amanda Hess (2016) about this loose alliance, which Republicans have become most effective at exploiting, four days before Trump was elected.

What gave the residual optimism about participation described earlier the deathblow was the rise of the alt-right from the depths of Reddit, 4chan, and 8chan, promoted by a newer sector of the media industry specializing in outrage (Berry & Sobieraj, 2014), and consolidated around memes. Meme culture has taken a life of its own. It developed principles and forms of assigning value to its products as symbolic objects and thus followed how other fields of cultural production differentiate (Bourdieu, 1993). This is evidenced by the vigor of critical meta-discourse—whose existence is particularly pronounced in ascending media fields (Jacobs & Townsley, 2017)—on such platforms as the internet magazine Meme Insider or the subreddit Meme Economy. This meme-appraising meta-discourse not only formed collective identity (Gal, Shifman, & Kampf, 2015) but in assigning worth and establishing hierarchies structured the symbolic economy of meme production (Literat &

Van den Berg, 2017). With the foundation of its own stock exchange NASDANQ in 2017, meme culture is crossing the threshold to a "real" economy.

We argue that the later career of Pepe the Frog, a cartoon character who has risen to infamy as one of the most prevalent symbols of the alt-right and a weapon in the meme warfare of the 2016 US presidential election, is paradigmatic for this stage in the life cycle of participation. Characterized by his creator as a humanoid "chill frog-dude" with a stoner face who liked peeing with his pants down to his ankles (Furie, 2016), Pepe was conceived as anything but a symbol of hate. With the catchphrase "feels good man", Pepe's memeification began with emotive commentary, first in the original joyous sense, then in different alterations attached to various emotional states (Triple Zed, 2015). The meme circulated through the internet, from fringe sub-cultures to celebrities. When presidential candidate Trump retweeted a Pepe depicting himself in October of 2015, apparently strategically utilizing the connotation of this symbol, while the alt-right used Pepe not only to spread their propaganda but also to support their candidate, the association seemed undeniable and the meme got fully politicized.

By mid 2016, Pepe was considered a symbol of white nationalism in different news reports. The Daily Beast quoted a self-proclaimed "anonymous white nationalist" in a story published on May 26, 2015 who asserted there was a campaign to remove the symbol from mainstream culture and claim it for the alt-right by purposely connecting Pepe with Nazi propaganda (Nuzzi, 2016). Violent and clearly anti-Semitic Pepes, with swastikas and other more or less coded Nazi propaganda messages, gained attention and were discussed in various news reports.

It is an understatement to treat racist Pepes and other user-generated right-wing vitriol during the presidential campaign as propaganda. In the demonstrative breaching of established cultural norms (what conservatives often deride as *political correctness*) they are part of a concerted attack on democratic consensus—understood as shared categories of purity and impurity through which people express and legitimize themselves in public (Alexander, 2006). The threat of continuous breaching of speech norms may constitute less a sustained switching of these cultural codes, which is what the liberal outrage against it conjures; besides outrage fatigue, the immediate threat is that by performatively embracing impure codes distracts from relatively mundane transgression of democratic principles (e.g., day-to-day racism).

Considering the growing body of media scholarship on this topic, we can see that the meaning attached to memes themselves have changed because of their role in consolidating the alt-right. Not too long ago, memes were discussed in terms of mostly politically innocent humor (Davison, 2012), viral marketing (Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy, & Okdie, 2013), as means to generate political dialogue (Milner, 2013) or form collective identities (Gal et al., 2015). More recently, the focus has shifted towards more divisive and democratically corrosive manifestations of this cultural form (Ludemann, 2018; Topinka, 2017; Sparby, 2017). As a prime example of a symbol modified and reinterpreted by peer-production, this has shed a much more pessimistic light on participation. As Topinka's study of the subreddit r/ImGoingToHellForThis demonstrated, "user-generated content on participatory media can establish and promote racism and nationalism without requiring the sanction of an established publisher" (Topinka, 2017, p. 17). What seems to resonate with this more pessimistic outlook on participatory media is a peculiar sense of nostalgia for the Network era—a time of greater political consensus in American society—particular in arguments critical of the so-called filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), which have been recently powerfully refuted (Bakshy, Messing, & Adamic, 2015) or qualified (Faris et al., 2017).

Not only through active user engagement but simply by the fact how we can witness political discourse through them, participatory media have contributed to a heightened sense of polarization, affecting loyalties for and resentments against others, how citizens interact (and perhaps more importantly not interact) with each other, their decisions, including on who to vote for. Supported by evidence from political ethnographies (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2016), Polletta and Callahan (2017) argued that white working-class resentment may be less about whether people have themselves experienced or witnessed discrimination than being part of stories which people like them share with each other *about being discriminated*. These stories get confirmed by media commentators who have made a business from telling their audience what other people think about them (Berry & Sobieraj, 2014).

Efforts to reappropriate Pepe, above all by the #SavePepe campaign launched by Pepe's creator Matt Furie himself, have so far been unsuccessful.[2] But there are also more hopeful prospects: With the impact of the #MeToo movement—effectively consolidated attention around the prevalence and persistence of sexual harassment and assault, encouraging mostly women to speak out about their experience, and holding sexual predators accountable—participation may be viewed again in a more nuanced, if not completely redeemed way.

7. Conclusion

The current meme-drenched political battles in the US and elsewhere shed light on three items we have approached through our case studies in this article: the relationship between participation, status, and identity, the dynamics affecting the relationship between mainstream and participatory journalism, and the political

[2] At the moment of writing this article, Furie has sued Infowars for copyright infringement for using Pepe in a poster which was sold on the site's online store (Sommerlad, 2018).

role of counter-publics and subaltern movements and their relationship to participatory culture.

One of Jonah Peretti's deepest insights (one that influenced both the viral tendencies of 21st century journalism as well as journalism's relationship toward the platform power of Facebook and Twitter) was the link he drew between participation and identity. Perhaps most ironic about meme culture of the political right is that, even as it trades on breaching mainstream cultural norms and stylizing itself as culturally progressive and radical, it rigorously polices its own locutionary conventions, despite the ever-evolving rules of meme discourse (Milner, 2013; Miltner, 2014). Analogous to the pressure to refine cultural tastes in order to maintain class membership (Bourdieu, 1984), status in meme communities is elusive and members need to continuously refine and perform their cultural proficiency since illiteracy and breaking of conventions leads to scorns and exclusion (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2015).

To add further irony, this moment also realized one of the more hopeful visions of theorists of subaltern public spheres (Fraser, 1992; Habermas, 1996; Jacobs, 2000): communicative spaces in which shared interests can be formed and from which they can (ideally) be asserted in the dominant public sphere when pertinent normative questions are at stake. Dismissing the interests of Trump supporters as false consciousness does not detract from the uncomfortable reality that the internet gave many people the opportunity to find and express their previously unheard voices and make them heard, including by reproducing and modifying racist memes. Indymedia, as we have seen, was one of the earliest progenitors of these developments, promiscuously mixing participation, political identity, and agonistic politics, and deeply influencing journalism as a result.

Traditional journalism, finally, has been deeply divided by these developments. On a professional level, what should the relationship between journalists and citizen participants be? In economic terms, should journalists make use of amateur content in order to save money, and what are the institutional consequences if they do so? Politically, finally, how ought journalists reconcile the agonistic tendencies of citizen participation (discussed above) and their own traditional roles as neutral brokers between different ideological perspectives? Should journalists become more political themselves? Does using a piece of Indymedia content mean that journalists endorse and anarchistic, anti-global perspective? How about something featuring Pepe the Frog? Does it matter that one perspective is of the left, and one that is of the right? Why? What does this difference say about the potentially latent political tendencies of professional journalism?

Considering the history of participatory journalism across this longer time frame can, finally, help us get a better sense of how politics and media have changed across the arc of the early 21st century. Through the lens of the often unexpected and unanticipated developments discussed in the previous section, we can get a sense of the different ways the cultural values and epistemologies of media making have refracted, split, and transformed. In order to meet the challenge of the present day—with its' problems both political and journalistic—we must know both where we have been and where we are going, and do so in relation to one of the dominant ideological impulses—that impulse to *participate*—of the digital age.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers, as well as Oscar Westlund and Matts Ekström, for their feedback on earlier versions of this article.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

C.W. Anderson is 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. Professor Anderson studies journalism, politics, and how the production of public knowledge is being transformed in the digital age. He is the author, co-author, or co-editor of 4 books: *Rebuilding the News* (Temple University Press), *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism* (with Tamara Witscghe, David Domingo, and Alfred Hermida); *Remaking News* (with Pablo Boczkowski, The MIT Press), and *News: What Everyone Needs to Know* (with Michael Schudson and Len Downie, Oxford University Press). He has written academic articles on digital journalism, sociology, political communication, and science and technology studies and more popular pieces for a variety of online websites and blogs. He is completing work on a manuscript tentatively titled *Apostles of Certainty: Data Journalism and the Politics of Doubt* (Oxford University Press). From 2000–2008 Chris was an editor and organizer at NYC Indymedia, one of the world's first "citizen journalism" websites. He received his PhD from Columbia University in 2009 under the supervision of Prof. James W. Carey and Prof. Todd Gitlin.

Matthias Revers is a Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Leeds. He is the author of *Contemporary Journalism in the US and Germany* (Palgrave US) and published articles on technological change and journalistic professionalism. His current research deals with political polarization, the moral boundaries of speech ("political correctness"), the establishment and enforcement of speech norms, and right-wing populist journalism.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 36–48
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1519

Article

Dark Participation

Thorsten Quandt

Department of Communication, University of Muenster, 48143 Muenster, Germany;
E-Mail: thorsten.quandt@uni-muenster.de

Submitted: 2 April 2018 | Accepted: 25 May 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
Citizen participation in the news-making process has been a hopeful promise since the 1990s. Observers hoped for a rejuvenation of journalism and democracy alike. However, many of the enthusiastic theoretical concepts on user engagement did not endure close empirical examination. Some of the major fallacies of these early works (to whom the author contributed himself) will be outlined in this article. As a bleak flip side to these utopian ideas, the concept of "dark participation" is introduced here. As research has revealed, this type of user engagement seems to be growing parallel to the recent wave of populism in Western democracies. In a systematization, some essential aspects of dark participation will be differentiated. Finally, the benefits of (also) looking at the wicked side of things will be discussed.

Keywords
citizen engagement; dark participation; fake news; news-making process; participatory journalism; populism; propaganda; user-generated content

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Visions and Bitter Realities: Citizen Engagement in the News-Making Process

Save Journalism! I remember a dear colleague wearing a shirt with that slogan at a conference sometime during the early 2000s. And, if I remember correctly, I wore the exact same shirt at the very same conference, as he had a full set of these with him. There was a certain heroic and noble Samaritan attitude connected to wearing it, and it also felt a little bit "punk"—or at least as punk as academics at conferences dare to be between conference cookies and presentation marathons. We wanted to save something important, a societal institution that seemed to be falling apart both economically and democratically.

This feeling of urgency, paired with excitement and hope for a new beginning, was not uncommon at that time. For the younger generation of journalism researchers, "legacy" media seemed to be stuck in completely crystallized traditions and was awfully outdated, especially in contrast to the exciting new things developing on the Internet. These hungry academics turned their attention to online journalism, a phenomenon that was still very much emerging and seemed very promising, as it allowed for totally new forms of storytelling and involved users as partners in the news-making process (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Deuze, 2003; Pavlik, 2001). The very word "users" felt revolutionary, as the older generation of academics still thought of them as "recipients" who swallowed whatever the media machine spit out (Schönbach, 1997, 2001). As an added bonus, the online journalists themselves were young and hungry, so there was a kind of mutual generational understanding. In some ways, the upcoming new breed of journalism researchers might have seen themselves reflected in the online journalists; they also tried to inject innovative ideas into an established, but sluggish, system working against a notable *vis inertiae* to set it in motion again.

Indeed, initial resistance made the lives of this pioneer generation of online journalists quite hard. Established journalists from print, radio, and TV news didn't take their online colleagues seriously; some even detested the change and hoped it would simply go away.

Equally, politicians, public relations officers, and other stakeholders largely ignored the "new kids on the block"; there were stories of online journalists not even being admitted to press conferences, being seated somewhere in the back, or being perceived as "computer nerds" (Deggerich, 2001a, 2001b). However, this situation changed rather quickly in just a few years. With the economic struggles of the parent media, the exodus of classifieds to online services, the mainstream adoption of Internet use, and the respective growth of use time, online journalism became accepted and even took over the lead role in many ways beyond the obvious production speed (e.g., Allan, 2006; Bivens, 2008; Hermida, 2010).

Despite (or maybe because of) this success story, the reality of participatory online news some 15 years later is very different from the early visions; notable forms of "produsage" (Bruns, 2008) and user-generated content seem to be largely missing from professional journalistic websites. The comment sections of online news media are flooded with hateful messages, opinion mongering, and incivility (e.g., Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Harlow, 2015; Neurauter-Kessels, 2013; Santana, 2014). And what's worse, there are even presumed cases of strategic manipulation attempts of community sections by foreign states and related actors (Elliott, 2014). Some observers even regard this as a new information war happening in the guise of user participation (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Zelenkauskaite & Balduccini, 2017). As a result, many news media restricted user participation or even gave up their comment sections altogether. Notable examples are *Reuters*, *Bloomberg*, *The Guardian* (certain topics), *Stern* (Germany), *De Volkskrant* (Netherlands), *News24* (South Africa), and *The Moscow Times* (Russia). While non-proprietary platforms, like Facebook, Youtube, Instagram or Twitter, may offer an alternative route for news distribution and participation, as compared to comment sections controlled by the media themselves, the negativity and toxic atmosphere there can be equally bad, and multiple studies imply that the deliberative quality is even lower, as is the interaction with journalists who seem to neglect such channels even when they are officially supported by their media (Esau, Friess & Eilders, 2017; Hille & Bakker, 2013; Rowe, 2015; Su et al., 2018).

Broadly speaking, the idea of free, high-quality user-generated content in the context of professional online news media is seemingly half dead. Naturally, there are promising projects outside traditional news outlets, but often these are driven by activists' interests in specific topics or they are small-scale, profit-driven news or PR ventures (as is often the case with online influencer channels on social media or special-interest blogs).

So, what went wrong? Maybe not much beyond human beings and societal reality not following some enthusiastic and rather utopian ideas. As I will discuss in this article, the issue predominantly lies with false expectations. Media managers' economic fantasies of a willing, free workforce were equally misguided as the rather naïve academic notions of a revitalized journalism in direct debate with its active users; both sacrificed empirical realism for fantasies that were driven by their own goals and hopes resulting in either a greedy or an idealistic projection (Section 2). As an antidote, I will propose and systematize the concept of "dark participation"—the evil flip side of citizen engagement (Section 3). This deconstruction of earlier, naïve ideas (to whom the author contributed himself) is deliberately one-sided; by adding some black to the pearly-white idealism of citizen engagement, one might end up with a more appropriate grey. While less exciting, this allows for a more nuanced understanding of participation, and in the end, a more realistic approach that allows for actual change (Section 4).

2. Limitations of Citizen Engagement as a Concept: Failures of the Light Side

The current situation did not come without warning signs. Earlier research revealed a reluctance among professionals to give up control in the production process and a rather limited willingness of audience members to participate for free in this process (Singer et al., 2011). Instead of the ambitious full participation in the news-making process, many companies simply set up "walled gardens" for limited participation in comment sections (Domingo et al., 2008; Hanitzsch & Quandt, 2012). The more active prod/users (Bruns, 2008) often chose to completely bypass journalism (Pavlik, 2000) and disseminate their idea of news via social networks and other online services (one prominent current example is a notoriously Twittering president), thereby questioning the monopoly and the very idea of professionalized news production by journalistic institutions. In many ways, entrepreneurial journalism—sometimes a precarious existence under de-institutionalized work conditions—echoes the impact of this cultural change (Cohen, 2015). So the empirical reality of user participation was a different one from the expectations for years now—and arguably, even from the beginning.

However, the problem cannot be simply attributed to a brilliant concept gone astray, as if a wonderful machinery just corroded into a deplorable state of malfunctioning. Rather, the whole proposition of grassroots journalism was one-sided from the beginning; it was a democratic and economic utopia that primarily revolved around the journalistic perspective and academic wishful thinking (Peters & Witschge, 2014). Löffelholz (2004) noted early on that the broad notion of a "redactional society" (Hartley, 2000) had a weak empirical and theoretical foundation. In most of the forward-looking concepts, the "user" was indeed a projection—either an altruistic democrat in constant Samaritan mode or a particle in a willing workforce contributing to the journalist's own processes as a free resource. It may be argued that such projections primarily mirrored academic or economic Shangri-las that did not take the users as human beings seriously enough. As Gans (2003) noted, ideal democracies would have ideal citizens, but such ideals

are meant to set societal goals, and therefore, remain intentionally simplistic. Actual (i.e., "real") societal life is much more complex (Gans, 2003), and most citizens are not motivated to fulfil the democratic ideal per se by gratuitously helping journalists inform their fellow citizens. It seems rather plausible that many would prefer to do something rather mundane instead (like relaxing after their daily paid work with a cool drink, watching television, meeting with friends etc.).[1]

However, such common-sense, down-to-earth thinking was not particularly popular in most of the early concepts of user participation in the news-making process; most of them were enthusiastically aiming for the sky. The reasons for this are multifaceted. Some major fallacies of the enthusiastic concepts of the late 1990s and early 2000s were biased observations driven by self-interest (idealistic or economic), projecting potentials and options as social reality, a rather weak consideration of the psychological and societal basis of human action, a lack of empirical work in concomitance with an abundance of conceptual work, and a disregard of the reasons for the institutionalization and professionalization of journalism.

As noted above, the idealistic bias on the part of academics was, in part, driven by their own interests and hopes regarding a democratic transformation and rejuvenation of journalism. This, perhaps naïve, approach may be also linked to the main protagonists at that time being primarily a younger generation of tech-savvy researchers. In contrast to many of their seniors, they had day-to-day experience with online communication, a more natural approach to computer technology (as they, themselves, were more or less digital natives), and based on their career stage, many were also eager to do things differently. Leaving behind the dusty environment of journalistic dinosaurs in traditional newsrooms and turning towards the dynamic, evolving new animals in the online world was certainly attractive. Also, their focus on the new came quite naturally with a preference for the exceptional over the normal. Their research was abundant in case-study examples of innovative best-practice examples of online news production and user participation and fewer with large-scale overviews of the overall state of the news media business.[2]

The media business' bias was certainly a different one. The fantasies of media managers were economic ones (Domingo et al., 2008; Vujnovic et al., 2010) that regarded the user as a cheap resource in the work process, basically producing content like "magic" out of nothing (Quandt, 2011). Naturally, there was an inherent cost-reduction idea involved here, that is, replacing paid journalists with voluntarily working users. Also, the walled gardens of comment sections were primarily meant as a means to promote customer loyalty, not as place for democratic debate that included both professional journalists and citizens (Singer et al., 2011). It is no wonder that the ideas of "user-generated content" and "participation" discussed in academia resonated well within parts of the industry (albeit for the wrong reasons). To put it more bluntly, while most academics meant "saving journalism" and "strengthening democracy", some media managers heard "saving money" and "strengthening our business".

In addition to this, there was also a certain lemming-like[3] mentality in some media houses; as more and more news outlets introduced comment sections and participatory formats, it became fashionable to do this, and many just did it because everybody else did it. This bandwagon effect was quite pronounced; not to be left behind and having the appearance of being "modern" was often the primary motivation. This sometimes led to bizarre situations. As a researcher in the field, I was once contacted by an editor of a small publishing house to help them participate in participation. When being asked why they wanted to include user input in the first place, the editor answered (somewhat irritated): "Because the management wants it like that" (Quandt, 2012). I labeled this strategy "something 2.0" back then (Quandt, 2012)—a principle that probably could be transferred to "anything x.0" even today.

The rather different goals notwithstanding, both approaches, by academia and the industry, were equally confusing technological options and economic potential with social reality. The differentiation between these (and the analysis of their complex interplay) is probably one of the most fundamental ideas of science and technology studies (STS), but their equalization remains a common mistake. The fallacy of confusing options with social realities is not just bound to technological innovations, though it runs deeper and is connected to a general perspective on human beings. Indeed, even in the early works of moral and political philosophy, it has been argued that there are reasons why societies come into existence and why people participate in larger, organized contexts. Centuries of this work led to the conclusion that participation does not automatically come free of charge, but is motivated by specific human interests and qualities and framed by the necessities of growing social structures. The darker view in the tradition of Hobbes' (1651/2008) Leviathan paints a self-

[1] This comment is not meant to downplay the considerable motivation of citizens to contribute to social causes, charity, welfare organizations etc.; however, there are significant differences of such activities to working for free for (mostly) profit-driven news organizations. One may also argue that such activities are much more "tangible" and the beneficial effects less abstract than "saving democracy through participation in journalism".

[2] An example of such case-oriented approaches can be found in the two edited books by Paterson and Domingo on online newsroom ethnographies (Paterson & Domingo, 2008; Domingo & Paterson, 2011). These two books were significant in developing the field of ethnographic research, so this is not at all meant as a criticism of *their* approach (full disclosure: I even contributed a study to Paterson & Domingo, 2008). On the contrary; the argument here is rather a criticism of what is *not* there or at least lacking, that is, more critical work putting such approaches to innovation in journalism into perspective, thus balancing that period's work more.

[3] This expression is borrowed from a reviewer comment and was included here as it mirrors my own experiences with industry contacts during that time quite well.

ish, interest-driven, and competitive picture of humans in their natural state with the societal rules and structures being borne out of "cold" reason and resulting in submission to authority. Rousseau's (1762/2018) Social Contract paints a much more positive image of the natural human state—peaceful, empathic, free, and non-competitive—and acknowledges the realities of evolving societies, but it aims for an idealized democracy beyond the corruption of social realities. One could argue that many researchers (perhaps unknowingly) followed Rousseau's ideals in their concepts of participation, hoping that citizens would be intrinsically motivated, as if they were still in an idealized natural state. Interestingly enough, even the economic fantasies of media managers seemed to take participation as an intrinsic value for granted, which is somewhat ironic considering that economic thinking is often firmly rooted in a concept of humans as primarily competitive and selfish.

However, one does not have to follow the darker Hobbesian idea (or indeed, refer to moral philosophy at all) to realize that there is a difference between an idealized human condition and social reality. Various factors influence the news-production process, and the enthusiastic approach to online participation reduced this to the technological potential of users taking part in the process (Domingo et al., 2008) and somehow freeing them from the one-sided production of traditional journalism. However, that process is not just a result of technological necessity, but, on a structural level, of labor organization, and on a personal level, of motivation; so there are many reasons why not everybody can or should be a journalist.

Indeed, as noted above, the idea of user participation was neither acknowledging the value of professionalization enough (actually, it very much opposed it) nor did it consider the results of psychological research on motivation. The inner urge to participate in the public debate (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007), that is, to provide commercially operating news media with free content, was taken for granted based on the assumption as a quasi-requirement for the citizen of modern society—aka "our democratic duty."[4] As a result, crucial questions did not receive enough attention: did many people show an urgent and obvious interest in news production? Why should users actually contribute something to professional news media, and what incentive would drive them to actually do this? Or, more bluntly put: why should anybody want to be a "citizen journalist"? The answers might have been quite different from the enthusiastic theoretical concepts. Actually, participation of a majority of the citizens simply for intrinsic reasons might have been highly unlikely, and external incentives were lacking or half-heartedly implemented (like a gamification of participation via rank systems). The lack of interest in user motivations in the early 2000s may be partially explained by the fact that most of the researchers in that particular field had a background in journalism research or even practical journalism; in many cases, their focus was still on the journalists and news media organizations with user-generated content becoming a part of that context (i.e., a notable resource in the production process that was still very much intact) (Domingo et al., 2008). This is actually inherent in the term "citizen journalist"; that is, it was thought that the people would become lay journalists and therefore assimilate into the system. This stands in stark contrast to the work of media effects researchers some ten years later where information sharing via social media is primarily conceptualized as a form of "private" online behavior and not as a form of public "news production" (often not being much different from what was discussed a decade before, except that it is happening in a different context, i.e., social media vs. legacy news media).

The sometimes rather broad re-conceptualizations of journalism were not backed up by empirical proof in most cases. Actually, there was a certain lack of empirical research beyond individual case analyses, especially in the early years of the development. As mentioned above, the initial focus on case studies and "outstanding" best-practice examples pronounced the extreme, neglecting the (potentially boring, but more prevalent) normal. One may still argue that in the beginning of a development, a heightened interest in the avant-garde is crucial to understand change. However, if such a nucleus of change is not contrasted with the overall state of the field, one might misinterpret innovations and their relevance (as a standard of comparison is missing). Indeed, some larger studies in the subsequent years cast doubt on the acceptance of user participation in news media and the motivation of users to contribute anything beyond comments (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast, 2015; Nielsen, 2014; Singer et al., 2011). At least in some countries, the journalists themselves were very skeptical about the usefulness of user contributions and their participation in online forums. Some were even doubtful of the citizens' principal potential to produce meaningful content (Singer et al., 2011).

On the one hand, one may perceive this as protectionism and a defensive reaction to the new competition with low- or non-paid workers. On the other hand, there are reasons for the existence of institutionalized journalism and why a profession usually is not only paid for, but also requires some form of qualification and skill. While the access to journalism does not depend on a formal qualification in many countries, there is vocational training on the job or even academic training available that teaches and reflects the rules and skillsets developed over the centuries as part of the profession. The

[4] The more recent concept of "reciprocal journalism" by Lewis, Holton and Coddington (2014) gives some alternative answers on a conceptual level. Again, the perspective here is structural rather than individual or motivational, but it acknowledges the benefit for users and followers and therefore does not reduce the analysis to a one-sided perspective on the (professional) production side. As Lewis (2015) pointed out, reciprocity can be also negative and anti-social—an argument that resonates well with the ideas discussed here.

idea that journalism only requires specific personal qualifications was rejected by research long ago (Weaver & Gray, 1980), so it's hardly surprising that untrained laymen (citizen journalists) may not contribute polished material that is ready for publication even if they are motivated to do so. This lack of ability, not simply motivation, was part of the discussion about participation early on (Singer et al., 2011). Some media just expected citizens to participate in the form of delivering raw material such as information on events, photos, eye-witness accounts, and feedback. In addition to individual qualifications necessary to do the job, professionalization also means institutionalization. The process of news production typically requires various skills, so the division of work plus a corresponding specialization is a natural result of growing news businesses; it's no wonder research revealed that in online journalism, specific work routines and production roles were quickly established on the basis of necessities and the logic of efficient work practices (Quandt, 2005). Similar processes were happening in blog-based, independent news outlets. Often these started as one- or few-person businesses, but with growth and success, they reinvented typical work routines of more traditional media houses and implemented horizontal and vertical differentiation.

In short, the enthusiastic concepts of citizen participation in the news-making process were partially shortsighted and ignored some framework conditions of professional, journalistic production processes, sometimes by virtue of idealism and sometimes due to an underestimation of the complex interplay of individual, structural, and social processes. However, hindsight is easier than foresight: The criticism here is based on retrospect, which always has the benefit of knowing the results, as well as the process that led to it. And while the concept of intrinsically motivated citizen participation might have been naïve, it was certainly important to initiate a discussion about the potential of innovative forms of news production and the importance of re-connecting journalism with the public. The subsequent debates on journalistic responsibility and community orientation were important to reveal issues of *déformation professionelle* and journalistic arrogance and can be regarded as part of a healthy re-calibration process.

There is a next step in this debate, though, and it somewhat turns the previous argument and perspective completely upside down. Lately, there is empirical and theoretical insight that points to quite successful forms of participation (at least from the perspective of the participants). However, these are not motivated by a belief in the democratic necessity of journalistic news production or an idealized citizen. On the contrary, they are often rooted in rather sinister motives and anti-democratic worldviews of the participating actors. In contrast to what was described above, these actors are often highly motivated and organized, so they actually have clear reasons to engage in "information" and "news" production.

3. Dark Participation: Concept and Systematization

The bleak flip side to the utopian concept of selfless participation in a redactional society (Hartley, 2000) as outlined above, could be called "dark participation". As research has revealed, this type of participation seems to be growing parallel to the recent wave of populism in Western democracies (Jouët, 2018; Manucci & Weber, 2017; Meltzer, 2014). Instead of positive, or at least neutral, contributions to the news-making processes, it is characterized by negative, selfish or even deeply sinister contributions such as "trolling" (Coles & West, 2016; Mihaylov & Nakov, 2016), strategic "piggy-backing" on journalistic reputation, and large-scale disinformation in uncontrolled news environments (Aro, 2016; Coe et al., 2014; Muddiman & Stroud, 2017). But why is that so? In parallel to the question regarding the "enthusiastic" participation model, one might ask more specifically: why does a non-professional actor with malevolent motives want to participate in the news-making process? And who are these alleged "citizens"?

In the following, I will sketch some initial cases that may hint at plausible answers before systematizing the concept of dark participation further. The examples that could be labelled dark participation range from misinformation and hate campaigns to individual trolling and cyberbullying. Many of these have been subject to recent public debate.

In 2014, *The Guardian* publicly announced that they found a high number of strategically placed, manipulative user posts in their comment sections. Throughout the Ukrainian crisis, the level of pro-Russian posts seemed to be disproportional, and there was evidence that linked these posts to the Russian government, or at least their support groups (Elliott, 2014). The work of pro-Russian "web brigades" or "troll armies" was observed early on (Franke & Pallin, 2012; Kelly et al., 2012; Sanovich, 2017; Shakarian, 2011), and the actions of the St. Petersburg based Internet Research Agency—basically an organized troll farm—received broad attention after being exposed by Western journalists (Walker, 2015). The aim of these "participators" was to influence the Western public and (potentially) the journalists, according to the Russian state goals, in other words, basically a form of covert political propaganda. However, the Internet Research Agency is certainly not the only notable case; the list of similar examples is long (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Zelenkauskaite & Balduccini, 2017) as is the list of presumed actors and groups (Weedon, Nuland, & Stamos, 2017), ranging from state propagandists and political extremists to religious groups and conspiracy theorists all over the globe (see also Quandt & Festl, 2017). Misinformation and propaganda can also take the form of hate campaigns that attack specific groups or individuals that symbolize these groups (Quandt & Festl, 2017).

There are also many cases where misinformation has been spread via social networks and short messaging

services (especially Twitter) either as "fake news" that was published under the name of news media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Murtha, 2016) or as information intended to be picked up by media as genuine eye-witness reports or user opinions (Ellis, 2017; Gowen & Bearak, 2017). Sneaking fake information into journalism by imitating trusted or innocent sources is a well-known propaganda strategy (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012) and can be seen as a particularly sinister form of dark participation. The originators plant false or misleading information and abuse the public's trust in journalistic brands. In addition to the potential impact when successfully manipulating journalists and getting their message into the news, the originators also cover their tracks and become invisible to outside observers.

Beyond these forms of obviously strategic, manipulative participation, there are also some reports of genuine trolling and bullying via comment sections. The motivations of forum trolls (Cheng, Bernstein, Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, & Leskovec, 2017) have not received much attention in journalism research, but there are some revealing reports on individual cases (as an example, see Steppat, 2014). These paint the picture of angry, malevolent participants who project their personal issues and a general hatred for fellow human beings or "the system" onto others with a grim will to stir up forum debates. Also, trolling seems to be sometimes motivated by the simple enjoyment of causing turmoil and seeing others react to aggressive or nonsensical posts (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014). In addition to this, forums are sometimes the scene of targeted bullying. In contrast to trolling, cyberbullying is "intended to harass an 'inferior' victim"; it is "an intentional and deliberate act" that happens "more than once" and is directed "against a physically or socially inferior victim" (Festl & Quandt, 2017, p. 329; see also Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, Fisher, & Russell, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010). Unsurprisingly, there are no clear boundaries between trolling and cyberbullying. However, while trolls sometimes attack other forum members in their "arguments", their actions do not repeatedly target one specific individual in order to harass that person; their primary goal is to cause trouble. Both of these types of dark participation can be differentiated from the above mentioned strategic forms of cyber hate, which are:

> Typically embedded in the actions of larger, more enduring hate movements or hate campaigns…and…targeted at whole groups defined by criteria such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on—and (mostly) not at single victims or at singular events. (Quandt & Festl, 2017, p. 336)

In contrast to trolling and bullying, strategic manipulation "serves an ideological, political, or religious goal" (Quandt & Festl, 2017, p. 338), so if individuals are attacked, they typically "stand for" a target group or an opposing principle (i.e., they signify "the enemy").

These examples point to the comment sections as a central target of dark participation. There are reasons for this; the comment sections are a good object of manipulation and hate because they basically offer an already established, large audience "for free" for strategic agitators and trolls. The environment also has the blessing of an established news source; that is, dark participators benefit from the media brand and the environment it offers. Also, due to the closure of the journalistic process to very limited walled gardens of user debate, the comment sections are often the only directly accessible step of the production chain (Singer et al., 2011). Some indirect influence can also be exerted by feeding tampered material to online media under the disguise of ordinary citizens or eye witnesses (as noted above), but depending on the level of fact checking, this might be a more difficult route.

Similar to the comment sections, malevolent participators might invade social media channels providing news items. Shared content on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. is subject to comparable "dark" commenting strategies, and in many ways, the situation is worse there because the news originators cannot exert the same level of control as in their own proprietary comment sections. Additionally, social media channels often give access to all levels of the production chain (as described in Singer et al., 2011) offering the option to publish news pieces without the involvement of professional journalists, therefore fully bypassing legacy media, or to release fake news or manipulated news pieces under the name of professional journalists and established media (Quandt, Frischlich, Boberg, & Schatto-Eckrodt, in press).

Through the above examples (misinformation, hate campaigns, trolling, cyberbullying), the shape and focal areas of dark participation become roughly visible. However, it is important to explore the concept beyond the idiosyncrasies of the individual case examples in order to not fall into the same trap as the primarily case driven "enthusiastic" research on participation. Therefore, in the following, I would like to dissect the variants of dark participation in more detail by differentiating several main dimensions: (a) wicked *actors*, (b) sinister *motives and reasons for participation*, (c) despicable *objects/targets*, (d) intended *audience(s)*, and (e) nefarious *processes/actions* (Figure 1). Such a systematic approach provides an understanding of the huge variety and differences in various phenomena that fall into the category of dark participation. While exploring these dimensions, I will also briefly discuss some of the knowledge we already have on them (albeit some of the findings are, indeed, still limited).

3.1. Actors

As indicated by the above case examples, actors of dark participation vary from individuals and organized groups to synchronized movements (and corresponding larger groups). Individual actors may be single trolls or hate

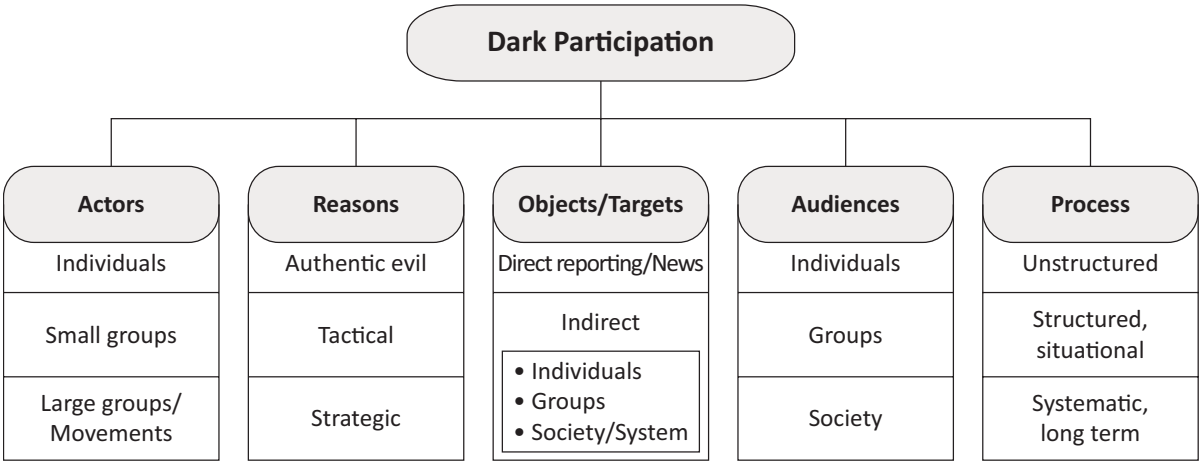

Figure 1. Variants of dark participation.

mongers with varying backgrounds, motivations, and participation behaviors that may be idiosyncratic (as they are rooted in the respective person's biography and circumstance). Still, there are specific types of individual trolls; some are obviously using hate postings to compensate for personal discontent (Steppat, 2014), while others appear to find it satisfying to stir up trouble or manipulate others (Buckels et al., 2014). The typical Internet troll is thought to be a single "lone wolf" (Steppat, 2014), but especially, "fun trolling" might not be as misanthropic as "hate trolling", and therefore, it is also open to group behavior. Such small groups of actors are also not uncommon as perpetrators in cyberbullying. A cooperation principle, including active bullies and supportive audience members (Festl & Quandt, 2017), is inherent to many bullying constellations with the perpetrator group being united by the joint action against specific targets. Joint action in various forms of dark participation also extends to larger groups that can be described as part of a political, religious, or ideological movement. Manipulative forms of participation in online forums are often strategically planned and synchronized. The above-mentioned actions of Russian propaganda brigades, but also of various other covert state agencies, right-wing populists, or conspiracy theorists are usually not simple coincidence (Gorwa, 2017; King, Pan, & Roberts, 2017; Pingaud & Sauer, 2016). They follow a specific sequence and logic, apply well-calculated messages that serve a specific goal, and are not as unpredictable as individual trolls.

3.2. Reasons and Motives

The motives and reasons for dark participation vary notably with the actor groups. Individuals are plausibly more prone to something that might be labeled "authentic" evil attacks; that is, their actions are morally bad and driven by genuine personal hate for others or the sheer pleasure of making others suffer (Craker & March, 2016; Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012). In contrast to a planned group action, such attacks do not follow a rational logic, and from the outside, they may appear random, affective, and/or psychotic. Other forms of dark participation are much more controlled or planned; the reasons may still be situational or short term in some cases, but they are following specific tactics (as is the case with some instances of bullying) (Festl & Quandt, 2017). Large scale manipulation campaigns are strategic by definition, and while such forms are often particularly sinister, they still apply a rational (cold) logic and process (Quandt & Festl, 2017). Organized hate speech in online forums applies demeaning language intentionally, and hate in this context is not to be confused with situational rage (although it seems to be emotionally loaded, which is part of a strategy to appeal to specific target groups).

3.3. Objects and Targets

The objects and targets of both mis/disinformation and negative/covert comments have to be discerned from the intended audience(s) of dark participation. Depending on the motives of wicked actors, the objects can be normal topics of reporting or hand-picked targets (like political or societal representatives that are exemplary for a despicable group or principle). Trolls and manipulators may attack specific articles or topics, and they can also divert content-driven hate to actors mentioned in the article or the journalists themselves. A typical example of this is the behavior of right-wing commenters who target articles on refugees (Devlin & Grant, 2017; Toepfl & Piwoni, 2017), and depending on the article's tone, also attack the journalists as being responsible for the content and its tone. In Germany, this basic principle was generalized in the form of the *Lügenpresse* (press of liars) accusation, especially advanced by the right-wing, anti-Islam and anti-refugee movement, PEGIDA (see also Quandt et al., in press). Here, the press and journalism in general became representative of an adverse system and the intended target of the negativity.

3.4. Audiences

The intended audience is often different from targeted persons or groups, and again, can range from individuals to groups to whole societies (see also Quandt & Festl, 2017). A typical example is forum participation by strategic actors. They first criticize an article (let's say, in the case of the Russian web brigades, a piece on Putin published in a German web magazine), transfer the criticism to the journalist as originator (claiming that her/his reporting was biased), and then escalate this to a systemic level (insinuating that this is typical for biased reporting on Russia in Germany).[5] So the direct, initial target is the article itself, but then it is diverted to indirect targets (journalists, the media, the system). However, the intended audience of such posts may be different from the targets. It could be the other forum participants, as part of the respective population and potential multiplicators, but also the journalists themselves (by giving them the impression that their reporting is not in line with their audience's perceptions and wishes) or maybe even third parties (who might hear about the user reactions from media reports). The effects of such forms of dark participation may be slow and indirect, following the "constant dripping wears away a stone" principle (Stelzenmüller, 2017), but they may affect whole societies as the intended audience. Here, one goal is potentially changing the reference system of what can and should be said in a society, and the framing of these discussions (i.e., in the long term, a societal norm shift).

3.5. Process

From the previous points, it is apparent that there are varying strategies when it comes to the processes of dark participation, from single, limited events to long-term strategies of subversion, in line with the underlying motives of the actors, the targeted objects, and the intended audiences. Individual hate trolling as an unpredictable series of psychotic outbreaks may be unstructured and random, whereas tactically motivated interventions are typically structured, but still bound by the specifics of the situation. Strategic forms of dark participation, on the other hand, are systematic and long-term processes. Feeding journalists tampered information or influencing forum participations according to one's own ideology may require advance planning, careful execution, and repetition to achieve the strategic goals (Marwick & Lewis, 2017).

This very brief differentiation of the most relevant dimensions and variants of dark participation hints at a large variety of phenomena that may be grouped under that label. Obviously, there are cognate concepts, like disinformation, propaganda, and populism (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012) or fake news (Rubin, Chen, & Conroy, 2015), but these are linked to different academic debates and perspectives. In this article, I deliberately focused the phenomena through the lens of participation, that is, "taking part in something else" such as the news production process, and I did so to contrast the dark side with the enthusiastic debate. It should have become apparent by now that the potential for dark participation is enormous and that there is also empirical proof that it may be quite successful, with intrinsically motivated actors eager to participate and contribute (but just not in the way journalism researchers dreamt of).

In contrast to the enthusiastic concepts of participation, the question, "why would anyone want to participate?" is much easier to answer for dark participation. The former was (at least implicitly) relying on the average user as an idealized democratic citizen who is willing to contribute for a higher good and out of an intrinsic motivation—an assumption that has obvious flaws under real life conditions. The latter does not rely on an idealistic general audience as participators, but is driven by very particular, often selfish interests of specific individuals and groups. The dark participators have extreme ideas and messages, and they try to get these out into the public with missionary zeal and by any means necessary. So while the enthusiastic concept of participation expected exceptional motivation from the normal audience, dark participation merely assumes motivated exceptions from the norm. As such a requirement for the concept is easily met, the future for dark participation is, paradoxically, bright.

4. Beyond Doom and Gloom: Save Journalism, Save the World?

Hateful comments, manipulation of forums, and fabricated information seem to be common features of user participation in the news-making process these days. These and other variants of dark participation are apparently on the rise. While journalism researchers in the 1990s and 2000s enthusiastically hoped for a rejuvenation of journalism and a strengthening of democracy by means of citizen participation in a positive and civil debate, anecdotal evidence and empirical research have pointed in exactly the opposite direction recently (Gardiner et al., 2016; Karlsson et al., 2015; Rowe, 2015; Su et al., 2018). As a result, some media limit their options of participation to the walled gardens of user comments, filter and moderate user posts, or install fact-checking units to double and triple analyze user-generated content for authenticity (Newman, 2017; Santana, 2016; Wolfgang, 2018)—a seemingly desperate attempt at putting the genie back into the bottle. Indeed, the situation seems

[5] This example is not a hypothetical one; it was communicated to a research team on web-based propaganda where I serve as one of the PIs (http://www.propstop.de/?lang=en), actually by *several* directly affected journalists. So it seems to be a common observation, and not just an individual case. However, the journalists reported many more comparable cases, by various actors, and not just the Russian web brigades; one has to be careful to not attribute this to a single group or nation.

to be grim, and many observers these days note that the Internet has become an unfriendly and hostile place (Rainie, Anderson, & Albright, 2017) that is full of hate and fake news (Lazer et al., 2018; Seely, 2018); positive participation sometimes looks like lost cause.

Given my ruthless criticism of early participation research at the beginning of this article, you might think that this assessment actually suits me as the author of a personal vendetta piece. Indeed, this article has been, in part, a very personal reckoning with earlier work on participation. I myself contributed to the enthusiastic debate on "saving journalism" through citizen participation and new online concepts. As noted, this idealistic perspective was well intended, but partially misguided and naïve. By introducing the concept of dark participation, I tried to show that there is a large variety of participation behaviors that are evil, malevolent, and destructive—at least if one believes in the value of democracy and free, impartial information flow. The examples and systematization paralleled previous analyses of positive options, but completely flipped them around (Domingo et al., 2008; Quandt, 2011; Singer et al., 2011). This was an intentional deconstruction.

If you now believe that the future is all doom and gloom, then you have stepped into a trap I intentionally set.

The examples of dark participation point to urgent issues of current online communication and news processes, and there is sufficient proof that these issues are more than serious. Without any doubt, it is highly necessary to research them. However, the current wave of apocalyptic analyses of media and society are partially born out of the same fallacies that plagued the early enthusiastic approaches. Again, researchers want to "save something important, a societal institution that seems to be falling apart both economically and democratically" (as noted in the very beginning of this piece); the difference now is that they are focusing on the many diabolic problems and not a messianic solution (which are, ironically, the two sides of the very same coin—participation). Science has fads that come in waves, and with the disappointment regarding earlier concepts and hopes, researchers again feel that these earlier ideas were stuck in crystallized traditions. Positive forms of participation now seem awfully outdated, and the many threats of online communication are the latest and, seemingly, the most important trend.

The issue here is not the (most relevant) topic of dark participation itself, but a growing lopsidedness that repeats the earlier failings in approach, just with an inversed object of interest. One has to wonder, if there are, again, "biased observations driven by self-interests, projecting potentials and options as social reality, a rather weak consideration of the psychological and societal basis of human action, a lack of empirical work in concomitance with an abundance of conceptual work, and a disregard of the reasons for the institutionalization and professionalization of journalism" (to quote the ruthless reckoning in Section 2)?

Indeed, when looking at certain current obsessions with fake news, populism, and hate, one may be inclined to answer at least some of these questions with a "yes"—maybe a conditional one, but still a "yes." Some of the current wave of research on hate speech in user comments, Twitter manipulation, or online propaganda consistently fails to offer a benchmark on how relevant these cases are in relation to the overall information flow. By pointing out that thousands or even millions of tweets are without a factual basis, they do not prove much beyond common knowledge; and with extremely low usage numbers in some countries, even millions of tweets are basically read by negligible fragments of the public. Similarly, research on the impact of bots and fake profiles often projects the potentials and options as social reality. Many of the studies in the field primarily offer case-study examples, and even concrete numbers on the percentage of social bots and fake profiles in specific comment sections or social media channels do not give a scale for their actual effect on society. Once again, media and communication research must be careful that it is not taking the exception as the rule.

I hope that you do not take this the wrong way. These types of research are important, even essential, as are other analyses of dark participation[6], and they help us in understanding societal changes under the conditions of an increasingly "total" media logic. However, as researchers, we should be careful to not make the exact same mistakes over and over again. To basically follow the earlier path of research, but in a reversed logic, would mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Journalism and the world as we know it are not saved by academic enthusiasm alone; neither are they destroyed by scientific (and public) doom and gloom. What the discussion on participatory journalism—and indeed, the role of news in a technologically and socially changed world—needs is more balance. A normalization of the debate and maturity beyond uni-polar depictions of the world is essential. As such, the concept of dark participation introduced here was, indeed, part of a trick argument. At first, it just reveals that there is a bleak flipside to the enthusiastic concept of participation, but it is certainly not meant to simply replace it or to replicate the basic principle just by coloring it black. Indeed, the recent public and academic outcry against a decline of culture (Anderson, Yeo, Brossard, Scheufele, & Xenos, 2018; Burkeman, 2017) is potentially as misguided as the naïve enthusiastic embrace of citizen participation was.

I would argue that a future agenda for the research on participation must accept and include both perspectives, light and dark, and it needs to offer clearer benchmarks on the societal relevance of both phenomena and everything in between. Forms of participation, either

[6] And indeed, I have to fully disclose that I also contributed to *this* discussion with more recent research on propaganda and populism, also in user comments and participatory formats, and its impact on journalism. Another *mea culpa* may be necessary at a later point of time.

helpful or destructive, should not only be studied as detached cases, extreme exceptions, or mere potential but also as notable factors in the crucial information flow of societies. This would require the development of integrative theories on the conditions of participation that are neither driven by wishful thinking nor doom and gloom. Therefore, what we need in the debate is another stage of development beyond simple black and white—a more realistic and healthy debate that reflects human and social life in all its glorious shades of grey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank both reviewers and the thematic issue editors for their valuable input and alternative perspective, which helped hone this essay's argument. Furthermore, I would like to thank Niels Göran Mede for his help in acquiring relevant literature and double-checking references.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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About the Author

Thorsten Quandt is a Professor of Online Communication at the University of Münster, Germany. His research fields include online communication, digital games and (online) journalism. Quandt is particularly interested in the societal changes connected to the Internet and new media, and the question how human beings have evolved in sync with these changes. His earlier works on participatory journalism and online newsroom production have been widely cited in the field of (digital) journalism research.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 49–57
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1467

Article

Alternative Media and the Notion of Anti-Systemness: Towards an Analytical Framework

Kristoffer Holt

Department of Mass Communication and Media, Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST), Mubarak Al-Abdullah Area/West Mishref, Kuwait; E-Mail: Holt.A@gust.edu.kw

Submitted: 6 March 2018 | Accepted: 27 June 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
A range of alternative media outlets focusing on criticizing immigration politics and mainstream media have emerged in Sweden in recent years. Although they have quite different ideological profiles, they share a clear and critical focus on immigration and mainstream journalistic representations of reality. Their message is that mainstream media conceal or distort information about negative societal and cultural consequences of immigration and that mainstream journalists have teamed up with the political elites and engage in witch-hunts of critics, while ignoring abuses by those in power. Such media outlets (especially online participatory media) need to be analyzed in the light of their position as *self-perceived correctives* of traditional media. There has been a remarkable surge of alternative media in Sweden with these traits in common during the past few years, and it is important to be able to discuss these media together as a phenomenon, while at the same time taking their differences into account. In relation to this, I argue that the notion of anti-systemness is useful in discussions of the impact these alternative media may (or may not) have on public discourse. In the article, I present a matrix that distinguishes between different types of anti-systemness: ideological anti-systemness and relational anti-systemness. The article therefore mainly presents a theoretical argument, rather than empirical findings, with the aim of pointing to a way forward for research about alternative media.

Keywords
alternative media; anti-systemness; counter-publics; ICAM; immigration; journalism; media distrust; polarization

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

Not long ago, there were great expectations among media scholars as well as public intellectuals and debaters about how participatory aspects of journalism and news production, especially through social media and the web 2.0, could change public discourse in positive, more inclusive and, therefore, democratically beneficial ways (Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007; Jenkins, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005). Giving the grassroots voice and visibility was especially pointed out as a promising aspect of participatory and citizen journalism (Domingo et al., 2008). Now, after more than a decade of web 2.0 reality, there seems to be more talk of populism than grassroot participation and a growing concern about fake news, hate-speech and propagandistic micro-targeting in online participatory channels (Anderson & Revers, 2018; Quandt, 2018). Alternative and participatory media are increasingly described as threats to the system, rather than as promising and reinvigorating reformers in a time of waning enthusiasm for democratic engagement. After Brexit and Donald Trump's unexpected victory in the American presidential election of 2016, analysts and researchers were collectively left scratching their heads, wondering what mistakes were made in the many analyses and predictions that preceded both elections.

In the self-examination that followed, many explanatory models emerged. One in particular has been re-

peated again and again as a mantra: the gap between societal elites and the "Average Joe" must have become so great that the elites lack contact with common people and fail to understand how they think, and what problems really concern them. American journalists seemed shocked that Trump's aggressive rhetoric targeting "mainstream media" seemed to have resonated with a large number of people (Barbaro, 2016). Even more unpleasant to many journalists was the insight that alternative news sites such as *Breitbart News*, which supported Trump actively during the campaign, proved to have an underestimated reach despite its reputation as a dubious playground for various factions of the American so called "alt-right". Clinton's campaign also contributed, paradoxically, to the impact of the "alt-right" by calling it out as a major opponent (Gourarie, 2016).

The fact that journalists in the major newspapers and the radio and TV channels seemed to be regarded by many citizens as part of the establishment and found themselves accused of being corrupt, fettered, leftist and back-tied by pledged allegiances to political correctness came as a cold shower for many who had actually seen themselves as "watchdogs" in relation to power, as the people's advocates.

A common denominator among many on the "right" side of the ideological spectrum (far-right as well as right-wing populists and many moderate conservatives) is that their narratives often criticize "mainstream media" for being biased in favor of liberal/leftist perspectives, uncritical of those in power and out of touch with ordinary people. At the same time, a host of "alternative media", often with a focus on criticism of liberal immigration politics and a harsh tone against mainstream media, has become an important factor in public discourse in many western countries. This article is about how such politically and ideologically driven alternative media affect media as a system for public discourse throughout the western world.

It is becoming more and more evident that alternative right-wing media are increasingly relevant in the field of political, as well as ideological and cultural communication (Nagle, 2017). It is also clear that the rapid emergence of phenomena such as the so called "alt-right" online movement has given rise to surprise and confusion (Gourarie, 2016). I argue that some of this confusion, at least in terms of scholarly attempts to come to grips with it, has to do with a discrepancy between the dominant theories about alternative media and alternative media as they actually are.

Scholarly work about alternative media has in essence taken its cue from Gramsci and the notion of hegemony. Alternative media is in such a setting seen as a liberating force, empowering and giving voice to groups who suffer from marginalization in the hegemonic discourse of mainstream "bourgeois" media. Historically, the phrase "mainstream media" has been used mostly by left-wing debaters, such as Noam Chomsky (1997) and by media scholars; "alternative media" has long been considered the embodiment of a dream about giving ordinary citizens a way of speaking back to power (see, e.g., Atton, 2015; Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2007; Lievrouw, 2011; Pajnik & Downing, 2008). Much research has therefore focused on activist uses of media (Penney & Dadas, 2014). Researchers have been reluctant to talk about right-wing populist, far-right activists or conservative criticism of the "politically correct" and "leftist" mainstream media using existing theoretical frameworks, although there are exceptions. Downey and Fenton (2003, p. 197), for example, pointed out that "it would be clearly a mistake to ignore the construction of right-wing counter-publics", and both Downing, Ford, Gil and Stein (2001) and Atton (2006) have approached these phenomena, albeit with a specific focus on the extreme-right and with a normative stance. In this article, I view alternative media in light of the current media landscape, marked by polarization and culture wars (Nagle, 2017). I argue that it would be beneficial if theoretical assumptions about alternative media were valid, irrespective of the media's ideological orientation. It is also necessary to view opposing media channels, especially online participatory media in the light of their position as self-perceived correctives of traditional mainstream media, presenting alternative interpretations of political and social events. This motive is particularly apparent in alternative media that is critical of immigration politics and the perceived threat of Islamization of western countries—although the main focus and level of "anti-systemness" (Capoccia, 2002) varies greatly between different actors. While some can be extreme and incite to violence, others can be moderate and reasonable (Holt, 2016a). Some are outspokenly anti-system, others are not—but may still have a polarizing effect on the media landscape. Yet others may show no signs of anti-systemness.

Thus, this article seeks to nuance the discussion of how alternative media—especially those with ideological/political agendas that clash with predominant values of the mainstream media—affect public discourse. I introduce a theoretical distinction between two different types of anti-systemness: ideological and relational. This framework is designed to work on any alternative media, regardless of political/ideological orientation, but is exemplified using Swedish alternative media that are critical of the country's immigration policy, building on insights from previous research (Holt, 2016a). This framework is important, because it enables a focused discussion of specific cases and makes it easier to identify alternative media that qualify as "anti-system" and those that do not. The argument is in essence theoretical with the aim of informing and inspiring future research.

1.1. Media Distrust and Alternative Media

Expressions of skepticism and suspicion of mainstream media are heard in many places throughout Europe and the USA these days. "Lügenpresse" ["the lying press"]

was, for example, a common slogan in the PEGIDA marches in Dresden, Germany, and elsewhere (Haller & Holt, 2018; Holt & Haller, 2017). Hegemonic mainstream media are seen to conceal or distort information that does not fit the "politically correct" agenda. In Sweden, right-wing movements, ranging from parties such as the Sweden Democrats (SD) to more extreme think-tanks such as Motpol.nu, raise criticism along these lines, although their approaches and lines of reasoning vary greatly (Holt, 2016a). They voice media skepticism, distrust and criticism in what might be termed immigration-critical counter-publics (Downey & Fenton, 2003). Tsfati (2003) defines media skepticism as a sense of "alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream media". It involves the "feeling that journalists are not fair or objective in their reports about society and that they do not always tell the whole story", and that mainstream journalists "will sacrifice accuracy and precision for personal and commercial gains" (Tsfati, 2003, p. 67).

This is hardly to suggest that media criticism is dangerous or bad in itself. However, if certain groups in society choose to abstain from participation in the regular mainstream platforms of public discourse (which are normally considered as the commons, the "agora") and instead entrench themselves in counter-publics where discourses of alienation and mistrust in conventional democratic channels are fostered and amplified, it can be problematic from a democratic perspective (Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2009; Sunstein, 2007). Firstly, it reveals that some people feel that they cannot participate on equal terms and choose alternative platforms outside the conventional news providers. Secondly, it can become an obstacle to deliberation between conflicting parties, which seriously challenges the democratic system.

The Swedish example is especially interesting. Support for the right-wing populist party, the SD, was long significantly lower than the support for similar parties in neighboring countries. But since the 2010 election, when they first received enough votes to be represented in parliament, support for the party has grown rapidly (from 5.7% 2010 to 14% 2015 and in some recent polls around 20%). During this period, the number and nature of scandals reported in the media about members of this party outnumber those involving members of other parties by far (Ekman & Widholm, 2014). SD have built a lot of their rhetoric around framing themselves as henpecked outsiders, without a fair chance in mediated political debates (Hellström & Nilsson, 2010). The claim is that mainstream media has put a lid on the debate about immigration, ostracizing critical opinions (Holt, 2017). Rhetorically, this has worked well for SD, since much criticism of the party has been easily explained away with references to "media bias". After the ruling Social Democratic party in Sweden suddenly decided to take measures to radically reduce the high number of asylum seekers during the 2015 migrant crisis, a growing number, even among mainstream journalists, have argued that there is some truth to the claim that immigration has been off limits for serious discussion in the Swedish public sphere for fear of being labelled racist (Truedson, 2016).

If massively negative media-coverage in the mainstream channels has not hampered the increasing support for SD, it may be because there are other voices available which play an important, and perhaps underestimated role in public discourse. There are indications that immigration-critical alternative media (ICAM) in Sweden have a significant reach (Borgs, 2015; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Kleis Nielsen, 2018). Survey data presented in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2018) reveal that each of the four major ICAM in Sweden reaches "around one tenth of the Swedish online population on a weekly basis" (Newman et al., 2018). Their readers are also clearly more right-wing oriented than readers of the most influential mainstream media in Sweden. Furthermore, the study reveals, their readers express much less trust in regular news-reporting than others (Newman et al., 2018). These sites (*Fria Tider*, *Nyheter Idag*, *Ledarsidorna*, *Samhällsnytt* and *Nya Tider*) are regularly described in mainstream media as a threat to the democratic system, as purveyors of hate and generally troll-friendly. While this might be true of some ICAM, it hardly holds for all of them. The problem is that they tend to be lumped together and treated as one coordinated entity—and are often generalized as extremists. Anti-mainstream media rhetoric is particularly targeted and described as a threat to freedom of speech. Some actors, such as the now defunct YouTube channel, *Granskning Sverige* (Burman, 2017), actually threaten and target individual journalists; others merely publish critical opinions and analysis. It is therefore important to distinguish between alternative media that actually display anti-system tendencies and those who do not. Being critical of mainstream news is not the same thing as promoting extreme agendas. It is crucial for scholars to make this distinction. Why are some groups angry with the "Lügenpresse"? How does their anger affect public discourse on a general level? Is this mistrust a threat to the democratic system, and does it pose a danger to free media? If so, in what ways?

I will not be able to answer these questions here, but I do propose a framework that I believe will aid the pursuit of the answers.

1.2. Alternative Media

The term "alternative media" used in scholarly research (see, e.g., Atkinson & Leon Berg, 2012; Rauch, 2015) aims—in broad terms—at media that challenge the established channels and put forward alternative approaches and perspectives that contradict or diverge from an experienced dominant discourse in the mainstream media (Atton, 2015; Leung & Lee, 2014). The term does not require any particular focus but refers to all types of media that are created and run in opposition to what is perceived as a dominant discourse in traditional media. Typically, according to Leung and Lee (2014,

p. 341), "such alternative media often jettison the conventional journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality to espouse specific political views".

Talking about alternative media will be confusing unless we classify them in a way that signals an orientation that separates them from other types of alternative media. The focus in this article rests specifically on alternative media that show a fundamentally (more or less pronounced) critical attitude towards the Swedish immigration policy and its consequences as well as towards the media establishment (Holt, 2016a, 2017). In Sweden, in recent years, the term has been associated specifically with immigration-critical media, characterized by an emphatically oppositional stance vis-à-vis both the political and the media establishment. In the Swedish context, the term "alternative media" refers to:

> A self-assumed term that signals an opposition to traditional media ("old media"), which many of the writers in this field regard as failing to report properly on important societal issues, for example, by avoiding reporting on social problems related to immigration. (Holt, 2016b, my translation)

The term "alternative media" is here somewhat problematic as such a classification is imprecise and implicitly could give the reported media the status of equivalent, "interchangeable" alternatives to established journalistic media. This could of course be problematic, given the huge difference regarding the conditions, ambitions and resources that exist between the "alternative" and the "mainstream". On the other hand, several of the people interviewed by Holt (2016a) registered some objection to the term because it can be interpreted as a way to impose a state of permanent exclusion. That is, the term "alternative" emphasizes and consolidates a position beyond the mainstream, beyond the pale.

Alternative media are relevant because their existence and working methods can affect the public conversation and the rest of the media landscape and hence the conditions for opinion formation and news consumption. Also, epistemologically, they often pose a challenge to mainstream media, since they implicitly, and often explicitly, challenge mainstream media's "fake news", while at the same time, more often than not, they have very limited resources to perform investigative research on their own and for the most part rely on reports from mainstream media for what they write about (Holt, 2016a). What is lacking in research, however, is a good way of approaching the study of this field that allows for a discussion of specific alternative media (regardless of their ideological/political leanings) as a phenomenon while still taking the wide variety within this type of alternative media in to account. Now, how might we approach this field of study in a manner that both views alternative media as a phenomenon in itself and makes distinctions among the various media? In my effort to answer this question I have taken inspiration from theories about anti-system parties (Capoccia, 2002). Similar to how a country's political landscape is affected when a new and ideologically controversial party wins support, the media landscape is inevitably affected when new media that promote standpoints considered by others as controversial enter the arena and win an audience. If these media, like some parties, can represent positions that are harshly critical of the political establishment and the elites and at the same time express opinions that are very far from other actors in the arena, some specific problems arise. The effects of such changes are often described in terms of increasing political polarization and challenges to the legitimacy of the established political system (Sartori, 2005). Just as it is possible to talk about such types of parties' influence on the political arena, media that display similar features (anti-establishment rhetoric, a message that undermines confidence in the current order and positions far from the rest of the media actors), contribute to increased polarization in the public debate conducted through media in a society.

As for the Swedish ICAM, we can see that there are major differences in how the various actors relate and positions themselves to other media actors and to what extent their legitimacy is challenged (Holt, 2016a). Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the different types of anti-systemness in a more elaborated manner.

2. Different Types of Anti-Systemness

As stated above, these alternative media channels need to be analyzed in the light of their position as a perceived corrective of traditional media and of constrained public discourse. This is in line with an anti-system line of thought (Capoccia, 2002). Anti-system attitudes can occur both to the Left and the Right, and Capoccia (2002, drawing on Sartori, 1976), distinguishes between *relational anti-systemness* (how a party positions itself in relation to other parties and vice versa) and *ideological anti-systemness* (whether or not the ideological foundation of the party includes an agenda to alter or destroy the system; Capoccia, 2002, p. 24). It is thereby possible to discuss different types of anti-systemness and to widen the definition beyond strictly anti-democratic movements. Many European parties that Mudde (2014, p. 217) calls "populist radical right parties (PRRPs)", for example, are not ideologically anti-democratic, but can still show signs of *relational* "anti-systemness", placing them in the category "polarizing parties" according to Capoccia (2002). I argue that such a distinction is also relevant to the sphere of alternative media.

ICAM position themselves as contenders to, or rebels against mainstream media's norms and ways of working—for example, ethical codes stipulating caution when reporting on crimes committed by immigrants (see, Pressens Samarbetsnämnd, 2001). Because of such restraints, mainstream media is construed as a mouthpiece of the political establishment rather than as watchdogs in relation to politicians. Epistemologically, ICAM also posi-

tion themselves as exposers of mainstream media's "fake news". As a response to this there are now a number of alternative media that present other interpretations of reality, and may report in ways considered unorthodox by journalists in the mainstream. There is reason to examine whether they show signs of anti-systemness and, if so, in what ways. These media, like anti-system parties, display anti-system characteristics to different degrees and for various reasons: some are clearly anti-system in the ideological sense while others who are not still appear to be anti-system in the relational sense (see Figure 1) by virtue of the polarizing effect they have in relation to other media outlets. Furthermore, some ICAM might not show any signs of anti-systemness, relational or ideological, which is also important to be able to point out. The differences between these types of anti-systemness are illustrated below in The Alternative Media Anti-systemness Matrix (Figure 1).

Ideological anti-systemness refers to the degree of antagonism and distrust displayed by actors in the specific alternative media toward mainstream media and their institutions within the established media system of a nation. Capoccia (2002) explains Sartori's definition of ideological anti-systemness as abiding by a belief system that "does not share the values of the political order within which it operates" (Capoccia, 2002, p. 14). In other words, it is a stance that would abolish the system of governance as a whole. Obviously, this represents a quite extreme position and would in relation to media mean a vision of a completely different media system. Ideological anti-systemness might be studied through self-descriptions, interviews and content analysis of material available through the specific alternative media (blog posts, pods, articles, YouTube clips, etc.). In order to fulfil this criterion, it must be clear that the view taken on mainstream media is clearly antagonistic and excludes any hope of change or remedy of the perceived ills. One example of such an outspoken position in the Swedish case, as identified by (Holt, 2016a), is the YouTube channel, *Granskning Sverige*, which regularly interviewed journalists and politicians in a provocative and confrontative manner and recorded the interviews secretly and published them (often in a tendentiously edited version). The channel clearly displays signs of ideological anti-systemness since they generally attacked and targeted mainstream journalists and called for the whole system to be abolished and replaced.

Relational anti-systemness refers to media that may, but do not necessarily meet the criteria of ideological anti-systemness, but still have an effect on other media. Capoccia (2002, p. 14) outlines three attributes of relational anti-systemness:

- "Distant spatial location from neighboring parties" (meaning that their views are far from even those who could be described as closest to them), which in turn leads to:
- "Low coalitional potential", which in turn entails:
- "Outbidding propaganda tactics/delegitimizing messages".

As for parties, these three dimensions are applicable to alternative media. Although some are not ideologically anti-system, they may have an impeding and/or polarizing effect on the media environment as a whole, similar to the effect some parties have on the party system when other actors position themselves strongly against them, for example through a "cordon sanitaire" or quarantine, or by refusing to participate in the same public debates because their views are considered unacceptable. Their conduct can also change or erode the standards for what is considered acceptable, especially if there is a high demand for the type of content they offer. In the Swedish case, the unique selling point of ICAM is in several cases that they provide information about the ethnicity of criminal offenders (which is generally omitted in mainstream

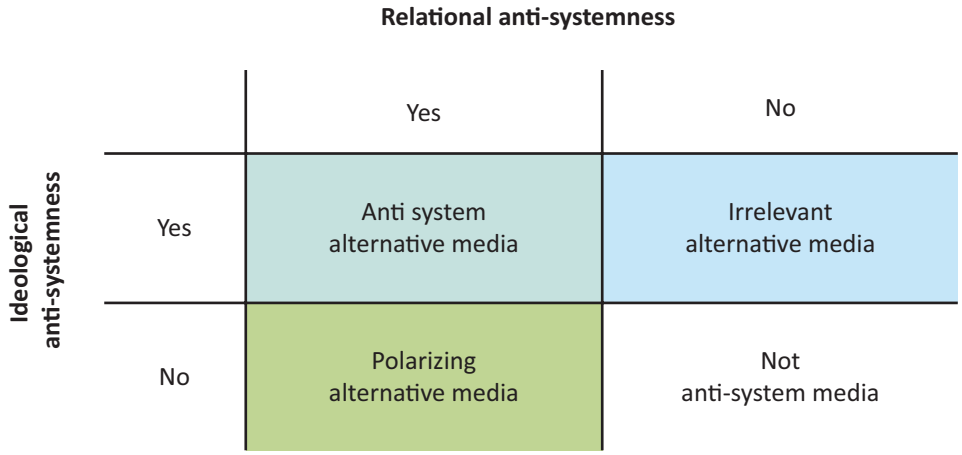

Figure 1. The Alternative Media Anti-systemness Matrix. Based on Capoccia's (2002) typology of "anti-system parties". The 2 × 2 matrix displays a typology of alternative media and their different forms of anti-systemness (or lack thereof) in relation to traditional media's positions, norms and ways of working.

news). If this type of content is attractive to readers, and hence constitutes a serious competitive advantage for ICAM in relation to mainstream media, it might lead to altered praxis in the mainstream. Such an effect is here deemed the outcome of relational anti-systemness because it would be an effect caused by the fact that other media adapt to new conditions imposed by the mere existence and success of the new actor (in a long-term perspective, however, if such a development takes place on a large scale, it would, of course, cease to be controversial and, as a consequence, also lose its anti-system quality).

Considering these two dimensions in a 2×2 matrix, a framework appears that makes it possible to differentiate alternative media based on observations about the applicability of both notions. If a specific alternative media displays signs of ideological as well as relational anti-systemness, we can talk about "Anti-System alternative media" as in the upper left square in Figure 1. They position themselves (ideologically) in direct opposition to the traditional media standards and functioning (for example by deliberately not joining the National Press Club or the media ethical system, and by displaying antagonism towards mainstream media actors). Relationally, they also have a direct impact on the surrounding media landscape because other actors openly renounce them (polarization), which tends to entail coverage in mainstream media. The content is of such a nature that it: 1) represents a real competitive factor for mainstream media; and 2) would be problematic to publish within the framework of mainstream media because of its controversial nature. The combination of 1) and 2) means a possibility that they also affect the behavior of traditional media. For example, mainstream media may change their practices to avoid losing readers. In Sweden, the website nordfront.se—run by national socialist "Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen", or the "Nordic Resistance Movement"—is an example that shows signs of both ideological and relational anti-systemness. While being outspokenly and radically anti-system in the ideological sense, they have also managed to attract much attention from mainstream media actors, especially in relation to a number of widely covered marches, most notably the one performed close to and at the same time as the Göteborg Book Fair in 2017. Their presence caused much outrage and indignation from debaters who found it unacceptable to let them march at all. As an organization, the movement (with a few hundred activists in the organization) decidedly belongs to the marginal fringe, but their media outlet, nordfront.se has gained a lot of visibility from mainstream media coverage of their marches (for example, activists typically wear shields with the organization's web-address eye-catchingly printed on it; see, BBCWorld, 2017). The above-mentioned YouTube channel, *Granskning Sverige*, has also been the subject of much journalistic coverage.

If, however, only the criterion of ideological anti-systemness is fulfilled and not the relational, as in the upper right square in Figure 1, they might be radical, hostile and antagonistic, but since they are generally ignored by other media, they can rightfully be described as "irrelevant", because they fail to elicit reactions and in effect publicity. They are not relationally anti-system in the sense that they have no direct impact on the surrounding media landscape. Their content is of a nature that would be problematic to publish within the framework of mainstream media. This category includes various blogs, social media accounts and other alternative media outlets run by fringe groups or individuals who simply do not cause any stir in the surrounding media environment. A good example is the Swedish PEGIDA-movement's Facebook page (Holt & Haller, 2017). In Germany, PEGIDA's Facebook page has a large following (Haller & Holt, 2018), and the movements activities have caused much debate and attracted prime time media coverage worldwide, but the Swedish branch has hardly been noted at all, and interactions around the rare posts appearing on the page are very few.

Moving down to the left corner square of the lower row of the matrix, we find alternative media that are not ideologically anti-system but have attributes of relational anti-systemness. These can be called "polarizing alternative media" and are not in principle (ideologically) opposed to the basic rules and guidelines that govern the established media's approach. They do not express a desire to replace the whole system, but call for changes in it. Those who take part in these media would not have problems connecting to the media ethical system and might actively seek membership in the National Press Club. However, the content is of such a nature that it: 1) competes with the established media; and 2) could be problematic to publish within the framework of the traditional media publishing channels. Their interpretation and application of the ethical guidelines are different from those of editors and journalists in traditional media, but do not challenge the existing order. Relationally, polarizing alternative media affect the surrounding media landscape in the same way as the anti-systemic—that is, by mutual rejection and open antagonism (for example they might not be accepted as members in the National Press Club, because Club members might find the "distant spatial location" too "distant". Secondly, they could also in theory affect other media's behavior. An example from the Swedish scene here would be the blog *Samhällsnytt* (formerly Avpixlat.info), a well-known ICAM in Sweden. One of the main contributors, Mats Dagerlind, applied for membership in the Press Club, but was denied entrance (Sköld, 2013) due to the fact that the blog did not have an official publisher, which is a criterion for being accepted as member in club.

The lower right corner of the table is a residual category for alternative media that do not meet any of the criteria for anti-systemness. This category is important in the context of discussing alternative media with agendas that are deemed as provocative and even harmful by some, but do not qualify for any of the two notions of anti-systemness presented in Figure 1.

3. Concluding Remarks

The typology outlined in The Alternative Media Anti-systemness Matrix can be useful both for selecting relevant cases when studying alternative media and for analyzing them. According to what has been described above, it will be of special interest to look specifically at purely "Anti-system" alternative media, with a potency to have a significant impact on public discourse and "polarizing alternative media", which might not pose a threat to the existing system per se, but still affect the debate, polarizing and presenting alternative agendas and interpretations of events to such an extent that meaningful discussions are difficult. Both types in the left-hand column can theoretically also have an impact on traditional media's behavior. "Irrelevant alternative media" can be represented by numerous blogs and sites that present views that are radically anti-system, but which do not cause any reactions from other actors or pose any threat to either the power over how reality is described or traditional media's circulation/readership. Such sites exist in abundance but fail to have any notable impact. Research about "alternative media" along these lines has largely been absent among media scholars but provides a good framework for distinguishing different alternative media from each other in a meaningful way and also lays the ground for relevant comparisons to be made between different cases.

The main aim of this article has been to offer a framework for analyzing alternative media that does not depend on any specific ideological position or normative assumption about the general nature of alternative media. Since media constitute the platform through which citizens in democratic society orient themselves and form opinions in order to participate in democratic life in an enlightened manner, the most important question to ask in relation to alternative media is how they might affect the conditions for public discourse. If they show signs of anti-systemness (either relational or ideological, but most potently both). They merit further scrutiny along lines of inquiry that seek to establish the magnitude of their possible anti-system effect on public discourse.

This framework also offers a fruitful way of putting specific cases in perspective and avoiding generalizations. While the purely anti-system alternative media can be described as both radical and threatening to a free and open debate and having a considerable impact on public discourse in terms of managing to attract a lot of attention, they might also be rather rare. More common are probably examples of extreme and fringe alternative media that live their lives mostly unnoticed by the vast majority and without opportunities of staging events or quasi-events that reward them with attention disproportionate to their size. In other words, mainstream media might actually turn otherwise irrelevant alternative media into full-fledged anti-system alternative media by the amount of coverage they devote to them. In cases where provocations are laid out as bait, this has proven to be a successful strategy (and a signum) for some alt-right actors (Gourarie, 2016).

It should also be noted that the matrix in Figure 1. can never be used in a static way—it is designed to allow for the dynamic nature of public discourse through media. Since the positions described in it are in essence dependent on other actors (mainstream media) and their positions, any momentary snapshot of the media landscape may become outdated after a while. Positions may have changed on both sides (ICAM and mainstream media). For example, an ICAM which falls under the category "polarizing alternative media" at one point might, due to changed behavior, increased acceptance from other actors or normalization of their worldview due to a changed political reality, verge into the category "Not anti-system". Nevertheless, the matrix remains a framework in which it is possible to make important distinctions between specific alternative media at any given time.

3.1. Limitations and Future Research

The contribution of this article is mainly theoretical, and the framework presented is intended to inspire future, more empirically oriented research. The examples mentioned above from the Swedish scene are included as illustrations, but in order to come to more valid conclusions, more rigorous empirical analysis of reach, impact and reactions from other media, as well as of attitudes and ideology needs to be done. Also, the argument made in this article does not purport to give the full answer to the question of how alternative media impact and affect public discourse—it highlights specific aspects of this, namely that the relational aspects, alongside the ideological aspects of the emergence of new alternative media actors are important for understanding the bigger picture.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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About the Author

Kristoffer Holt is Associate Professor in Media and Communication Studies at the Department of Mass Communication and Media, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait. Holt has done research into alternative media, media criticism, media ethics and participatory journalism. His work has appeared in *New Media & Society*, the *European Journal of Communication, Information, Communication & Society*, *Journalism Practice*, *Javnost: The Public* and the *Journal of Media Ethics*, among others.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 58–69
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1493

Article

The Moral Gatekeeper? Moderation and Deletion of User-Generated Content in a Leading News Forum

Svenja Boberg *, Tim Schatto-Eckrodt, Lena Frischlich and Thorsten Quandt

Department of Communication, University of Muenster, 48143 Muenster, Germany;
E-Mails: svenja.boberg@uni-muenster.de (S.B.), tim.schatto-eckrodt@uni-muenster.de (T.S.-E.),
lena.frischlich@uni-muenster.de (L.F.), thorsten.quandt@uni-muenster.de (T.Q.)

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 24 March 2018 | Accepted: 27 June 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
Participatory formats in online journalism offer increased options for user comments to reach a mass audience, also enabling the spreading of incivility. As a result, journalists feel the need to moderate offensive user comments in order to prevent the derailment of discussion threads. However, little is known about the principles on which forum moderation is based. The current study aims to fill this void by examining 673,361 user comments (including all incoming and rejected comments) of the largest newspaper forum in Germany (Spiegel Online) in terms of the moderation decision, the topic addressed, and the use of insulting language using automated content analysis. The analyses revealed that the deletion of user comments is a frequently used moderation strategy. Overall, more than one-third of comments studied were rejected. Further, users mostly engaged with political topics. The usage of swear words was not a reason to block a comment, except when offenses were used in connection with politically sensitive topics. We discuss the results in light of the necessity for journalists to establish consistent and transparent moderation strategies.

Keywords
community management; computational methods; forum moderation; gatekeeping; journalism; participatory media; Spiegel Online; topic modeling; user comments; user participation

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

Which information makes it into the news, thus gaining the possibility of attracting the attention of a mass audience? From the very beginning, this fundamental gatekeeping decision has accompanied the work of journalists. Nowadays, the figurative "gate" journalists are keeping has changed. Since the emergence of participatory formats, journalists are no longer the only communicators publishing content on their news outlets; user comments have become a widely established supplement to journalistic output (Walther & Jang, 2012), though the value of comment sections has been questioned by news organizations resulting in the transfer of participatory spaces to non-proprietary platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall, & Fast, 2015). One reason for these developments might be that the maintenance of comment sections is costly and challenging. In contrast to earlier hopes of encouraging constructive discussions (Papacharissi, 2004) and actively integrating users in news production processes (Bruns, 2008), user comments have been found to also open the floor for "dark participation" (see Quandt, 2018), ranging from misinformation and hate campaigns to individual trolling and cyberbullying. Researchers have focused on these uncivil forms of communication, such as the spreading of vulgar language, disrespect, and aggression, highlighting their possible negative impacts (Coe, Kenski, & Rains,

2014). Yet other readers tend to respond adamantly to such uncivilities, increasing the risk of derailing debate (Ziegele, Breiner, & Quiring, 2014).

To prevent the abuse of participatory comment sections, journalists no longer only guard their open gates (Singer et al., 2011) by pre-selecting valuable user comments, but they also keep a vigilant eye on the comment section, ready to throw out anyone who transgresses the rules (Ksiazek, 2015). Although professional journalists feel morally obliged to create a discussion-friendly environment (Meltzer, 2015), they often lack a shared understanding of not only *what* they find uncivil and threatening (Frischlich, Boberg, & Quandt, 2017) but also *how* to deal with it (Muddiman & Stroud, 2017). Studies on the underlying factors of these inconsistent moderation decisions are rare and rely mostly on journalists' subjective perceptions (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011).

Which factors affect the actual gatekeeping decision? Do journalists mainly respond to widely acknowledged taboos, like offensive language and swearing, or are there problematic topics that are moderated with greater care? The current study aims to fill this void. We conducted an automated content analysis of a unique large dataset set from a six-month period of the entire comment section (pre- and post-moderation) of the leading German news outlet Spiegel Online (SPON). Our analysis unveils hidden gatekeeping decisions and allows for the observation of real gatekeeping processes.

2. Gatekeeping in Times of Participatory Journalism

Gatekeeping represents one of the most studied areas of communication research, dealing with the question of how editorial space is filled and how topics, events, and interpretative patterns are prioritized (Heinderyckx, 2015). Since White's (1950) depiction of journalists as rational news selectors who mainly depend on their individual freedom of choice, the concept has expanded in regard to several other factors, such as institutional structures on organizational and societal levels (Vos, 2015).

The emergence of participatory journalism not only changed journalistic decision-making processes but also the position of journalistic organizations in the information network. As citizens have gained opportunities to add information to the news, multiple "gates" have opened (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000), resulting in a myriad of information sources and actors involved in communication processes. Traditional media gates have not lost their importance, but as communication hierarchies have flattened, researchers rather refer to "curated flows" (Thorson & Wells, 2015, p. 27) or "gatewatching" (Bruns, 2005, p. 1) when they describe the selection and editing of news content online. This development has also changed journalism on the output level with participatory formats, particularly user comments (Walther & Jang, 2012), becoming an established feature on newspaper websites.

The emergence of these new communication channels was accompanied by euphoric hopes that the world was witnessing a new form of the deliberative public sphere (Bruns, 2008). Early studies show that journalists embrace the idea of being in touch with their readers but are also reluctant to offer them full access to their platforms (Domingo et al., 2008). According to Lewis and Westlund's (2015) systematization of cross-media news work, audience perceptions vary according to journalistic roles and activities. Considering tasks of community management, like observation and selection, journalists see users as active participants, yet the way journalists communicate with their readers has not changed fundamentally. Indeed, editors in online newsrooms are still in charge of the production process and are only willing to allow small "walled gardens" for actual user participation (Hanitzsch & Quandt, 2012). Since media organizations also implement participative offerings as additional channels of distribution (especially in case of non-proprietary platforms like Facebook), audiences are perceived as commodities or statistically aggregated target groups (Lewis & Westlund, 2015) resulting in the challenge of balancing editorial and economic goals. Nevertheless, possibilities of user engagement are usually limited to polls, comment sections, and social media sites as another outlet of news.

3. Guarding the Gates against Uncivil Intruders: Why Journalists Perceive Moderation to Be Necessary

Participatory formats offer journalists a great way to get directly in touch with their readership (Vos, 2015) and for users to articulate their views and evaluate the journalistic output. Besides constructive discussions, participatory formats allow irrelevant or even uncivil content to reach the public's eye. Coe et al. (2014) define incivility as an "unnecessarily disrespectful tone toward the discussion forum, its participants or its topics" (p. 660), which manifests as offensive attacks against other persons (Gagliardone et al., 2016), social groups (Engelin & De Silva, 2016), or disruption of the discussion for one's own amusement (i.e., trolling; Binns, 2012). Often, incivility is accompanied by swearing in terms of using highly arousing and offensive language (Kwon & Cho, 2017). In contrast to incivility as a whole, which can be quite hard to detect (Ross et al., 2016), swearing is less difficult to recognize for forum moderators. The presence of obscene language can be easily detected by both community managers and keyword-based algorithms. Also, journalists' ethical guidelines clearly condemn the use of offensive language (Muddiman & Stroud, 2017).

Since user comments are often discussed as indicators of the opinion climate, journalists fear how offensive and hateful comments could affect public discussions. Community managers not only deal with single users but also with orchestrated attacks exploiting the trustworthy environment of traditional news outlets (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2017). Also, recent political controversies, like the election of USA President Donald Trump, have turned the interaction with user-generated content itself into a con-

tentiously discussed topic (Hofseth, 2017). The reason why news media still enable user comments is rooted in the journalistic role of the "press advocating for the public [and] serving as its voice in a mass-mediated society" (Braun & Gillespie, 2011, p. 385). In that regard, comments are seen as an additional tool to create a deliberative public sphere.

Following this line of thought, Lewis, Holton and Coddington (2014) introduced the concept of "reciprocal journalism" (p. 230), which describes the relationship between journalism and participatory formats as an interaction both sides benefit from. Journalists function as community builders who encourage an active discourse. In order to sustain the bond between media outlets and users, community managers have to establish an environment that "operates on and continues to foster trust" (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 235). This also implies that their responsibility is to protect the public from cyberhate and content that could harm vulnerable groups (Pöyhtäri, Con, In, Bassi, & Bretagna, 2014). The prevalence of hate and disrespectful communication might damage this trusting relationship by putting off users who want to engage in a constructive discussion as well as making journalists question the overall benefit of comment sections. The latter recently caused several media outlets to disable their comments (Moosa, 2014). Also, research shows that the engagement of users is rather low, which also diminishes the commercial value of comment sections from the media organizations' perspective (Karlsson et al., 2015).

As a consequence, community managers operate in a field of tension between their perceived moral obligation to keep undesirable content out of the comment section and their efforts to engage and reach people via participatory formats. They have to balance the risk of letting undesirable content slip through and scaring off users who would prefer a focused, theme-oriented discussion or rejecting too much, thereby restricting their forum and possibly being accused of censorship. Furthermore, they are often challenged by a vast amount of content that has to be handled in tandem with other daily tasks. As a result, journalists need to develop strategies to help integrate the moderation of user comments into their daily newsroom routines.

4. How to Deal with Undesirable Comments: Strategies of Community Management

Facing the challenges of participatory journalism, gatekeepers have been forced to differentiate their journalistic roles in order to handle problematic user comments. In that regard, comment moderation can be more or less restrictive. Community managers mostly rely on non-interactive strategies (Frischlich et al., 2017), which basically involve the decision of whether to block a comment or not. Non-interactive strategies include the laissez-faire approach of trusting the community's self-regulatory efficacy, more restrictive means like deactivating the comment sections below articles dealing with potentially sensitive topics (*closing the gates*; Nielsen, 2012; Reich, 2011), enabling single comments after inspection (*guarding the gates*), or scanning the comments for unwanted content and deleting it retroactively (*patrolling behind the gates*; Ksiazek, 2015).

Analogous to the "hierarchy of influences" conception of the journalistic working process (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016), the individual moderation decision is affected by newsroom routines, media organizations for which the journalists work, and the societal institutions and social system in which they operate. As described above, journalists feel obligated to provide a public forum for increasing awareness of relevant societal issues (Braun & Gillespie, 2011). On the level of newsroom routines, moderation is influenced by the political leaning, editorial policy, and quality standards of the media brand (Pöyhtäri et al., 2014), which include editorial guidelines such as netiquette.

Looking at the content of comments, research shows that the topic of the discussion influences the amount of incivility journalists discover (Ksiazek, 2018) as well as the perceived necessity for a moderator to intervene (Loosen et al., 2017). Comment threads on sports or hobbies are perceived as less problematic, whereas political issues are often accompanied by uncivil content, which not only applies to general topics but also to the framing of issues (i.e., portraying refugees as potential criminals). Beyond the respective topic of the comment thread, user comments also address the development of the comment thread *itself* as a subject of discussion. These examples of meta-discussion often manifest themselves as discontent with journalistic news production or forum moderation (i.e., allegations of journalists being partial or even lying; Prochazka & Schweiger, 2016) or critical remarks towards other commenters (Loosen et al., 2017) and thus raise the awareness of community managers. Further, comments that include swearing are blocked rather consistently (Muddiman & Stroud, 2017). Most plausibly, this is because the prevalence of swearing is an obvious and easy-to-detect feature in the comment and also a clear violation of discussion norms to which journalists adhere (Pöyhtäri et al., 2014). Since swearing in relation to political topics attracts readers' attention, Kwon and Cho (2017) conclude that the norms around the acceptable degree of swearing vary across topical areas, so it can be assumed that the prevalence of swearing and the topic of the respective comment serve as the most obvious characteristics to be considered in the moderation decision.

Even though editorial guidelines serve as a point of reference, the decision of which comments to reject is often based on personal experiences (i.e., frequent exposure to hateful content) or even gut feelings (Frischlich et al., 2017). Therefore, differences not only between distinct media outlets but also within the same newsroom can be expected.

Little is known about the effectiveness of moderation. Requiring user registration and pre- and post-

moderation of discussion threads clearly promotes a more civil platform (Ksiazek, 2015). To date, studies that are able to compare the actual incoming comments with community managers' moderation decisions are scarce. As a notable exception, the study by Muddiman and Stroud (2017) on moderation of comments in the New York Times' online forum showed that community managers partially tolerated forms of incivility other than swearing because readers engaged heavily with swearing, and swearing merely poisons the climate of discussion.

5. The Case of the SPON Forum

The research object of this study, SPON, is one of the most important German news websites. Launched in 1994, it carries on a long tradition in the online market. The website has 20.64 million unique users per month (Statista, 2018) and is the third most frequently visited news website in Germany. SPON has the largest online forum in the country with comments visible to everyone, although users have to register in order to write a comment.

The user comments in the SPON forum are handled by 11 trained social media editors who have long-standing experience in the moderation of content. Along with maintenance of the forum, they are also responsible for other social media channels, such as Facebook and Twitter. Comments are checked for violations of the netiquette individually in the context of the discussion thread. Thereby, the forum aims to encourage an "open, friendly and respectful climate of discussion" and further seeks a "fair and factual tone of argumentation" (SPON, 2018). Comments that include swearing, vulgar language, or other elements of disrespectful and aggressive communication are banned. In the SPON comment section, mostly post-moderation is used. Additionally, for about 30% of the articles, a form of pre-moderation takes place, namely closing the discussion threads on sensitive topics like Middle East conflicts or the refugee crisis (Kriesel, 2017).

Analogous to the existing literature on forum moderation and as outlined in the SPON netiquette, the prevalence of swearing seems to be an important cue to be considered in the moderation decisions of SPON community management, since swear words are easy to detect by only scanning a comment or with the technical support of keyword filters. Also, the fact that SPON disables the comment sections under certain topics shows their sensitivity to problems of incivility that might arise with regard to issues that have been perceived as problematic in the past. But do the community managers of SPON also use the prevalence of swearing as an obvious reason to block a comment in order to preserve a friendly tone in the discussion? Are they more alerted to political topics in which swearing is less likely to be tolerated? To explore these questions, we formulated the following research questions.

- RQ1: Which topics are brought up in the user comments of the SPON forum (before moderation)?
- RQ2: To what extent do the comments include swearing (before moderation)?
- RQ3: Are comments that include swearing more likely to be banned by the forum moderators (moderation decision)?
- RQ4: Are comments that include swearing more likely to be banned when they occur in political contexts compared to non-political contexts (moderation decision)?

6. Method

To explore these questions, we used a six-month dataset of the complete SPON forum, which gives meaningful insight into how community managers handle user comments. This unique data resembles the whole input in the form of pre- and post-moderation comments, allowing the analysis of comments that were not publicly accessible.

6.1. Data

During the examined period (November 30, 2016–May 16, 2017), a total of 673,361 comments were posted referring to 9,548 articles. More than one-third of the comments (35%) were rejected by community managers after publication.

Before the analysis, a number of common preprocessing steps were applied (for an overview, see Günther & Quandt, 2016), including removing HTML markup, URLs, and stop words. Still, the data contained a lot of meaningless tokens, which were removed by excluding words that occurred less than 20 times ($n = 643,298$). To manage the ambiguous use of names (i.e., "Mrs. Merkel", "Angela"), the named entities of the comments were extracted with the Python software library spaCy (Honnibal & Johnson, 2015) and standardized manually.

6.2. Analysis

To explore what people in the SPON forum were talking about, we identified comment topics using latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA; Blei, Ng, & Jordan, 2003). LDA is an unsupervised learning algorithm that discovers latent topics inductively based on patterns of words that co-occur in the same document. It provides information on (i) to what extent each word of the corpus characterizes each topic (β) and (ii) to what extent each topic is present in each document (γ). Each comment can be a mixture of several topics (Günther & Domahidi, 2017). There is no clear-cut definition of characteristics of topics in theoretical terms; the meaning of the LDA-detected topics is assessed empirically by the interpretation of characteristic features of the respective topics (Maier et al., 2018). Since the topics are derived from co-occurring words, they do not necessarily resemble general topics of me-

dia coverage, like politics or sports or certain events like elections, but capture prevalent patterns of the way in which certain issues are addressed or framed (Jacobi, Van Atteveldt, & Welbers, 2016). For example, the LDA might identify two different topics that deal with the same issue but differ regarding the valence of the co-occurring top terms.

Before estimating the topic model, two parameters have to be predefined: (i) the number of topics (k) and (ii) the number of topics allowed per document (α). To find the ideal numbers of k and α, a series of 200 topic models were computed based on training and test samples using the LDA function of the R topicmodels package (Grün & Hornik, 2011). We found that the model of $k = 25$ and $\alpha = 5$ had a large increase in predictive power. These parameters were run several times on various random samples of the data, providing reproducible results with only minor deviations. The 25 topics were characterized by looking at the top terms and documents most representative for each topic. The interpretation was validated by two additional coders who were able to find the same labels for each topic. As a second validation step, an analysis of intercoder-reliability was performed to assess to what degree human coders and the topic modeling concur. The resulting kappa (Cohen, 1960) indicated substantial agreement, $\kappa = 0.76$ (Landis & Koch, 1977). It is noteworthy that the human coders agreed as much as the comparison of algorithm and human coders.

Swear words were detected following a deductive rule-based approach (Günther & Quandt, 2016). A swearing dictionary was implemented based on an actual keyword list used by journalists to prefilter insulting comments (Frischlich et al., 2017), which was extended by an online search of further swear words, resulting in 1,829 terms (i.e., "asshole", "idiot", or racial or misogynist slurs). The dictionary was matched with the text of the comments, extracting the respective swear word and the variable "contains swearing" (yes/no). With regard to RQ3, a subsample was created, including all comments that contain swear words.

Due to the large number of cases, it is challenging to infer meaningful relationships. For instance, using standard null-hypothesis significance testing on the given sample size would most likely result in finding a significant difference between the published and rejected corpus, even though the difference might be close to non-existent (Weber & Popova, 2012). To bypass this problem, the logic of the independent sample t-test is reversed; instead of testing for *difference* and rejecting the null hypothesis (*no difference*), the data is tested for *equivalence*, which means rejecting the rephrased H_0 (*true effect*) and supporting the alternative hypothesis (*absence of an effect that is worth examining*; Lakens, 2017). Naturally, a null-effect cannot be supported; thus, a maximum-no-effect (Δ) has to be predefined as a threshold. In the current study, the equivalence tests were calculated following Weber and Popova (2012), applying the mathematical formula to an R function and testing common effect sizes (small: $\Delta = 0.1$; medium: $\Delta = 0.3$; large $\Delta = 0.5$).

7. Results

To some degree, the extracted topics resemble the typical repertoire of news media coverage, including politics, sports, culture, and education (see Table 1). In line with prior studies, the data shows that users engaged heavily with political topics. Not only were almost half (10/25) of the identified topics about general political issues, such as democracy, or specific events, such as elections or the refugee crisis, political comments were also rather frequent in the corpus, especially the German federal election ($n = 28,018$), the civil war in Syria ($n = 25,849$), and diplomatic relations to Turkey ($n = 22,842$).

Apart from generic topics and current events, the LDA also revealed several forms of meta-discussions that were brought up by SPON forum users, namely constructive discourse, uncivil discourse, "fake news" accusations, and trolling. The constructive and uncivil discourse topics both addressed netiquette as an issue but through different frames. On the one hand, they were contrasted in a call for a civil debate and, on the other, used to discredit other users or community management. The topic addressing "fake news" did not cover the ongoing public debate on this phenomenon (see Quandt, Frischlich, Boberg, & Schatto-Eckrodt, in press) but used the term "fake news" as a complaint against SPON. Often, this complaint was associated with accusations of censorship against community management, thus representing a disclaiming remark towards legacy media in general and SPON in particular rather than referring to the general issue of media coverage. Finally, the trolling topic was characterized by rather pointless disruptive or uncivil language. These comments did not address media critique in a direct manner but, nonetheless, qualified it as stance against the general discussion thread by disrespecting discussion norms, such as relevance to the issue and civility.

In general, there is no topic which appears exclusively in the published or blocked comments. Plausibly, the comments that hint at a disrespectful way of communication, such as accusations of mainstream media being liars or "Fake News", trolling, and uncivil discourse, are rejected more often. Also, comments on controversial political issues are often subject to moderation. The distribution of topic-means among the published and blocked comments does not seem to indicate that community managers are more alert to political hot topics. Naturally, these topics evoke more engagement and maybe even more uncivil behavior. Nevertheless, the differences are barely noteworthy.

As community managers widely rely on keyword-based classification of presumable uncivil content that requires further inspection, swearing can be considered one of the key identifying features of rejected comments. With a total of 58,176 (8.6%), the number of comments

Table 1. Description of user comment topics.

Description	Most representative terms	Prevalence of topic (*n* of comments where $\gamma > 0.3$)
Politics		
German federal election	SPD, Schulz, Merkel, CDU, Green party, party, AfD, voter, politics	28,018
war in Syria	Russia, USA, war, Syria, Putin, Assad, NATO, Western World, weapon, Ukraine	25,849
tensions in turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, Germany, Turkish people, nation, Merkel, government, Europe, politician	22,842
USA election & trump administration	Trump, USA, Obama, president, Putin, Clinton, world, American people, Democrats, Russia	20,076
refugees & threat of crime and terror	Germany, nation, refugee, police, live, Islam, religion, immigrant, victim, Berlin	19,090
Eu & Brexit	Europe, Germany, UK, Brexit, nation, France, Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Brussels	17,755
right-wing populism	AfD, right, left, party, the Left Party, opinion, Höcke, democracy, Germany, Nazi	15,914
democracy	election, democracy, majority, elected, the people, voter, citizen, politics, parties, politicians	14,389
Society		
Families & education	children, woman, parent, man, school, live, learn, teacher, student, family	17,690
Societal norms	people, live, society, politics, freedom, democracy, nation, capitalism, future, population	14,661
Elite critique	Politician, Mr., Mrs., responsibility, military, Merkel, Germany, official, boss, DDR	13,269
Law	law, case, state, rule, apply, judge, court, citizen, judgement, question	13,161
Science	question, earth, number, statement, actual, study, comparison, statistics, science, result	13,109
Economy		
Employment, taxes & pension	money, pay, tax, work, Euro, Germany, state, cost, income, pension	22,694
European financial crisis	money, Euro, Germany, billion, Greece, bank, depts, millions, pay, cost	16,695
Global economy	USA, Germany, China, company, product, world, market, economy, land, Trump	14,221
Consumer Service		
Automobile & energy	car, drive, VW, diesel, electricity, PS, vehicle, Tesla, kilowatt hour	26,157
Infrastructure	railway, internet, Berlin, data, customer, Hamburg, city, airport, fast, smartphone	18,170
Health	eat, people, living, water, doctor, meat, alcohol, patient, couple, beer	15,965
Leisure		
Sports	FC Bayern, BVB, game, player, soccer, fan, club, team, rank, last	21,930
(Pop)Culture	woman, watch, movie, music, picture, sad, Tatort (German TV show), nice, art, show	17,364

Table 1. (Cont.) Description of user comment topics.

Description	Most representative terms	Prevalence of topic (*n* of comments where $\gamma > 0.3$)
Meta-Discussion		
"Fake News"	media, SPON, fake, news, fact, press, article, Spiegel magazine, truth	18,496
Uncivil discourse	contribution, thanks, read, SPON, write, comment, topic, question, forum, opinion	18,328
Trolling	people, say, bla, nix, money, whatever, believe, stupid, blame, real	13,756
Constructive discourse	question, problem, situation, opinion, politics, effective, condition, manner, behavior, topic	11,887

Notes: LDA (method = Gibbs, $k = 25$, $\alpha = 5$, $n = 67,336$).

that included swear words or racial slurs was surprisingly low (*RQ2*). In fact, the significant equivalence test ($t = -36.68$, $\Delta < 0.1$, $p < 0.001$) shows that the presence of swearing does not discriminate between the published and rejected comments, or at least, the effect size is minimal ($r < 0.1$). Thus, comments that include swearing are not more likely to be banned (*RQ3*). It is worth mentioning that the individual swearing terms of the dictionary were also distributed equally in the published and rejected comments except for some terms of xenophobic slurs, like "goatfucker", or political insults, such as "nazi-slut", which were blocked in over 90% of the cases.

So, if the occurrence of swearing as an agreed-upon violation of the netiquette is alone not enough to attract the attention of community managers, which comment characteristics are? Relatedly, in which topics is swearing tolerated or handled more restrictively? With regard to *RQ4*, all comments that contained swearing were tested for equivalence among the moderation decisions for each topic. Again, the equivalence among the published and blocked corpus was tested with a threshold of a presumed maximum-no-effect of $\Delta = 0.1$, $\Delta = 0.3$, and $\Delta = 0.5$.

For the vast majority of the topics, the assumption of equivalence can be supported, meaning there is no appreciable difference between topic and moderation decision in comments with swearing (see Figure 1). However, for the topics "automobile" ($p = 0.061$), "right-wing populism" ($p = 0.99$), "fake news" ($p = 0.28$) and "threat (terror/refugees)" ($p = 0.26$), the assumption of a maximum-no-effect of $\Delta = 0.1$ is not supported. The data shows that community managers were more likely to tolerate swearing in the context of automobiles, for instances regarding the diesel emissions scandal. Swearing was less tolerated in the context of right-wing populism, fake news allegations, and associating refugees with threats to national security. Yet the differences between the published and the rejected corpus are rather small; when applying a medium maximum-no-effect of $\Delta = 0.3$, the equivalence tests for all topics are highly significant.

In sum, the results show that the users of the SPON forum engage heavily in political discussions as well as meta-discourses on the netiquette of the forum. We found no topic-related differences between the published and rejected comments. Also, the use of swear words was not a key indicator in the rejection of comments, whereas racial slurs were blocked rather consistently. Even though the forum moderators were slightly more restrictive on the co-occurrence of swearing and topics dealing with refugee politics, fake news allegations, or right-wing populism, systematic moderation or even exclusion of certain topics can be denied. Thus, to understand moderation decisions, further context factors must be considered.

8. Discussion

Community managers and digital editors are expected to guard the open gates of online newspapers (Singer et al., 2011) against dark participation—with the obvious challenge of finding an adequate level of intervention. The current study aimed at providing empirical insights into the gatekeeping processes of community managers.

The results show that there is neither consistency nor a systematic way of blocking certain topics or styles of communication. Not even swearing as a generally agreed-upon violation of both journalistic professional norms and netiquette was eliminated consistently from published comments. There is a slight indication, though, that racial and misogynistic slurs are more strictly, yet not completely, blocked demonstrating journalists' efforts to protect vulnerable social groups. We also found that the use of swear words is not handled more or less restrictively in conjunction with specific topics. However, we found small differences in moderation behavior of swearing in conjunction with comments on the refugee crisis, fake news, and right-wing populism. This finding hints at the community managers' endeavors to keep offensive language out of already sensitive topics that refer to nationally prevalent political controversies in order to fulfill a mediating role in the discourse. Notably, SPON does not enable all articles to be commented on, so topic-related moderation decisions that took place beforehand are not reflected in our results.

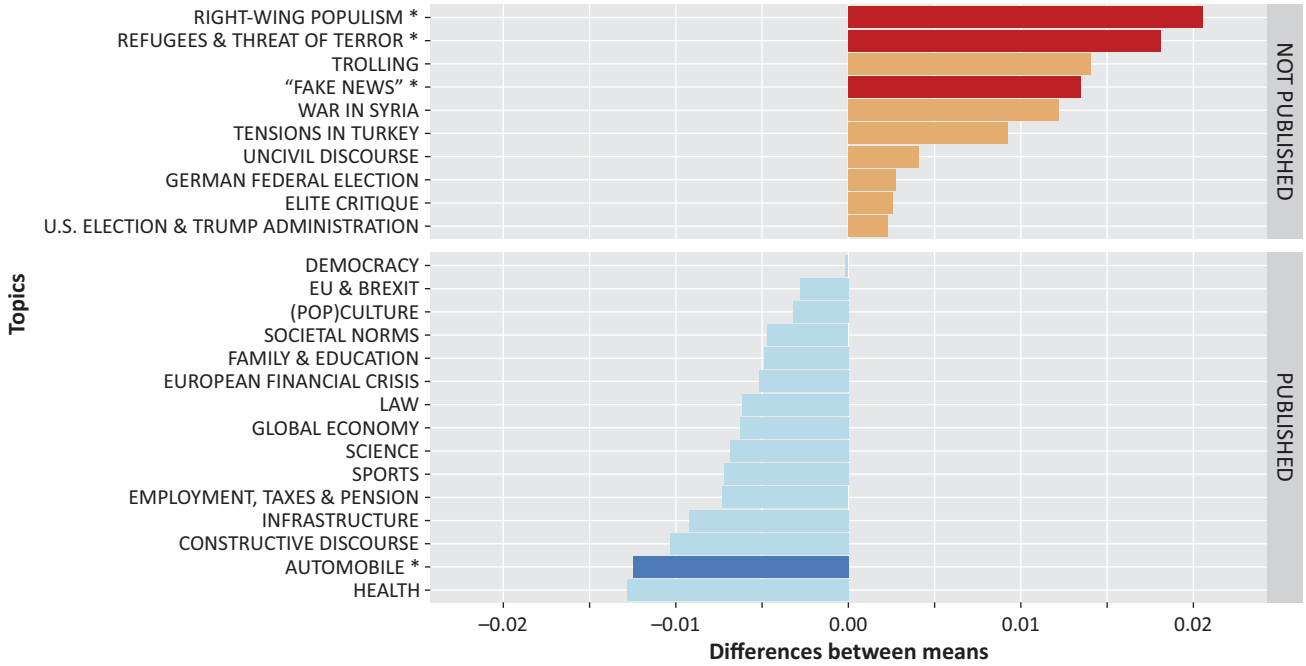

Figure 1. Equivalency among topic and gatekeeping decision on the comments that include swearing. $N = 58,176$, $\Delta = 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Overall, the data shows that there was no systematic cleaning by topic. Simple heuristics, such as abusive language, are unrelated to whether a comment was rejected. This allows for two possible conclusions: either there are context factors other than the topic or independent from the content of the comment, or there is no systematic strategy, and moderation fully depends on the individual instincts of community managers. The non-consistent blocking of swearing could also hint at certain contexts in which swearing is not perceived as problematic; insults could, for example, also be used to admonish other users (i.e., "don't act like an [swear word]"). Further research should take the context of swearing into account—especially to whom the words refer—in order to evaluate if they are used to disrespect other users in a hostile way. Context factors that are independent from the content of a single comment could include personal or organizational constraints, such as work-load, the lack of supportive resources, the number of comments streaming in at the same time, or the recognition and blocking of known troublemakers independent from the content of the post.

There are some limitations to this study. The analysis was limited to one forum, and therefore, influencing factors on the organizational level, such as the political leaning of the newspaper in regard to the restrictiveness of moderation policies, could not be explored. Also, to further explore the inter-individual effects of gatekeeping decisions, it would be necessary to know who exactly moderated each respective comment.

Although we discovered no general patterns of moral red lines, the mere fact that more than one-third of the comments were rejected demonstrates that journalists feel morally obligated to protect their comment sections from harmful content or, at least, content that is perceived as such. Yet we do not know which standards they apply or which concept of an ideal moderation they pursue. Further research should investigate which aspirations individual community managers associate with a functioning forum moderation and why they think certain levels of restrictiveness are vital to online discussions.

Finally, the current study finds strong evidence against media-critical conspiracy theorists who believe that the mainstream media systematically conceals issues that are opposed to the political mainstream and blocks comments that offer alternative views. Nevertheless, non-transparent moderation practices make it difficult for users to understand why their posts have not been published and stir up feelings of mistreatment. With regard to the concept of reciprocal journalism, media outlets should define for themselves which benefits they derive from enabling comment sections and, further, what kind of forum they want to offer to their readers. Following this, moderation guidelines should be developed that are not only in line with this strategic decision but are also application-oriented and provide more detailed instructions than the general framework of the netiquette. Most importantly, the selection and rejection of user comments should be transparent to the users of the forum. Even if this might not silence every "fake news" accusation, it could help to regain trust from the readers who feel misunderstood from time to time but are generally willing to engage in a deliberative discussion.

9. Conclusions

The current study demonstrates that forum moderators face the continuous challenge of creating spaces for user participation that are beneficial for both the media organizations and their readership while having to protect these spaces from dark forms of participation, like hateful content, disruptive or nonsense comments, or even threatening accusations. The mere fact that a substantial amount of user comments is perceived to be not suitable to reach the public eye raises the question of why media organizations even bother to encourage user participation—or differently phrased, what do media organizations envision as the ideal forum for user participation? In this context, it is worth investigating for future research how much proprietary and non-proprietary platforms of user participation vary in terms of audience perception and journalistic intervention. Proprietary platforms have the potential to target the media outlet's core audience while leaving the journalists in charge. As platform providers, community management could think of new measures to guarantee the kind of online discussion for which they aim, for example, making sure that commenters have to read the article before participating or constantly identifying and blocking users who violate the rules of the forum. However, we observe that these measures of control are not fully taken advantage of, yet. When it comes to non-proprietary platforms, media outlets let go of these means of control even more; in return, they potentially reach a broader audience. These circumstances make it all the more necessary for media organizations to develop a consistent and transparent roadmap for handling user comments.

The results show that even journalists of a single outlet do not share common rules when it comes to the selection of user comments, except a very small effect was noted in the blocking of severe racial slurs in connection with topics related to refugees, right-wing populism, or fake news accusations. Instead, gatekeeping decisions depend to a substantial degree on inter-individual differences. From the users' perspective, participative formats offer the chance to discuss a broad variety of different issues. Even though possibilities of actively participating in news production processes are limited by the restrictions of media outlets, the results clearly show that single voices or views are not systematically silenced by forum moderation.

So is user participation an enrichment or a daily struggle? Community managers are eager to ban dark forms of participation but also want to leave their users room for discussion at the same time. In this context, the traditional questions of gatekeeping research are still interesting: Which comments are considered to be worth publishing and, therefore, selected by forum moderators? The current study contributes to this field of research by integrating methods of computational social science and, therefore, offering insights into the *actual gatekeeping decision*. Although these journalists were partly able to keep their gates against aggressive and disrespectful language, their decisions were not fully based on a set of obvious standards like the consequent filtering out of swearing but, rather, shaded by the moderator's personal moral compass. Still, participative formats offer unique possibilities for media outlets to get in touch with their audience. However, if media organizations want to fully tap into this potential, they must figure out how to deal with these challenges. The fact that moderation decision-making processes are often not fully comprehensible might unintendedly fuel censorship-critique among readers, thus damaging the image of participatory journalistic media in the long run.

Acknowledgments

The research was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. We acknowledge support by the open access publication fund at the University of Muenster.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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About the Authors

Svenja Boberg is a PhD student at the University of Muenster. Since 2016 she is a Research Associate in the BMBF-funded project "Identification, Detection and Countering of Propaganda Disseminations Via Online Media", mainly focusing on using computational methods to analyze user comments. Her dissertation deals with the articulation and spread of political anger via social network sites.

Tim Schatto-Eckrodt is a PhD student and communication scientist, who researches methods to identify attempts to influence public opinion through online-propaganda. Since October 2017 he is a member of the chair of online communication of the Department of Communication of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany. His master's thesis dealt with diffusion and the acceptance of new technologies.

Lena Frischlich studied Psychology at the University of Cologne and completed her PhD in social and media psychology in 2016. She has joined the Institute for Communication Science (chair of Online Communication) at Münster University in 2016, working as a Post-Doc in the PropStop project on detection, identification and combating of covert propaganda-attacks via online media. In January 2018, she has started her own junior research group on democratic resilience in times of online-propaganda, fake news, fear- and hate-speech (DemoRESILdigital).

Thorsten Quandt is a Professor of Online Communication at the University of Münster, Germany. His research fields include online communication, digital games and (online) journalism. Quandt is particularly interested in the societal changes connected to the Internet and new media, and the question how human beings have evolved in sync with these changes. His earlier works on participatory journalism and online newsroom production have been widely cited in the field of (digital) journalism research.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 70–78
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1490

Article

Strangers to the Game? Interlopers, Intralopers, and Shifting News Production

Avery E. Holton [1,*] and Valerie Belair-Gagnon [2]

[1] Department of Communication, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84106, USA; E-Mail: avery.holton@utah.edu
[2] Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA; E-Mail: vbg@umn.edu

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 22 March 2018 | Accepted: 22 June 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
The contours of journalistic practice have evolved substantially since the emergence of the world wide web to include those who were once strangers to the profession. Amateur journalists, bloggers, mobile app designers, programmers, web analytics managers, and others have become part of journalism, influencing the process of journalism from news production to distribution. These technology-oriented strangers—those who have not belonged to traditional journalism practice but have imported their qualities and work into it—are increasingly taking part in journalism, whether welcomed by journalists or shunned as interlopers. Yet, the labels that keep them at journalism's periphery risk conflating them with much larger groups who are not always adding to the news process (e.g., bloggers, microbloggers) or generalizing them as insiders/outsiders. In this essay, we consider studies that have addressed the roles of journalistic strangers and argue that by delineating differences among these strangers and seeking representative categorizations of who they are, a more holistic understanding of their impact on news production, and journalism broadly, can be advanced. Considering the norms and practices of journalism as increasingly fluid and open to new actors, we offer categorizations of journalistic strangers as explicit and implicit interlopers as well as intralopers. In working to understand these strangers as innovators and disruptors of news production, we begin to unpack how they are collectively contributing to an increasingly un-institutionalized meaning of news while also suggesting a research agenda that gives definition to the various strangers who may be influencing news production and distribution and the organizational field of journalism more broadly.

Keywords
digital news; innovation; interloper; intraloper; journalism; media; news production; strangers

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades they have come swiftly, a multitude of strangers to journalism working with and through new and innovative technologies and challenging the authority of news organizations and journalists alike while also opening new pathways for journalism's relevance and sustainability. Amateur journalists, bloggers, mobile app designers, programmers, and web analytics managers have joined an extensive and growing crowd of professionals who have, whether considered or not by journalists and news organizations to actually be journalists, introduced innovations into the news production process. They have challenged traditional definitions of what it means to be a journalist and to produce news while augmenting a news production and distribution process that relies more than ever on outsider perspectives to institute engaging and sustained content

and content delivery (Lewis & Westlund, 2015a; Westlund & Lewis, 2014). While evidence suggests journalists are more aware of and accepting of the contributions these strangers have made (Baack, 2018), they continue to be cast as peripheral actors in journalism (Nielsen, 2012; Tandoc & Oh, 2017).

This may be partly due to the ways that scholars discuss these strangers. In this essay, by introducing these actors as strangers we risk marginalizing their contributions. But as this essay contends, understanding more clearly and more categorically who these strangers are, and how they are shaping the contours of journalism, may diminish the reluctance among journalists and media scholars to position them more squarely within the process of news production and distribution. As Vos and Singer (2016) suggest, by understanding who is creating journalism, where they position themselves within the practice, and how they are received by journalists and their audiences, a more holistic understanding of journalism's norms and practices may emerge. By adding to the discourse surrounding journalism practice, such explorations can contribute to a clearer conceptualization of what journalism is and what it may become (cf. Carlson, 2016). This essay seeks such clarity through the offering of categorizations that may begin to remove the stigma of outsider from journalistic strangers.

Taking up recent calls to consider the organizational field of journalism as one undergoing a near-continuous process of normative and productive change (Anderson & Revers, 2018; Eldridge, 2018; Ferrucci, 2017; Vos & Singer, 2016), this essay posits that while various strangers are bringing change to journalism, their position within news production is not as dichotomously straightforward as insider/outsider or interloper/journalist. By first reviewing the state of research on innovation in journalism and its emphasis on individual actors as agents of change in terms of journalism, this essay offers a consideration of three categorizations of journalistic strangers before outlining how these strangers may be changing current epistemologies of journalism as well as the practice of journalism itself. These categorizations provide a more systematic way of examining who exactly these strangers are and what impacts—real or potential—they may be having on the epistemology and practice of journalism. Thus, this essay provides new means for media scholars and practitioners to unpack the complex changes journalistic strangers may have on journalistic theory and practice individually and collectively.

2. Innovation in Organizations and Journalism

Studies examining the role of outsider influence on journalism practice have most frequently focused on innovative technologies, those who introduce such technologies into the news process, and the impact of the adaptation of these technologies on journalistic norms and practices (cf. Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; Nielsen, 2012; Singer, 2005; Tandoc & Oh, 2017). These studies have focused on individual-level analyses of routines (Lowrey, 2012; Ryfe, 2012), organizational and institutional structures (Lowrey & Gade, 2012), technology as disruptive to journalistic norms and practices (Belair-Gagnon, Owen, & Holton, 2017; Gynnild, 2014; Lasorsa et al., 2012), and technologies' relations with social and material expressions (Domingo, Masip, & Costera Meijer, 2015). Using concepts including agents of media innovation, boundary making, diffusion of innovation, disruption, and isomorphism (Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007), much of this research has alluded to the prevalence of an innovator dilemma in journalism wherein news organizations see innovations and innovators as unwelcome strangers, or what Eldridge describes as media interlopers, despite their contributions to the norms and practices of journalism (Eldridge, 2018; Nielsen, 2012).

Recent studies suggest a slow but notable change in this pattern as news organizations and journalists loosen their traditional authoritative grip on news production and see more value in non-traditional journalistic actors (hereafter referred to as "journalistic strangers") such as bloggers (Nielsen, 2012), programmers (Lewis & Usher, 2013), and web analytics managers (Tandoc & Thomas, 2015). This reflects Lowrey's (2012) contention that "over time, innovative news forms and practices emerge in *variation*, flock together in a *selection* process, stabilize, and then demonstrate *retention*" (p. 216). This process, observable by newsroom management and fueled by external pressures from journalistic strangers who bring with them innovative know-how, can and has fostered technology experimentation and adoption in news production. Simultaneously, it has opened new avenues from outsider contributions to and influences on the production and distribution of news.

With a few notable exceptions (Boczkowski & Siles, 2014; Weber, 2017), the literature on journalism innovation tends to single out innovation in newsrooms from other organizations as having a unique set of organizational constraints and features. Management studies have distinguished between types of innovations (e.g., product vs. process innovations) that are more easily adopted, implications for future adoption, and acts of coordination and information sharing, among other factors influencing adoption and organizational change. Orlikowski and Gash (1994) wrote about technological frames as central to understanding technological development, use, and change in organizations since they may vary across groups. The way users (or news organizations and the journalists working within in them in the case of this essay) understand a technology can impede on or enhance future individual and organizational adoption. Thus, it is important to analyze the variations across categorizations of actors who are co-shaping innovation in organizations that produce specific products, such as news production and the process of news creation and distribution. Through lenses of innovation, adoption, and subsequent effects, and including typologies of multiple

actors, a more layered understanding of news production and the nuances of the actors involved there can be developed.

Unlike studies of innovation in journalism, organizational studies have pushed to set boundaries across levels of analyses in innovation. While organizational studies follow those conceived by early scholars relying on a collection of actors collaborating through similar means toward similar ends, they tend to focus on the adoption of new technology as well as non-traditional actors working within and for organizations in which they traditionally would not be involved. Those groups making use of innovative technologies and introducing them into new environments are nuanced, complex, and constituted by individuals as well as agencies with different functions or disciplinary backgrounds. Rarely is the descriptor of insider/outsider accurate in capturing how they perceive themselves professionally or how they are perceived by those they are working for or with. For these groups, technology can mean different things and serve different purposes, hindering or fostering adoption. In the case of journalism, where news organizations have sought new pathways toward financial sustainability through engagement with social and digital media innovations, journalistic strangers such as amateur journalists, bloggers, and microbloggers have provided a means of observing successes and failures of innovation adoption with minimal risk on journalists or news organizations (Holton, 2016). The emphasis on disruptive actors, or more specifically multiple actors introducing multiple disruptions simultaneously typically from outside traditional boundaries of an organization, is a key conceptual lens through which technology adoption, failure, and tension in organizations more broadly and in news production more narrowly, can be analyzed and more accurately understood.

3. Strangers in Journalism

With the expanding prominence of technology-oriented strangers in journalism, the need to understand categorically who these strangers are is intensifying. Relying on generalized labels (e.g., bloggers, microblobbers, programmers) risks conflating those who actively seek to, or actually do, contribute to journalism with those who do not, while dichotomously casting them as insiders or outsiders, journalists or interlopers, risks devaluing their contributions. As sociologist Georg Simmel (1950) outlined in his metaphor of strangers, there may be no escaping the stigma that comes with such a label, but through more exact examinations of who strangers are and where they fit in (or want to fit in), we can better understand their personal and professional positions. Strangers are, by Simmel's account, "fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries." A stranger's position within a group, whether ephemeral or lasting, "is determined by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning" and "that he imports qualities into it which do not and cannot stem from the group itself" (p. 402). In other words, because they are not committed to the ingredients or tendencies of the group, strangers are not "owners of soil" and have the character of mobility and a possible objective stance to the qualities and activities of the group.

Journalistic strangers exemplify Simmel's definition, bringing with them new ideas and innovations that disrupt journalism from the outside, or from within in some cases. While the strangers discussed in this essay may not be ephemeral in journalism (some of them do have a lasting impact after all), they are fixed within their spatial group, did not belong in journalism from the beginning, and are importing qualities to it that do not originally stem from the journalistic profession. The definition of strangers, unlike the metaphor, entails both individuals and institutions of varying kinds. These individuals and groups of strangers are especially relevant in journalistic change, which often comes from the edges to the mainstream "where change is less encumbered by tradition, by an established way of doing things" (Bruns, 2014, p. 16). This innovation push, wherein a new media model is found to be workable and useful and spreads to mainstream outlets, has been under way for some time now, driven partially by journalistic strangers.

These strangers have helped to introduce new ways of identifying what news is, how to deliver it more effectively, and how to better engage with news audiences. As a recent example, in their research on the role of web analytics companies in news production, Belair-Gagnon and Holton (2018) found that while not acknowledging their role as challenging the culture of journalism, analytics managers working at these companies positioned themselves as disruptors of the news business model, connectors between journalists and audiences, and routinizers of web analytics practices in newsrooms. While these companies are not new to journalism—there is a long history of companies providing audience measurement tools in the media industry—they provide trace data. These companies maintain they provide a potential set of solutions for news organizations to face the financial crisis in media by, at least in part, removing the guesswork from what kinds of news audiences want to and do engage with. Similar studies focusing on the incorporation of web analytics have found this to be true, noting that while journalists remain hesitant to using web analytics to guide their content, they do see such data as critical to their work (Tandoc, 2015; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015). The fundamental impact of web analytics—which continues to be provided by those working outside of news organizations—on the norms and practices of journalism suggests that rather than exclusively focusing on how journalists experience emerging technologies in newsrooms, research should also consider how journalistic strangers such as web analytics companies may be challenging the epistemologies of journalism by facilitating notions of hyper-personalization of news content, diffusing sets of interactions with audience members, and de-

mystifying the complexities of data that can uproot traditional journalistic practices such as relying on gut instincts to decide what is news.

Media scholars have examined journalistic strangers beyond web analytics companies (e.g., web designers, web programmers, amateur and citizen journalists, drone hobbyists, and start-ups). Several of these strangers, or at least their professions, barely existed before the emergence of the world wide web. Their specializations have, for the most part, developed rapidly and steadily, driven by corporate imperatives and co-developed with news organizations, journalists, and the public. Given their disruptive nature and the adoption of their technological innovations and practices into the creation and distribution of news within a relative temporal proximity (or simultaneously in many cases), this essay argues that these strangers should be considered collectively rather than individually for the broad impact they are having on news production. Observations of individuals changing journalism from the outside continue to provide insights into the evolving landscape of journalism's epistemology, expertise, economy, and ethics (Lewis & Westlund, 2015b; Vos & Singer, 2016), but they do so at the risk of placing significance on one stranger or set of strangers. This may miss the interplay between the many sets, or multiplexes, of journalistic strangers and their resulting impact on news production and distribution.

4. Three Typologies of Strangers

To begin dissecting such multiplexes and those who comprise them, as well as to more fully understand key contributors to today's rapidly evolving news process, this essay offers formative categorizations for journalistic strangers that help alleviate issues of conflating labels and overgeneralizations. The definitions and examples offered here are meant to serve as a platform for discussion that elevates the discourse of non-traditional journalism actors while providing more constructive ways of placing them within journalism more broadly. Eldridge (2018) describes one segment of these strangers as *media interlopers*, or individuals "positioning their work as journalism, alongside sharp critiques of traditional journalists and dominant narratives of what journalism 'is'" (p. 4). These interlopers do not fit typical definitions of journalists and often find themselves working outside of journalism's professional norms to the ridicule of journalists and news organizations (cf. Quandt, 2018, on dark participation in this issue). Provided a stage by the internet and social media, interlopers make use of new technology in ways that challenge news production, raising questions of who produces what and with what impact on journalism and news audiences. Yet, as Eldridge (2018) notes, their place within journalism, as well as the place of similar actors on the periphery of the journalistic field, remains clouded by the fluid nature of their interaction with journalism and a lack of scholarship devoted to understanding them.

This essay contends that today's technology-oriented media interlopers may be thought of as actors or institutions who may consider the work they do to be part of news media, though they do not always define themselves as journalists and if they do their role may not only involve traditional journalistic tasks or they may bring new practices and norms in journalism. As such, they are generally questioned by traditional journalists and news organizations. These interlopers are not new to journalism, though with the help of the world wide web and social media, they have forced a reconsideration of what journalists are and journalism is. Against the backdrop of innovation and disruption, these interlopers (as well as other strangers to journalism) are challenging news organizations to reconsider their roles—either potential or realized—as either competitors or collaborators in today's digital news cycle. Such tension is driven, at least in part, by the rising number of and nuances between media interlopers (Eldridge, 2018). In other words, so many journalistic strangers are now contributing to journalism and, whether they see themselves as journalists or are critical of the state of journalism, are shaping how news is produced and distributed. Yet, categorizations of journalistic strangers and their impacts on journalism practice and epistemology have yet to be made clear. The following sections lay an initial foundation for such categorizations. Leaning into media scholarship that has explored non-traditional journalism actors (cf. Boyles, 2017; Eldridge, 2018; Lewis & Westlund, 2015a), possible categorizations and definitions of journalistic strangers are offered as a means to strengthen the ways in which these actors are discussed by scholars and practitioners while also removing, even if slightly, the stigma that continues to keep them bound to the edges of journalism.

4.1. Explicit Interlopers

Explicit interlopers are defined here as non-traditional journalism actors who may not necessarily be welcomed or defined as journalists and work on the periphery of the profession while directly contributing content or products to the creation and distribution of news. They frequently and overtly challenge journalistic norms, calling for improved practices (e.g., more transparency through linking in social media spaces; fact-checking that includes public input).

Early forms of explicit interlopers who emerged alongside the proliferation of the internet include bloggers and citizen journalists who contributed to news production through early adoption of innovations. In creating weblogs, or "frequently updated website[s] with posts arranged in reverse chronological order so new entries are always on top" (Blood, 2003, p. 61), bloggers used the internet, coding, and web spaces dedicated to diary-style entries to critique traditional news sources and to share news and information of their own. Scholars and news practitioners initially questioned their role in journalism, categorizing weblogs in four distinct ways:

(1) those produced by journalists; (2) those produced by professionals about journalism or the news industry; (3) those produced by individuals breaking news or events; and (4) those linking to news or events (Blood, 2003). In her analysis of political and civic affairs weblogs, Singer (2005) found that bloggers were making use of hyperlinks—not yet a practice among most journalists—and that journalists were beginning to shift the style of their content and platforms of delivery based on the successes and failures of bloggers. Yet, journalists were apprehensive about accepting bloggers as producing journalism, while news bloggers more frequently positioned themselves as journalists or—at the very least—as contributing to journalism via practices that allowed them to break and contextualize news more quickly than journalists (e.g., publishing online first, allowing audiences to publish in their spaces, using blogs and web pages to solicit news).

These bloggers contributed to a more digitally participatory culture of journalism wherein the boundaries between journalists and audiences were blurred by new forms of audience engagement and contribution through the internet and social media. A similar scenario played out with WikiLeaks, which was developed outside of journalism and, "based on their growing notoriety, were able to build at least temporary alliances with some very significant mainstream media outlets" (Bruns, 2014, p. 15). In combining an existing pathway of journalistic contributions—leaking information and documents in this case—with the features of the internet and related technologies, WikiLeaks altered news production by providing faster (and mostly transparent) leaked information along with the opportunity for news organizations to digitally house and share that content.

The capability of the public and other journalistic strangers to contribute to and inform news production raised a bevy of concerns among journalists and news organizations, who expressed anxiety over a more reflexive culture of journalism that diminished traditional journalistic authority. As Lewis (2012) contended, new actors in journalism were negotiating journalistic norms, contributing to news and information as part an evolving digital and social mediasphere, and challenging news organizations to rethink their approaches to audiences. In other words, these strangers to journalism influence changes in news production largely through applications of emerging technologies, with the explicit aim of adding to or being a part of journalism without actually assuming the label of journalist.

4.2. Implicit Interlopers

Implicit interlopers are defined here as non-traditional journalism actors whose alignments with journalism are less clear than explicit interlopers. Because they do not generally challenge journalistic authority, and because of the potential contributions and improvements they offer to journalism, such as more successful content and audience engagement (e.g., news crowdsourcing or user-generated content), they may be more welcomed by journalists and news organizations. Implicit interlopers, who may not be as critical of journalism as explicit interlopers given that their financial well-being is linked to news organizations and other journalists in many cases, are also not as quick to reject the label of journalist.

As an illustration, Boyles (2017) explored journalism hackathons or events bringing together programmers and journalists to construct collaborative programs that may benefit news production, audience engagement, or other areas of journalism. In this study, she noted that civic hackers, or those who apply their programming knowledge for civic benefit, help inform news organizations and journalists about technological advancements and opportunities. They also encourage journalists to tinker with innovations they otherwise would be hesitant to use. While civic hackers are not journalists, nor do they typically embrace the label of journalist, they nonetheless work with journalists to create products with the potential to improve various areas of news production and engagement. To this end, they help "cultivate stronger press–public relationships" and contribute to the ways in which journalists think about the tools and technology used for their profession.

Other scholars have noted similar roles for programmers and web analytics professionals (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Lewis & Usher, 2013). The latter provide for-profit services to news organizations through web analytics and have thusly invested in understanding the norms that drive journalism and appropriating some of those without actually becoming journalists themselves. This has helped to ease a hesitancy among journalists to incorporate complex data into their content considerations and helped web analytics companies coordinate more effectively with news organizations (Nelson, 2018; Petre, 2018). As Petre (2018) observed, web analytics professionals have found ways to make data more intelligible and applicable for journalists, helping them to combine journalistic intuition and training with web analytics when making decisions about news coverage.

Further, Belair-Gagnon and Holton (2018) found that web analytics organizations make efforts to understand the ways that journalists work and the problems they face when working with web metrics and analytics, developing ways to alleviate those issues either through personal interactions or through the development of new delivery platforms. While these interlopers do not consider their activities journalism per se, they acknowledge their contributions to news production. Their vision of journalism in the construction of knowledge starts with the rationalization of news production by encouraging the use of digital tools spurred by marketing techniques geared towards understanding individually and collectively personalized users' behaviors rather than fostering a notion of journalism as serving public interests. In other words, these companies may impact traditional journalistic values as well as audience preferences, and this un-

derstanding of journalism may lead to a digital footprint resulting from uncontrollable past experiences that have an active role in establishing current knowledge. This impact may be a profound one: an epistemology of journalism that reflects on oneself and users' behaviors as opposed to one geared towards public interest.

This emerging form of construction of knowledge brings together elements of the past and an imagined audience while at the same time entering into conflict with established visions of journalism: one that is watchdog or responds to public interest. This epistemological transformation in journalism wrought, in part, by implicit interlopers, suggests that news organizations may depend more on a quantified notion of digital users' behaviors as a determinant in the production, and more particularly in the formatting and placement, of news. Such considerations may be contextual and depend on several factors including the role that proprietary and non-proprietary platforms may play in the shaping of technology and epistemological changes in journalism.

4.3. Intralopers

This also raises questions of those individuals working within news organizations and informing journalists without embracing the full role or label of a journalist. Defined here as media intralopers, or non-traditional journalism actors working from within news organizations without journalism-oriented titles, they may be trained in journalism or be well versed in the craft of the profession. These individuals are distinct from explicit and implicit interlopers because they work from the inside out, bringing non-traditional journalistic expertise and perspectives to news organizations and disrupting news production through advancements in digital and social media. This also includes the in-house production of emerging technology meant to supplement or complement journalists' work. In this sense, intralopers are the less strangers by proximity than they are by the work they perform in relation to news production.

As one example, in 2018, Reuters released Lynx Insights, an internally developed automation tool that reporters can use to accelerate the production of their stories or find new ones. While Lynx Insights may be deployed by journalists as a way for organizations to suggest enhancing their work, it is a product of programmers and other developers working from within Reuters. A survey of American data journalists also showed on the one hand that "larger organizations [are] more likely to undertake data work that involved a division of labor, with computer-assisted reporters, graphic designers, statisticians, and programmers working on teams" (Fink & Anderson, 2015). Smaller news organizations are likely to have one journalist who would acquire data skills. Fink and Anderson also noted that smaller organizations were more limited to third party pools, as smaller news organizations may see data journalists more as a luxury that elite news organizations can afford.

This mirrors the efforts of the "intrapreneurial units" Boyles (2016) explored in her interviews with news innovation leaders in North America. Unlike the implicit interlopers, intralopers coordinate their work within the news production process meaning they may also be more limited by regulations imposed by their news organizations or by the institutional norms that drive journalism practice. At the very least, they may face pressures that explicit and implicit interlopers may not, including tensions within news organization structures (e.g., between production and management as well as between editorial and intrapreneurial units), complexities in navigating professional relationships with journalists, and intricacies of their own role performances and identities.

5. Discussion

Since the emergence of the world wide web and proliferation of social media, media scholars have called attention to the role of strangers as influencers in technological innovation in the creation and distribution of news (Westlund, 2012). Scholars have developed case studies on the attitudes, behaviors, and impacts journalistic strangers may have had—and are having—in news production. They have also argued for a need for deeper examinations of who these types of strangers are and how they may be changing journalism, raising questions of how they individually and collectively affect news production, and perhaps how scholars approach those effects (Lewis & Westlund, 2015a, 2015b; Westlund & Lewis, 2014). The role of journalistic strangers in journalism necessitates an extensive understanding of their positions and roles in news production. It also requires researchers to address broader questions of technological adoption and innovation in newsrooms while considering how explicit and implicit interlopers, intralopers, and journalists do or do not coordinate their professional identities and activities as well as the effect this coordination may be having on the culture of journalism.

Rather than emphasizing single actors or single groups of actors when examining evolutions in the creation and distribution of news, as well as the culture of journalism, this essay argues that with more distinct categorizations of journalistic strangers, scholars can develop research that includes the actors and groups who add to news production and culture individually and collectively. In doing so, more accurate analyses of the ways these strangers are contributing to the production of knowledge around the process and culture of journalism may be developed and discourses drawing these contributors in rather than casting them out may be strengthened.

This essay provides a starting point by discussing the relevance of coordinating between teams of strangers and journalists in technological innovation while also highlighting the culture and perceived roles that particular groups have had in coordinating their roles within news production. Boyles (2016), for example, showed how digital newsroom management, organizational cul-

ture, and speed of innovation have fostered tensions between intrapreneurial innovation units in newsrooms and the livelihood of news organizations. Building on this and similar studies, practitioners and scholars may consider investigating the sort of organizational settings that allow for the coordination of efforts between strangers and journalists. In other words, by recognizing that there are different types of strangers often acting simultaneously in news production and knowing how to categorically define them, scholars may be able to conceptualize how these strangers and the different forms of interactions they co-produce in journalism vary across individuals, teams, groups, and organizations. Research questions may include how news organizations coordinate the use of audience metrics between those supplying the analytics tools, news managers and editors, and journalists or what roles news organizations open up for explicit and implicit interlopers, and how these actors coordinate with intralopers and journalists.

While intralopers may be less disruptive to the culture of journalism as they embrace the news production process more explicitly, implicit interlopers (e.g., web analytics companies) who may be more accepted now as part of journalism may emphasize new epistemological logics (e.g., personalization of news or the focus on audience preferences rather than public concerns). And while explicit interlopers are somewhat disassociated from journalism, journalists may take from them (e.g., adopting participatory journalism practices from bloggers and social media producers). The effects of these actors and changes in journalistic knowledge-oriented norms are not evolving solely in a case study form, from one interloper to another for example, but appear to be happening in coordination with each other, especially when applied to creating and distributing news in participatory journalism contexts.

As these journalistic strangers may envision different technology frames, important empirical questions remain. How do these frames impede or enhance current and future uses and adoption of technology in newsrooms? How do these journalistic strangers see themselves in relationship to news production and journalism more broadly, and how do they see themselves fitting into changing processes of news production? To address such questions, potential research avenues in journalism studies should include longitudinal analyses of how these innovation processes work separately and together, following the temporally-unbound research agenda that Carlson and Lewis (2018) suggested. Given that social media and other technologies such as web analytics are prompting news organizations to adapt more quickly, so too should scholars be more temporally reflexive in their studies.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on a limited number of existing studies, this essay has reflected on ways to provide categorizations for journalistic strangers who have had, and are having, an impact on the creation and distribution of news and journalism culture. These strangers vary in their influence on news production, and this essay illustrates that different categorizations of strangers (i.e. explicit and implicit interlopers, and intralopers) may have different levels of influence on journalistic norms and practices based on the innovations they adopt and their positions, real or perceived, within journalism as a profession. Scholars have identified specific journalistic strangers in news production, and this essay argues that there is a need for more definitive studies on groups and variation among groups or teams of strangers. In this context, an overarching set of empirical questions offered here include: What are the roles of explicit and implicit interlopers and intralopers in news production innovation? Does the cultural proximity to journalism between these strangers have an impact on the success or failure of news production innovation? And as the nature of these strangers continues to evolve and they become more integrated into news production, are there other typologies that researchers should consider? More broadly, if these strangers are changing news production and the organizational field of journalism, are they really strangers to journalism at all?

This brings us to questions of the changing epistemologies of journalism and what journalism ought to be under the coordinated influence of strangers. Technological innovation, which can happen quickly, fluctuates for different groups and may be dependent on these groups' observations of one another. In the case of news creation and distribution, this could be seen as explicit and implicit interlopers and intralopers taking cues from one another based on each other's successes and failures in innovation. As Poole and DeSanctis (2004) suggested, tracing the history of a technology and user engagement with that technology can reveal much about the process of adoption and the resulting changes to individuals, the groups they are bound up with, and the influence of those groups on other groups. This is especially evident when some of those individuals are less bound by organizational policies or restrictions. Such is the case with explicit and implicit interlopers and intralopers, who are often freer to work at the edges of journalism.

While media scholars have begun exploring the role of strangers in journalism, though more noticeably in American, Australian, or western European case studies, there remains a need to analyze how these groups relate to each other in the wider organizational field of journalism. Such an expansion of research has practical and theoretical contributions in understanding innovation processes more holistically, how these processes depend on external and disruptive actors that are part of a networked environment beyond the bounds of newsrooms, and in what ways they challenge traditional news production and journalism culture. Scholars and practitioners will need to consider how external actors "force innovation" in journalism and where these actors fit in. The categorizations outlined here provide a starting

point. This is not to suggest that all journalistic strangers are welcome—especially given that many are happy to be, and will continue to be, content working outside of journalism—but rather to highlight the more malleable nature of journalistic boundaries, which appear to be looser and more penetrable than ever and to provide more constructive categorizations to those individuals contributing to today's journalism.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Scott Eldridge for his valuable input in the formation of this essay, Oscar Westlund and Mats Ekström for their enduring insights, and the reviewers whose input helped the ideas of this essay take form.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Avery E. Holton is an Assistant Professor and Vice-President's Clinical and Translational Scholar at the University of Utah where he also serves as Student Media Advisor for the University. He studies changing personal and interpersonal dynamics brought about by digital and social media technologies. The recipient of a 2018 National Humanities Center Summer Fellowship, his most recent research projects have examined the ways in which identity is created in digital spaces, how journalists brand themselves within those spaces, and how community is created around news on social media.

Valerie Belair-Gagnon is Assistant Professor of Journalism Studies at the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota. She is also Director of the Minnesota Journalism Center and affiliated with the Yale Information Society Project. She studies technology and how changes in the business and ecology of news affect news work and cultures of innovation. This includes: innovation processes; the role of coders, platform companies, and other digital companies in news; user participation, social media and apps; and audience engagement.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 79–90
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1465

Article

Hybrid Engagement: Discourses and Scenarios of Entrepreneurial Journalism

Juho Ruotsalainen [1,*] and Mikko Villi [2]

[1] Finland Futures Research Centre, University of Turku, 00130 Helsinki, Finland; E-Mail: juho.ruotsalainen@utu.fi
[2] Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä, 40014 Jyväskylä, Finland; E-Mail: mikko.villi@jyu.fi

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 7 March 2018 | Accepted: 24 May 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
Although the challenge posed by social media and the participatory turn concerns culture and values at the very heart of journalism, journalists have been reluctant to adopt participatory values and practices. To encourage audience participation and to offer journalism that is both trustworthy and engaging, journalists of the future may embrace a hybrid practice of journalistic objectivity and audience-centred dialogue. As innovative and experimental actors, entrepreneurial journalism outlets can perform as forerunners of such a culture. By analysing discourses in the "About Us" pages of 41 entrepreneurial journalism outlets, the article examines the emerging journalistic ethos of entrepreneurial journalism and its participatory tendencies. The results show a conception of journalism that is a hybrid of the journalistic ideals of dialogue and objectivity. This kind of hybrid journalism and adjacent "hybrid engagement" can offer an answer to the dual challenge of how to make journalism more participation-friendly while at the same time hold on to the defining values and criteria of journalism. Drawing from futures research, the article concludes by sketching four scenarios of how entrepreneurial journalism and participatory hybrid engagement may develop in the future.

Keywords
affect; discourse analysis; entrepreneurial journalism; futures research; future of journalism; hybrid journalism; participatory journalism; scenarios

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

From the beginning of the millennium media and journalism have increasingly been characterised by a participatory turn. Audiences have in various ways taken a central stage, by both contributing to the production and distribution of journalism and shaping its cultural landscape (Gillmor, 2004; Villi, 2012). Journalists have often been reluctant to embrace the turn as the new audience-centred ideals "do not mesh well with the traditional journalistic culture" (Graham, 2013, p. 116). In the networked era of social platforms, "intimate" mobile technology and increasingly affective and participatory forms of communication, journalism faces a dual challenge: how to increase audience engagement—broadly defined as a personal connection the audiences have with the news—and participation, while preserving the core criteria and values that define journalism (Beckett & Deuze, 2016). A common argument is that journalism needs to connect with citizens' lives and identities better than before (Ha et al., 2018; Swart, Peters, & Broersma, 2017).

While participatory journalism is often defined as news content produced by non-professionals (Wall, 2015), this article addresses participatory journalism

more broadly, in terms of emerging journalistic culture, values and actors. The conceptual framework of the article consists of *entrepreneurial journalism* and *hybrid journalism*. We define entrepreneurial journalism as one that 1) is produced by new media outlets established by journalists themselves, 2) reflects the personalities, goals and visions of the founders, 3) seeks to renew journalism by addressing new niches, exploring new styles and formats, and building a new relationship with the audiences, and 4) pursues a sustainable business based on these attributes.

Entrepreneurial journalists pioneer hybrid journalism (see Wagemans, Witschge, & Harbers, 2018), which merges the dialogical and objective traditions of journalism (Soffer, 2009) and is manifested in such "hybrid" genres as participatory journalism. Hybrid journalism offers one solution to the potentially contradicting ideals of engagement and objectivity. It arguably suits social media platforms with their conversational and affective registers better than the traditional, detached type of journalism, and potentially makes journalism more attractive for audience participation.

Hybrid journalism can invoke *hybrid engagement*, which appeals to both rational and affective sentiments in the audience. In the same way as hybrid journalism mixes objective-rational and dialogical-affective aspects in reporting, the invoked hybrid engagement mixes rational and affective aspects of engagement (Kormelink & Meijer, 2015) in a balanced way. Rational engagement is used here to refer to factual information and the feeling of trust it invokes (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017), and affective engagement refers to a personal, emotional connection with news content.

Content produced by new media players are often affective and seek to engage the user on a personal level (Papacharissi, 2015), which questions traditional normative claims of what journalism should be like and how it should address and appeal to its audiences. According to Singer (2017a, p. 131), entrepreneurial journalists "revisit what often are deeply held views about what journalism is, should be and might become". Such dissenting approaches place entrepreneurial journalists in a good position to pioneer possible futures of journalism (Ruotsalainen, in press). Participatory and interactive audience relationships are often built-in as a part of entrepreneurial journalism, as entrepreneurs have to know their customers and their needs very closely (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016).

According to Singer (2017b), entrepreneurial journalists—their conceptions about journalism as well as the actual journalism they produce—have been studied relatively little. Thus, this article makes a needed contribution to the discussion on what constitutes the ideas, approaches and values of entrepreneurial journalism. Furthermore, entrepreneurial journalism is studied in relation to hybrid journalism, clarifying what hybrid news journalism could be like in practice and how it may evolve in the future. The main research question in the article concentrates on examining *how the ethos of entrepreneurial journalism reflects hybrid journalism, hybrid engagement, and a more participation-oriented journalistic culture*.

The article analyses discourses in the 41 "About us" pages of entrepreneurial journalism outlets from North America and Europe. Building on the analysis, the article constructs four scenario sketches for the development of entrepreneurial and hybrid journalism. The scenario sketches are not predictions, as the probability of any scenario ever being realized accurately is low (Gordon & Glenn, 2018). Their purpose, instead, is to open up the space of alternative possibilities in the development of entrepreneurial journalism. While Vos and Singer (2016) have analysed discourses of entrepreneurial journalism in trade and popular press, this article analyses the discourses used by entrepreneurial journalism outlets themselves.

The next section addresses and elaborates on the trend towards hybridity in journalism, analyses some future-shaping trends related to audience engagement, and presents entrepreneurial journalists as pioneers of hybrid journalism. A short review on entrepreneurial journalism is offered in section 3. Section 4 presents the results from the analysis of the "About us" pages. The results are elaborated as scenario sketches in section 5, and in the conclusions, the idea of hybrid engagement is reflected upon for each scenario.

2. The Hybridization of Journalism

The media systems of western democracies have become hybrids of traditional and social media: content on online platforms is collectively produced and shared by journalists, citizens, bloggers, and activists (Chadwick, 2013). As journalism is increasingly distributed on these platforms, the question of how to combine public with personal communication in journalism becomes pivotal—news needs to become more engaging than before. In this article, engagement is defined as affectual, personal and social experiences the audience has with a publication and its contents (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010).

In such a hybrid system, the rationality of traditional media and the affectuality of social media are blended (Laaksonen, 2017)—in effect, "dichotomies such as public/private, entertainment/politics, work/leisure become blended, and personal and political become intertwined" (Laaksonen, 2017, p. 12). Affect refers to both subjectively experienced emotion and intersubjective experiences (Papacharissi, 2015). As embodied social meanings, affects constitute a shared life-world that "makes sense" and is experienced as meaningful (Langlois, 2014). A shared life-world between a media outlet and its audience is a crucial prerequisite for audience engagement and participation. In the hybrid media ecology of affective news streams, audiences need to find news content as personally meaningful if they are to consume,

share, and comment on it (Papacharissi, 2015), and so journalism has to find new, affective ways of reporting and connecting with the audiences' identities if it is to stay relevant.

Hybridity reflects a broader socio-political environment in which matters of personal interest related to identity are emphasised in public life—i.e., "identity politics" (Lilla, 2017). Although identity politics cannot be altogether reduced to social media, the heightened role of identity is a structural feature of the current media ecology. Van Dijck and Poell (2013) describe a social media logic that in different ways intensifies and interacts with users' (networked) identities. A person's identity and personal relevance have become core filter mechanisms in news consumption (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2002), and social media also steer political action to identity-driven strategies as they "enable personalized public engagement" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 739). Furthermore, Western societies have for decades already been exhibiting postmaterialist values of intellectual, aesthetic, self-expressive, and humanitarian pursuits (Inglehart, 1977). In a post-materialist world, citizens' identities are increasingly constructed in networked communication instead of economic production (Lash, 1994).

Some other trends, too, hint at new directions for engagement. On social media, audience trust is often determined by who shares the content to them, instead of the news organisation that produced the content (The Media Insight Project, 2017), steering power away from news organisations to audience communities (Villi & Jung, 2015). Moreover, growth in online audience revenue is compensating for the decrease in advertising revenue (WAN-IFRA, 2017). New payment models are often membership-like (Newman et al., 2017), implying a closer relationship between news organisations and their audiences. Finally, "old-fashioned" reporting still engages audiences. In the USA, many of the legacy media, such as the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*, have recently grown their subscription base especially among young consumers (Schwartz, 2017).

These trends imply that an audience-first development of affect, identity, and emotion is emerging as news consumption is shifting to online—while, at the same time, traditional reporting is still regarded as valuable. A key question for the future of journalism is, then, how journalism can re-establish a connection with its audience while also preserving its own autonomy. Benton (2017) believes that in order to recreate their relationship with the audiences, news organisations need to offer a feeling of community and personal connection with them, as well as producing trustworthy, high-quality journalism—in other words: hybrid journalism, arguably enticing rich hybrid engagement.

However, the concept of hybridity can be criticised as being too vague and general. Witschge, Anderson, Domingo and Hermida (2018, p. 2) criticise hybridity as a catch-all term and a shortcut to "denote everything that is complex as hybrid". They call for next steps in the study of hybridity to "not only name but also describe and theorize the complexity of the field" (p. 4). Importantly, the implications of hybridity remain under-explored in the field of journalism studies (Baym, 2017, p. 11), and research on hybrid journalism tends to focus on soft-news genres (cf. Bødker, 2017; Hamilton, 2016) such as celebrity journalism (Bulck, Paulussen, & Bels, 2017).

Baym (2017) contributes to the study of hybrid journalism by dividing the concept into three interlinked levels: systemic, discursive, and textual. Systemic hybridity refers to the melding of technological affordances, economic agendas, and structures of media production and distribution. Discursive hybridity refers to the blending of journalistic discourses or "linguistic consciousnesses". Textual hybridity describes the blending of genres, forms, and styles. In fact, all new journalistic genres, such as participatory journalism, can be defined as hybrid as they mix different elements in a non-binary way (see Witschge et al., 2018).

Through these three levels hybridity can be seen as a future-oriented concept: by adding new segments on top of traditional journalistic values and attributes, different manifestations of hybridity open new paths for the development of journalism (see Wagemans et al., 2018). In order to analyse hybridity in the values of journalists in a more focused way, this article concentrates on discursive hybridity and defines it as the blending of two constitutive journalistic notions—objectivity and dialogue—which have traditionally been thought of as competing and incompatible (Soffer, 2009). According to Soffer (2009), objective journalism observes, gathers information, and objectifies social phenomena while maintaining an external position and avoiding dialogical relationships. Dialogical journalism, in turn, presents a polyphony of views instead of an authoritative monologue, encourages different interpretations instead of a unified, single message, and draws on the subjective, personal styles of individual reporters. The goal of dialogical journalism is to inspire public discourse and political communal life as opposed to simply conveying neutral information to citizens (Carey, 1989).

It may be that in the future participatory approaches steer journalism in the direction of the hybridity of objectivity and dialogue. Beckett and Deuze (2016) call this kind of a new journalistic ideal "affective objectivity", pioneered by the global journalism startup scene: while retaining its criticality and independence, journalism of affective objectivity advocates more engaged, involved, and emotional approaches. The concept of affective objectivity is close to the concept of hybrid engagement outlined in this article.

3. Entrepreneurial Journalists as Change Agents

Entrepreneurial journalism is growing globally (Mathisen, 2017), and is one of the trends shaping the future of journalism (Wagemans et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial journalists are those who have established

their own business, and who not only produce journalism but have a total control over running the enterprise. Casero-Ripollés, Izquierdo-Castillo and Doménech-Fabregat (2016) describe entrepreneurial journalism as having three characteristics: it 1) is produced by small-scale media organisations, or cooperatives, of individual initiatives, 2) involves the creation of a business of one's own—seeking new (business) opportunities and journalistic niches, and 3) encourages people to see the journalist as an entrepreneur, "tearing down the wall that traditionally separated the creation of content from business" (p. 288). The third characteristic also involves new forms of news production, such as the craft production model of journalism that reflects the personality and skills of the entrepreneur (Picard, 2014).

Casero-Ripollés et al. (2016, p. 288) describe innovation and creativity as the core qualities of entrepreneurial journalists, "venturing into new territory and topics, and incorporating new techniques". Assuming control over the production, entrepreneurial journalists can steer their journalism in directions they find interesting, innovative, and worth exploring (Carlson & Usher, 2016). Free of the path dependencies of traditional newsrooms, new players in the field can challenge established norms and routines and create new journalistic cultures and practices (see Tandoc & Jenkins, 2018). Entrepreneurial journalists, and especially cooperative enterprises, also seek to establish close and collaborative relationships with their audiences, bridging the gap between media outlets and citizens (Siapera & Papadopoulou, 2016).

More loose and inclusive descriptions emphasise an orientation of change as defining entrepreneurial journalism (Compaine & Hoag, 2012). Some authors even count freelancers as entrepreneurial journalists (De Cock & de Smaele, 2016; Holton, 2016) because of their "entrepreneurial soul" (Mathisen, 2017, p. 919). Along these lines, Schultz and Jones (2017, p. 12) emphasise "discovery and exploitation of opportunities" as defining entrepreneurial journalism, accentuating that entrepreneurial journalism does not concern only nascent and small enterprises but businesses of all sizes.

The above review is in line with what Singer (2017a) points out: the concept of entrepreneurial journalism is blurry, more a label than an identifiable practice. According to Vos and Singer (2016, p. 150), entrepreneurial journalism is "as likely…described in terms of an 'entrepreneurial spirit' as…a specific practice or set of practices". Perhaps a criterion that is neither too exclusive nor too inclusive is the following: entrepreneurial journalism involves the discovery of new opportunities and the construction of a business around them. Legacy media can also find and exploit new opportunities, but their business is not dependent on them. Although large, established digital media outlets such as *Buzzfeed* or *Vox* are not strictly entrepreneurial as they are no more extensions of their founders or owned solely by them, their business is based on one defining idea—focusing exclusively on explanatory journalism in the case of *Vox*, or trying to make news viral in the case of *Buzzfeed*.

Finally, it must be emphasised that entrepreneurial journalism is not about ditching the traditions of journalism. New media outlets often uphold the core values of journalism (Tandoc & Jenkins, 2018; Usher, 2017; Wagemans et al., 2018). For instance, the Dutch startup *De Correspondent* is a hybrid of objective reporting and journalists' mediating subjectivity (Harbers, 2016). In a similar way, *Buzzfeed* produces rather traditional journalism but emphasises the importance of social and identity-related issues that are of interest to its audiences, as well as drawing on the knowledge of citizen sources (Tandoc, 2018).

4. We the Explorers—Discourses of Entrepreneurial Journalism

4.1. Data and Method

The data for the article is collected from the "About Us" pages of 41 entrepreneurial journalism outlets mainly from the U.S., with individual outlets from Canada, Cuba, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Scotland, Spain and Sweden (see Appendix). The U.S. outlets were chosen from a list of major digital media organisations collected by Pew Research Institute (Jurkowitz, 2014). The list was complemented with smaller entrepreneurial outlets both inside and outside the U.S. The sampling was continued until a sufficiently diverse sample of outlets was covered. Data saturation was reached as all collected data fit in the identified discourses and did not reveal uncovered aspects in them. Perhaps surprisingly, no country or region-specific differences were identified, except for a brief mention about the fight against censorship in the Cuban case. The U.S. pages were collected in spring 2015 for the purposes of another research project (Ruotsalainen, 2016) and the rest in autumn 2017. The non-English pages were translated into English.

Because the purpose of this article is to add to the understanding of the emerging ethos of entrepreneurial journalism, a broad definition of entrepreneurial journalism (Singer, 2017b) was assumed in the collection of the data. The selected outlets include a broad spectrum of large and small entrepreneurial media organisations: startups, non-profits, established outlets and newcomers. For the same reasons, the definition of journalism was kept relatively wide. While most of the organisations in the data are journalistic, there are some, such as the science publication Aeon or the technology site *TechCrunch*, which do not publish "news" but, rather, topical articles with a niche interest.

On the "About Us" pages the new digital media outlets describe their journalism, values and visions, thereby opening vistas to possible futures of journalism (Carlson & Usher, 2016). To reveal the shared meanings in the texts, the data was analysed using discourse analysis. Discourse refers to a socially designated and shared way of

thinking expressed through language. Discourses are social boundaries around what can be said about a topic, and how. This way they both limit and enable how a phenomenon or issue can be presented. (Fairclough, 2003.) New, emerging discourses create new social reality and can be used to anticipate emerging social futures (Inayatullah, 1998).

The analysis was initiated by coding different themes found in the data. The actual discourse analysis was conducted by analysing how these themes are represented in the data. Four discourses were identified and analysed: *identity*, *niche*, *network*, and *change* discourse. A rather strong discourse of *traditional journalism* was also identified. This discourse consists of such features and values as factuality, public service and impartiality. Because these features are well-known, the discourse of traditional journalism will not be presented in more detail in this article. The discourse is, however, pivotal as it supports the hypothesis of this article—that the conception of journalism among entrepreneurial journalists is a hybrid of the traditions of objectivity and dialogue.

4.2. Media Outlets as Persons—The Identity Discourse

In the *identity discourse* the media signify themselves as human-like individuals with their own identity and personality. This is done in five ways. First, the media ascribe themselves different characteristics and describe their "emotions". *Politico*, for instance, is "proud" and it has "passion", *Zetland* has written journalism as its "original passion", and *Quartz* is "nerdy" and defined by its "obsessions". Second, the media describe themselves as value-driven and ethical—how they believe in what they are doing. *Investigative Reporting Project Italy*, for instance, "believes journalism should be a watchdog of democracy" and *Krautreporter* describes its "principles". Twelve of the media write how "dedicated" and "committed" they are to their journalism, connoting they care about their journalism on a "personal" level. Third, the media construct identities by identifying with their audience. *Mic* for instance writes how its editors and writers share attributes with its readers, and *The Ferret* seeks to build a community of like-minded people. Fourth, the media highlight their individual reporters and founders. This can be interpreted as a way to brand their journalists (Molyneux, 2015), associate the organisation with real humans and thus to construct an authentic identity. *The Rumpus* for instance mentions the "overtly personal" newsletter of its editor-in-chief, and *Mic* was created by "two long-time friends". Fifth, the subjectivity and personal voice of the journalists are highlighted. This is demonstrated by *De Correspondent*, whose "authors are no objective automatons…; rather, they are subjective beings, rooted in and motivated by ideas and ideals".

The identity discourse presents news selection and journalism as something reporters personally care about. This is well exemplified by *Krautreporter*: "Our authors decide for themselves what they are going to report on". However, the focus is still on the news, on matters of public interest, and the discourse reflects a hybrid of the ideals of objectivity and dialogue. *El Diario* manifests this by emphasising that its defining values are subordinate to traditional journalistic ideals: "But all our values are subject to a fundamental one in journalistic terms: respect for the truth".

4.3. Going Deeper—The Niche Discourse

In the *niche discourse*, the media emphasise how they concentrate and specialise—an often-recurring word in the discourse is "focus". The subjects on which the media claim to concentrate on are, however, quite general, such as politics and business trends. Only a few media indicate clearly defined and narrow niches, such as *The Marshall Project*, which writes about the American criminal justice system.

In other words, the media claim to focus on rather traditional areas of journalism—"niche" refers to their specific journalistic approaches and voices rather than narrow topics. The outlets often assert to have some distinct feature that separates their news from "traditional" news. *Buzzfeed* does not produce only news but "the most shareable news". *Discourse Media* is "focused on matters of public importance" and includes topics such as gender and indigenous issues among those themes.

Many of the media manifest their journalism as "deep", as going or looking deeper than the surface of daily events: "dive deep" (*ProPublica*), "delve deeper" (*Vox*), "to uncover, explain and highlight deep-lying structures" (*De Correspondent*). Many of the analysed media thus claim their niche as something more comprehensive and more steeped-in than day-to-day reporting. In the words of *Zetland*, its "mission is not to make news—it is to make sense".

Niche discourse rhetorically highlights how entrepreneurial media differentiate themselves from general-purpose mass media and build their distinctive identity. This kind of journalistic ideal is not about providing "just the facts", but to assist with sense-making, a core tenet of dialogical journalism. However, the niche discourse does not question the objectivity ideal of general interest journalism.

4.4. Rhizomatic Media—The Network Discourse

The *network discourse* signifies media as nodes in networks. *The Marshall Project*, for instance, describes its web page as a "dynamic hub", and *FlavorWire* defines itself as "a network of culturally connected people". The network discourse marks a departure from legacy media, which often draw clear lines to separate them from both the audience and other organisations and institutions.

In the network discourse, the media seek to network and establish a personal relationship with their audience. The network discourse hence allows media to embody its audience's tastes and values. The *New Inquiry* seeks

to "connect directly with our audience" and *Quartz* calls readers to share its "passions". A personal and direct relationship with the audiences is manifested in how the media present themselves as communities: the word "community" appears in the data 15 times (see Malmelin & Villi, 2016).

The production of journalism is described as a networked process. The media often mention their freelance network and how they cooperate with other organisations. *Discourse Media* writes how media should "work together" more, and how it "collaborates with our colleagues to pool resources, build capacity and maximize our collective impact". *ProPublica* not only publishes pieces by other outlets but also annotates them and does follow-ups. This way the network discourse relies on the collective intelligence enhanced by the Internet.

In the network discourse, hybridity is expressed both as a cooperative production of (objective) journalism and as a dialogue between media and their audiences. The discourse can also be interpreted to incorporate people's intimate life spheres into journalism—a core characteristic of dialogical journalism.

4.5. The Reformists—The Change Discourse

In the *change discourse*, the media present themselves as change actors: as reformers of media, journalism, and society. *First Look Media* "seeks to improve society through journalism and technology", and *Zetland* participates "in the much-needed reinvention of Danish quality journalism". Traditional journalism is displayed in the discourse as being too passive. *Mic* states how "news organizations can do more to empower our generation". *ProPublica*, in turn, criticises traditional investigative journalism for its "past failings" and touts how it will persistently hold the powerful accountable "until change comes about".

Some media highlight narrative journalism, as opposed to fact-reporting, as being the tool to make such change happen. According to *The Marshall Project* "storytelling can be a powerful agent of social change". *Mic*, in turn, believes that "stories…shape the world, especially when they challenge traditional narratives". Here, "traditional narratives" can be interpreted as referring to legacy media, as *Mic* notes how the perspectives of young people are often "left out of the media's narrative".

In the change discourse, traditional journalism is portrayed as too dull and uniform. *Politico* claims that "traditional journalistic conventions…make stories dull, predictable and often unreadable". Implicitly criticising homogenous traditional media, *The Awl* argues that readers are "poorly served by being delivered those same stories in numbing repetition". Similar views are presented also by *Gawker*, *Mic*, *El Diario*, *De Correspondent* and *Marshall Report*.

In the change discourse, traditional journalism of the objective tradition is posed to be renewed by shaping journalism as more socially active and less dull and homogenous. The discourse implicitly encourages the injection of journalism with the diversity and "activism" of dialogical styles.

5. Sketching Scenarios for the Future of Entrepreneurial Journalism

The future of entrepreneurial journalism—as with journalism in general—remains fundamentally open. Alternative futures of entrepreneurial journalism can be explored—and long-term ideas, policies, strategies, and plans formulated—by constructing scenarios. A scenario is a vivid, information-rich description of a certain topic in a certain time in the future, with key trends, decisions, and events depicting how the present situation has led to a particular future (Glenn, 2009; Ralston & Wilson, 2006). It needs to be highlighted that scenarios are not predictions: by studying potential at the present time, scenarios anticipate plausible futures instead of predicting probable ones.

This section presents four scenario sketches of entrepreneurial, hybrid journalism in the year 2030. The scenarios presented are called "sketches" as they lack a full narrative of how a certain future could have been reached—instead, they are more snapshot-like views into the future. The year 2030 is chosen because a little over ten years is a sufficient time for entrepreneurial journalism to evolve and establish itself in the field of journalism. Each scenario sketch ends with an interpretation, in which manifestations of hybridity and possible outcomes of the scenario are assessed.

The scenarios were constructed by first selecting core elements from each of the four discourses and placing them into a table. Then thematically similar elements were coded to form initial scenario categories. Finally, to make the categories concise they were condensed so that each scenario had only one or two elements from each discourse (see Table 1). The table was then elaborated and expanded as short scenario narratives.

5.1. Scenario Sketch 1: Elitist-Individualists

Entrepreneurial journalists offer their journalism to educated "elite" audiences. Their value proposition is based on very narrow—and thus highly monetizable—niches: they provide high-quality, specialised and backstage information the audiences cannot find elsewhere. Quality journalism has become a way to make social distinctions, and an outlet's distinctive identity entices (elite) audience engagement.

The audiences expect individuality, character and integrity from their preferred media. Hence the media's identities reflect their founders' personality, voices and passions. As "individualists" entrepreneurial journalists often avoid having too close a relationship with their audiences. As such they can remain true to themselves, a principle appreciated by their audiences. However, the

Table 1. Scenario sketches of entrepreneurial hybrid journalism in 2030.

	Elements from the discourses			
Scenarios	**Identity Discourse**	**Niche Discourse**	**Network Discourse**	**Change Discourse**
1. Elitist-Individualists	Identity based on the founders' personality, voices, passions and opinions.	Narrow niches (such as the judiciary system), often on topics outside the daily news grind.	Networked with other, similar media outlets.	A pioneer spirit emphasizing the cutting-edge, the alternative, and the experimental.
2. Communalists	Identity based on the audience and its passions.	Relatively broad topic areas (such as technology), but audience members provide highly specialised knowledge.	Networked with the audience. Audience members as reporters.	The audience members as change agents in society.
3. Public Service	Identity based on a dedication to the "common good".	General news "with a twist" (such as explainers and interpretations).	Utilising the collective intelligence of the public.	Seeking to renew society.
4. Identity Media	Identity based on the reporters' personality and "obsessions".	Eclectic niches reflecting the interest areas of reporters. Partisan journalism with strong opinions.	Networked, distributed "newsrooms" and freelance networks.	Catering to new, emerging needs and offering highly novel content.

media often cooperate with other high-minded media outlets, as well as high-profile or insider audience members. Together this vanguard bunch relentlessly seeks the cutting-edge and is prone to experimentation.

Interpretation: Prototypes for this kind of a future are such outlets as the *Politico* or the *Quartz*. Dialogue in journalism is expressed by the subjective voices of the entrepreneurs rather than a polyphony of views. If a focus on elite niches became more common, it would, on the one hand, indicate a journalism that is more in-the-know, resourceful, and deep. On the other hand, though, it would imply a retreat from the public sphere and large-scale audience participation. A crucial question is whether legacy media would go this direction too, or whether they would seek to fulfil the function of public service.

In this scenario, entrepreneurial journalism would probably rely strongly on audience payments, be they by subscription, membership fees or single payments. This would further risk widening the gap between the information-haves and have-nots, the well-off and the deprived.

5.2. Scenario Sketch 2: Communalists

Entrepreneurial journalism outlets are built around audience communities (see Malmelin & Villi, 2016). Audience members are closely involved and often become reporters too. In a highly fragmented culture and public sphere, citizens seek existential security and a sense of purpose from different communities—audience communities among them.

Journalists specialise to offer content that their audience finds interesting. The media's niche areas and personality reflect the interests and identities of their audience. Many of the audience communities are oriented towards public matters. However, entrepreneurial outlets can nurture communities also for those audience segments unacquainted with current events. This fosters engagement in matters of public interest, and audience members often become influential change agents in society.

Interpretation: The scenario posits that audience communities and affiliated hybrid journalism could act as bridges between private and public motives and interests, in effect creating a new, hybrid social and societal entity. The "dialogue" in this scenario is a balanced mix of subjective styles and different points of view.

The scenario is inclusive and participation-positive and does not suggest the prospect of rising information-inequality. However, the risk is that journalism may lose its autonomy: journalists may have to submit to the audiences in order to stay relevant. All in all, this scenario promises a major opportunity for entrepreneurial media outlets, assuming they are much more proficient in nurturing audience communities than rigid legacy media (see Villi & Jung, 2015).

5.3. Scenario Sketch 3: Public Service

Entrepreneurial journalists offer their products to the general public. They report on the matters of public interest, but in new ways—for example, through news ex-

plainers. Many entrepreneurial news outlets also specialise in covering journalistic blind spots.

Entrepreneurial journalists construct their identities through a dedication to the common good. Still, they are not as passive in regards to promoting change as legacy media but seek to renew society and right wrongs. The polarisation and decentralisation of societies has been reversed through state interventions, active social policy, and civic-minded journalism. Citizens are to a large extent committed to acting in the benefit of the broader society. Entrepreneurial journalists are networked with citizens, and can thus efficiently utilise the collective intelligence of the public.

Interpretation: This scenario could be driven by a broad awakening to the threat of widening social gaps and deepening inequalities in the society. A general sentiment towards public-mindedness would encourage entrepreneurial journalists to embrace traditional virtues of journalism with an activist streak, competing in the same field with legacy media but seeking to outperform them in terms of social impact.

In this scenario, entrepreneurial journalists pioneer a new kind of "institutionalised" public or citizen journalism, one that has the prowess to respond to the perceived shortcomings of mainstream media. Journalism leans toward an objective style of delivery with an emphasis on underserved voices.

5.4. Scenario Sketch 4: Identity Media

Entrepreneurial journalism outlets focus on helping audiences construct their identities. Identity politics have escalated. The world is changing faster than expected, and people cherish and protect their identities almost neurotically. Media outlets base their identities on their reporters' "obsessions".

The niche areas entrepreneurial media focus on are eclectic, reflecting the personal interests of both the reporters and the audiences. Journalism is often hyperpartisan with strong, albeit well-argued, opinions and views. Still, people are curious about the world and constantly seek new material to construct their identity. Newsrooms are highly networked, often free of physical spaces. Freelance networks and audience participators provide reporting and ideas to meet extremely diverse demands. Entrepreneurial journalism caters to new, emerging needs, tastes and topics, offering highly novel content.

Interpretation: In this scenario, hybrid journalism is perhaps most dominated by dialogue and especially its use of literary techniques. With narrow audience segments and their own journalistic voices, this scenario reflects what Nechushtai (2018) describes as an emerging news system category of "polarized liberal".

With the focus on idiosyncrasy and identity, the scenario runs the risk of severing cultural and ideological polarization. On the other hand, in this scenario media are the most pluralistic and diverse, and audiences highly engaged to participate in the production of journalism. Hence, perhaps paradoxically, there is also a potentially heightened interest in public affairs.

6. Conclusions

In a possible future, journalistic media outlets will continue to lose their relevance, interest and engagement among audiences, to the advantage of other content producers who engage more participatory forms of communication on social platforms. The solution outlined in this article to avoid such a future is a hybrid of the ideals of objectivity and dialogue in journalism—arguably well-fitting to the participatory social media. This type of journalism has the potential to invoke "hybrid engagement", which draws on both affect and reason and potentially encourages behavioural engagement as well—i.e., audience participation.

The assumption that an ideal of hybrid journalism and hybrid engagement is spearheaded by entrepreneurial journalists was tested in the analysis of the "About us" pages of 41 entrepreneurial journalism outlets. The article found that the discourses—emphasising distinctive identity, niche approaches, networks, change-oriented culture, and traditional journalistic values—indeed display hybrid notions of journalism and engagement. In the words of *Zetland*, journalism should "engage the heart as well as the mind".

Elaborating the discourses, this article presented four scenario sketches of entrepreneurial hybrid journalism. In the "Elitist-individualists" scenario, hybrid engagement is based on the mix of premium and trustworthy quality as well as the distinctive, highbrow sensibilities of the media outlets. Audience participation is relatively low as media outlets and audiences alike appreciate the uncompromised autonomy of journalism. In the "Communalists" scenario, the media and their audiences live in an almost symbiotic relationship, on which participation and engagement are built on. Audiences assume journalistic ideals and norms, which set them apart from, e.g., independent bloggers. The "Public service" scenario, comes closest to traditional journalism, as entrepreneurial journalists offer their journalism first and foremost for the general public. However, they engage audiences by an active stance towards social change and by embracing a wide range of citizen contributions, setting them apart from legacy media. In the "Identity Media" scenario, audiences are engaged by the outlets' idiosyncratic identities and contents, which help them construct their identities, as well as by the accurate but opinionated reporting. Audience contributions are needed to meet the immensely diverse and swiftly changing tastes and demands.

Entrepreneurial journalists offer a testbed to experiment with new approaches in journalism. The scenarios presented here show different approaches how entrepreneurial journalists can renew journalism and how hybrid journalism can manifest and evolve in practice. In

each of the scenarios, the outlets interact closely with their audiences and consequently know their intricate needs and tastes in detail. This kind of sensibility is something that bigger news organisations may find hard to establish—but which is increasingly crucial in a media environment where the provision of facts alone is insufficient and needs to be spiced up with affective and participatory approaches. The "audience-first sensibility" is—or should be—closely connected to the audience-first strategies of media outlets, as they seek to compensate for diminishing advertising revenue with gaining and retaining loyal paying consumers (Villi & Picard, in press).

Further studies could build on, elaborate, broaden and challenge the scenarios, and compare if and how empirical analyses of entrepreneurial journalism—not just conceptions of journalism—match the findings of this article. Studies could also advance the study of both concepts by anticipating what different outcomes entrepreneurial journalism and hybrid journalism may have in the future, for which scenarios are only one tool. Journalism studies is already a strongly future-focused discipline (Broersma & Peters, 2017), and assuming concepts and methods of futures research could help clarify the academic discussion on the possible, desirable, and undesirable futures of journalism (see Ruotsalainen, in press).

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland and the Finnish Foundation for Economic Education.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Juho Ruotsalainen (M. Soc. Sc.) is a postgraduate student at the Finland Futures Research Centre, University of Turku. His doctoral thesis explores entrepreneurial journalists—their conceptions of journalism and its futures, and the reporting styles they develop and adopt. By studying entrepreneurs as pioneers in the field of journalism Ruotsalainen seeks to anticipate how journalism, in general, may change by the year 2030.

Mikko Villi (PhD) is Professor of Journalism at the University of Jyväskylä, Department of Language and Communication Studies. In his work he explores the evolution in different media sectors, focusing on digital communication, online communication, mobile communication, and visual communication. His key interest is the study of media organisations and media management, thereby joining the study of organisational communication with media studies.

Appendix

The studied entrepreneurial journalism outlets and the URLs of their "About Us" pages.

14ymedio (http://www.14ymedio.com/quienes-somos.html),
Aeon (http://aeon.co/magazine/about),
All Things Digital (http://allthingsd.com/about/site),
Blank Spot (https://www.blankspot.se/in-english),
Bleacher Report (http://bleacherreport.com/about),
Business Insider (http://businessinsider.com/about),
Buzzfeed (http://www.buzzfeed.com/about),
De Correspondent (https://decorrespondent.nl/en),
Discourse Media (http://discoursemedia.org/about),
eldiario.es (http://www.eldiario.es/que_es),
The Ferret (https://theferret.scot/about-us),
First Look Media (https://firstlook.org/about),
Flavorwire (http://flavorwire.com/about),
Gawker (gawker.com/about),
Gigaom (about.gigaom.com),
GlobalPost (http://www.globalpost.com/content/about),
Investigative Reporting Project Italy (https://irpi.eu/en/about-us),
Krautreporter (https://krautreporter.de/pages/ueber_uns),
Mashable (http://mashable.com/about),
Mediapart (https://blogs.mediapart.fr/la-redaction-de-mediapart/blog/290910/about-mediapart),
Mic (http://mic.com/about),
MinnPost (http://www.minnpost.com/about),
News Deeply (http://www.newsdeeply.com/overview/),
OZY (http://www.ozy.com/about),
Politico (http://www.politico.com/about/our-story),
ProPublica (http://www.propublica.org/about),
Quartz (http://qz.com/about/welcome-to-quartz),
Re/code (http://recode.net/about),
Salon (http://www.salon.com/about),
Talking Points Memo (http://talkingpointsmemo.com/about),
TechCrunch (http:// techcrunch.com/about),
The Awl (http://www.theawl.com/about),
The Daily Beast (http://www.thedailybeast.com/company/about-us.html),
The Daily Caller (http://dailycaller.com/about-us),
The Marshall Project (https://www.themarshallproject.org/about),
The New Inquiry (http://thenewinquiry.com/about),
The Texas Tribune (http://www.texastribune.org/about),
The Verge (http://www.theverge.com/about-the-verge),
The Rumpus (http://therumpus.net/about/),
Vox (http://www.voxmedia.com/brands/vox),
Zetland (https://www.zetland.dk/aboutzetland).

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 91–102
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1674

Article

Networked News Participation: Future Pathways

Sue Robinson * and Yidong Wang

School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53706, USA;
E-Mails: robinson4@wisc.edu (S.R.), wang797@wisc.edu (Y.W.)

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 3 July 2018 | Accepted: 24 August 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
Civic participation in news production has been a trend under academic scrutiny for at least two decades. The prevalence of digital communication and the dominance of proprietary platforms are two combining forces that disrupt the established journalistic norms. In this article, we investigate news participation and make three grand statements regarding: 1) the holistic definition of participation, 2) the network structure of participation delineating the power dynamics of different media actors, and 3) the transnational context of participation exhibiting the structural constraints within nation-state sovereignty. It is our argument that news participation as a civic act in the digital, globalized age has not fundamentally democratized the information flow as early optimists predicted. Instead, a group of "information elite" have risen to power due to their access to institutional resources, their advantageous positioning in the media ecology, and their entrenchment in the dominant ideology. Participation on proprietary platforms can be easily co-opted to serve the interest of the new information elite.

Keywords
civic participation; news participation; participatory journalism; proprietary platforms; social media

Issue
This article is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

Participation in "acts of news" (Robinson, 2014) as a discourse on proprietary platforms opens up a civic space for knowledge building—or at least this is the way our actions in digital social places are supposed to feel. But since this space is constrained by the existing hierarchically oriented societal infrastructure, new participatory forces are prone to be appropriated by the social, institutionally entrenched elite to perpetuate such power structures. Civic actors who align with dominant ideologies now show a technological savvy to immerse themselves into the networked media ecology to advantage. Quandt (2018) points out that "dark participation", such as manipulative disinformation and outright trolling, has long been a twin force parallel to the positive side of participation in the cyberspace. In their reflection on the scholarly writings about digital participation, Lewis and Molyneux (2018) question the presumptive conceptualization of civic discourses on social media as positive, representative, and decisive. And yet never before have marginalized voices, social movements, and nonprofits had such access to at-the-ready mass communication outlets; never before have whistleblowers, good Samaritans, and oppressed citizens found audiences to effect change at local *and* global levels; and never before have we had such networks available to us as individuals to keep up with friends and colleagues, look for jobs, decry our politics, or seek community. Scholarship on "participation" has begun to debunk the hype and nuance participatory practices in consideration of the various contexts within which it is exercised. This work is so important as our lives become more and more entangled with social-media's proprietary platforms over which we

have very limited control and within which our very souls are laid bare for advertisers, political operatives, and others who may or may not have our best interests at heart.

Our aim in this essay is to make three grand statements about the science and art of participation: the holistic definitions of participation, the network structure of participation, and the transnational context of participation. First, we will articulate what is meant by "participatory". In doing this, we explore the epistemological roots of participation as a civic act, considering the multiple layers of participation as something done both as an individual and also as part of a governing system of knowledge dissemination and control (Carpentier, 2015; Melucci & Keane, 1989). Second, we offer a typology of participatory roles, drawn from Robinson's research (2016, 2018). We complicate those roles by situating them within a structuring system of networked information exchange that is directed by power dynamics. Third, we think transnationally about these roles in the context of proprietary systems of distribution according to government-media relationships (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Wide variances exist on the availability of interactive features on news and social sites even within the borders of the same democratic country (Suau & Masip, 2014). We note too that the very definition of "participation" morphs according to the locality and its political and information infrastructure; each place has its own structuring system with varying formal/informal relationships as well as different restrictions and allowances for participation in mediated spaces.

Our fundamental argument is that network-savvy, prolific members (often representing some segment of the status quo, but not always) are forming a new "information elite" who are reconstituting information flows at all levels of society. As such, this thinking advances Robinson's categorizations of participatory roles; the position of some individuals as being highly networked with access to proprietary platforms determines the amplification of voice. Underlying structures such as legacy media platforms or authoritative institutional sites privilege production circulation for many participants—making them a new kind of elite because of their access to the information stream, especially that which flows among policymakers. For others who are less connected, elite status is more elusive until citizens are able to manipulate the communication networks—and their constraining and enabling forces—in an advantageous manner.

Furthermore, the decline in news outlets locally means that citizens globally are exposed to a proliferation of national news and radio talk shows that tend to be niche oriented—e.g., Fox or MSNBC in the United States—alongside a plethora of content from local activists and politicians, NGOs, and multinational corporations crowding the public deliberative sphere. Holt (2018) captures how some of these actors establish an "anti-system" niche in the information flow and brand themselves as alternative media sources challenging the perceived "established system", whose interest is allegedly represented and reinforced by the mainstream media. Meanwhile, trust in information sources becomes a scarce good as people are now more aware of the agendas promoted by niche news sources. According to the Digital News Report conducted by Reuters Institute (2018), proprietary platforms where those news sources aggregate may risk losing their participatory appeal to more private messaging services because of concerns over misleading information and breach of user privacy.

Thus, this article will interweave the intersecting forces in play around the civic task of news participation with our advanced understandings of digital networks, normative hierarchies governed by dominant ideologies, and new connectivity among global nation-states. Citizens' participation in news production serves a civic function as information is gathered and disseminated to advance certain agendas concerning the daily life of citizens. Conceptually, such participation is a continuation and expansion of Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, and Delli Carpini's (2006) model of civic engagement, which entails purposeful acts of problem solving and community building. The civic nature of news participation gives another layer of relevance to our argument about information elite, whose undue privilege can potentially undermine the health of participatory news networks—with one outcome being the lessening of any civic impact. In the conclusion, we will focus on the future directions for research on news participation, thinking about where we have already been and the trends of polarization and isolationism internationally as well as the complicated job of the participating citizen today.

2. Participation and Its Structures

2.1. Defining Participation

Vague and fickle, interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional, the concept "participation" eludes a strict consensus of definition (Carpentier, 2015; Fierlbeck, 1998; Jenkins, 2013; Literat, 2016; Pateman, 1970). According to Jenkins (2013, p. 271): "it becomes more and more urgent to develop a more refined vocabulary that allows us to better distinguish between different models of participation and to evaluate where and how power shifts may be taking place". Participation thrives authentically only within a reciprocal relationship between two parties; the more engagement *journalists* have with citizens, the more *community* benefits from such participation (Borger, van Hoof, & Sanders, 2016; Harte, Williams, & Turner, 2017; Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). For example, García de Torres and Hermida's case study (2017) of journalist Andy Carvin depicts a constructive collaboration with public users of social media to report on breaking news. When citizens have capacity to tell their own stories to wide audiences, they "participate" in information flows of communities in ways that increase the feeling of belonging (Costera Meijer, 2013;

Nip, 2006; Robinson, 2009; Wall, 2017). Anderson and Revers (2018) define the epistemology of news participation as "a form of journalistic knowledge in which professional expertise was modified through public interaction" (p. 26). However, the normative ideal of participatory epistemology has been challenged by the hypercommercialization of audience engagement and the abusive use of participation to promote anti-democratic ideologies (Anderson & Revers, 2018; Quandt, 2018). Meanwhile, journalism studies scholars have explored how digitized "participatory journalism" undermines the press' authority (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Singer, 2011; Wall, 2017). Within the journalistic profession, there is confusion and a lack of standard regarding how to moderate participation so that institutionally produced news is not submerged by falsity and incivility (Boberg, Schatto-Eckrodt, Frischlich, & Quandt, 2018).

Carpentier (2015) in his attempt to untangle the varying meanings of the concept pulls from scholars such as Melucci and Keane in their 1989 declaration that participation "means both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the 'general interests' of the community" (p. 174). Ultimately, he lands on a definition that delineates the concept of participation from two others—access and interactivity, though he suggests that these two are dimensions that insert possibilities. Furthermore, Carpentier argues for a comprehensive understanding of any participation as being representative of a more macro struggle for ideological supremacy:

> Debates on participation are not mere academic debates but are part of a political-ideological struggle for how our political realities are to be defined and organized. It is also not a mere semantic struggle, but a struggle that is lived and practiced. In other words, our democratic practices are, at least partially, structured and enabled through how we think about participation. The definition of participation allows us to think, to name and to communicate the participatory process....As a consequence, the definition of participation is not merely an outcome of this political–ideological struggle, but an integrated and constitutive part of this struggle. (Carpentier, 2015, p. 18)

This article accepts this holistic articulation of participation as a social construct reflective of and shaped by numerous forces at work. This definition recognizes that many kinds of participation exist with its actants of various intentions and situations. When we explore participation as such, we must reveal the constraints and enabling mechanisms that generate outcomes (whether those outcomes come in terms of democratic experiences, social bonding, political/cultural capital, revenue, or perhaps something more malevolent like wide-spread "fake news" and propaganda). In other words, as we each participate in digital information infrastructures—in the ebb and flow of production and consumption through posting, friending, sharing, linking, pinging and other participatory acts—it matters where we are located (geographically, yes, but also culturally, racially, economically, politically etc.), when, why, and how. Certain "mechanisms" at work might entail national regulations, workplace protocols, or the proprietary-platform structures that impose rules and structures around participating. In addition, the vast underlying networks these proprietary platforms depend upon blend with our offline circles and vice versa—meaning that "participation" often results in unintended connections and associations that we may or may not have wanted.

The structures of participation rely on two major propositions: one, who is producing content and what role are they playing in the overall system of information exchange; and, two, what power dynamics are at work especially in consideration of the distribution infrastructure. We detail both below.

2.2. Participatory Actors

Regarding the first structural consideration, much scholarship has documented participants in information exchange. Lewis and Westlund (2015) gave weight to producers but also to the algorithms, cross-media platforms, network properties, and other dimensions that interrelate. Scholars catalogue the nature of digital participation, distinguishing between crowdsourcing, machine work, and more traditional production (Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-de-Guevara, 2012, also see García de Torres, Edo Bolós, Jerónimo, Yezers'ka, & Herrera, 2015; Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Thurman & Walters, 2013). Indeed, motivations for participations vary widely (Borger et al., 2016; Costera Meijer, 2013; Kormelink & Meijer, 2017; Wall, 2017). Ahva (2017) studied the "inbetweener" citizens who do not quite reach the level of journalist but still produce. Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) describe the peripheral workers in journalism, including citizen bloggers, programmers and analytical professionals, and rebels and reformers within institutional journalism, as "strangers" to disrupt the established rules of journalism. Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018) notice that a hybrid practice of both journalistic objectivity emphasizing professional fact-gathering and open-ended dialogism featuring audience interaction emerge in the form of "entrepreneur journalism". And Hermida suggests we are heading toward a mass collaboration of citizens participating on a large scale *with* journalists (2010; Garcia de Torres & Hermida, 2017). In this new information-based world, journalism authority and industry control diminish, leading to deprofessionalization (Splichal & Dahlgren, 2016). This section explores what role all of those producing information play in a media ecology.

Primarily, this article highlights a typology (see Table 1) Robinson (2016) did in collaboration with Kettering Foundation and that later served as the foundation for

her book titled *Networked News, Racial Divides: How Power & Privilege Shape Public Discourse in Progressive Communities* (2018). She broke the varying levels of participants down according to networked properties or information-exchange roles comprising digitized media ecologies today. The typology includes:

- "Institutional Producers": Those entities considered to be information royalty who have been around a long time and have the capability to allow or prohibit participation because they own their own platforms and have dominion over mass spaces that tend to be well known as "brands" among constituents. These are news organizations, government programs, churches, etc. who can bypass media to host their own information exchange and operate at the macro, institutional (or even, systems) level of information production.
- Situated inside these realms are many individuals ("Individual Institutional Producers") who carry the brand torch via their own participatory platforms such as their blogs, Twitter, or Facebook. Their highly networked scaffolding combined with their nimble relationship-building capacity as individual personalities makes this role in the emergent media ecology particularly powerful.
- "Alternative Sites" refer to media organizations like ethnic publications that establish outlets to challenge the status quo. Digital technologies have meant huge audience growth for these sites, which take advantage of participatory nature of interactivity. These entities are not quite institutional and established, but instead exist at the meso level of the information society.
- "Network Facilitators" maintain the network through aggregation and algorithms, tend to be automated, and operate at the meso level of society because they make visible what is happening on the individual level with what is being produced at the macro level. Google, Facebook, Twitter and other distribution platforms that are commercially owned and for-profit play key roles as essential network facilitators in information exchange.
- "Community Bridges" are those individuals or entities who circulate in multiple groups within the overall information network and who have the capacity to broker relationships. In this work, "Community Bridges" can prevent a situation where silos of conversation dominate by forging connections where there were none—at least in theory.
- "Niche Networkers" are those key influencers around specific topics or special interests whose participation in information production populates the discussion. Sometimes these can be "Community Bridges" as well, but more and more often, they are not. Robinson's research (2018) demonstrates that these individuals, operating at the micro level, make use of all the digital platforms available and tend to be prolific across the information-exchange platforms around a particular issue.
- "Issue Amplifiers" are those engaged citizens who might link or share public-affairs data on their Face-

Table 1. Participatory roles in an emergent ecology in local community.

Roles	Function	System Level	Actors	Platforms
Institutional Producers	Set hierarchy for information flow	Macro	Institutions such as the press or school district (as entities)	Newspapers, radio, television, website, social media accounts
Individual Institutional Producers	Perpetuate hierarchy of flow	Macro-Meso-Micro	Individual reporters, politicians or others associated with institutions, offshoot websites	Reporter blogs, social media accounts of employees
Alternative Sites	Groups or established entities challenge status quo	Meso	Nonprofessional journalism entities with general-interest content	Newspapers, radio, websites, blogs, forums, Facebook Group Pages
Network Facilitators	Maintain the network, aggregate content	Meso	Automated program	Website, blogs, Google, Facebook, Twitter
Community Bridges	Individuals or sites that connect otherwise disparate communities	Meso-Micro	Community leaders (could be reporters, activists, bloggers)	Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, social media
Niche Networkers	Individuals not associated with institutions who produce copious content on an issue	Micro	Special-interest bloggers, activists, citizen journalists	Blogs, Facebook pages, websites, social media
Issue Amplifiers	Share, discuss	Micro	Engaged citizens	Facebook, Twitter, email

book pages and Twitter feeds, or other social media but who are not regularly producing content around a specific topic like "Niche Networkers". In a world where 1.37 billion active *daily* users globally are on Facebook alone (and some 330 million on Twitter), many many individuals might consider themselves to be participating in some kind of micro-level issue amplification.

These roles of production work in concert with participatory actions that make up the information flow in local communities as well as national media systems. From the micro-level individual poster on Facebook or Weibo to the mega-systemic, macro-level distributive platforms that operate as "network facilitators", each role contributes, influences, undermines, transforms, enhances, and perpetuates the social, political, economic forces in the civic society of every country around the globe. It is how people and entities are networked that determines the direction and volume of information. Those networks result from both intentional actions as well as latent effects, draw from both offline and online relationships, and reflect the circumstances at work in the overall media ecology at micro, meso, and macro levels. It should also be noted that these roles are not discrete categories.

2.3. Power Hierarchies in Proprietary Distribution Systems

Second to consider is the *success* of those information interactions as determined not only by the networked amplifications—and these would include the algorithmic properties of platforms—but also by the dominant ideology and power dynamics of a particular sphere. Participation depends not only on platform access and availability, and not only on networked connections and amplification (Usher, 2017), but also on the internal and external forces at work before that person presses the submit button. Some scholarship has posited that to "participate" is to engage in a duality—on the one hand, it means to act as an individual with intention for some expected benefit, and on the other, it also suggests to become a "part" of something bigger than the individual, to participate in something like a community or system (Carpentier, 2015; Melucci & Keane, 1989). This duality means that those studying participation as a phenomenon must appreciate not only the individual participators—their motivations, influences, impacts, challenges and strategies—but also the structural conditions surrounding that participation. This latter means consideration of the power dynamics at work, the specific networked infrastructure supporting (or inhibiting) participation, and the influencing actions of others in that realm. A dominant ideology that governs the information-exchange patterns can help determine the success of any participation. Every participant plays a role within that system, whether they mean to or not. Every act of participation creates a ripple or a splash in a massive stream of information.

Thus, participation comes with caveats. Off of Carpentier (2009, 2015), Pateman (1970), and Arnstein (1969), Literat (2016) lays out "degrees of participation" where both the actions and its outcomes exist along a continuum axis that depend on a huge host of factors. Someone merely posting as an "Issue Amplifier" on their own have little influence in the network without some kind of facilitator or key connection that can send that content over a bridge into other places (Usher, 2017). Citizens on their own must generate and take advantage of highly networked connections if they want their content to make an impact. Without that connection, these producers are merely practicing "citizen participation" as opposed to "civic participation". One role news organizations perpetuate is a constant repairing of authoritative fissure through very intentional repressing of "non-professional" content produced by "amateurs". Analyzing Australian journalists' adoption of Twitter as a news dissemination platform, Bruns (2012) revealed that the tension erupted when news organizations migrated to the social media sphere and cohabited and competed with "amateur" news producers actively attacked their institutional authority. This policing of journalistic authority is an important point to remember because so much scholarship has heralded the opportunities of the Internet to diffuse power hierarchies (e.g., Castells, 2013), but institutions remain entrenched as controllers of information. Carpentier (2009, p. 408) calls the utopian outlook on digital possibilities a "reductionist discourse of novelty". Hindman (2008), Robinson (2018), and many others have shown how offline echelons temper such rapture.

The word "participatory" evokes a utopian democratic agency, yet digital production manifests something more nefarious, or at the very least, often represents a co-opting of that agency. Way back in 2002, Andrejevic warned of the "exploitation of self-disclosure" in interactive media production, which transforms any act of participation on the part of citizens into free labor for commercial institutions and subjects private information to state and corporate surveillance. More than a decade later, Silverman (2015) suggested we have entered a "surveillance state" that amounts to "spying" on the part of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Mass-scale surveillance enabled by "digital footprints" has become an integral part of the capitalist state machine that rationalizes domination through optimizing economic productivity and regulating the technocultural discourses circulating in the media (Bolin & Jerslev, 2018; Fuchs, 2015). In this accounting, "participation" within proprietary entities fails as an act of individualism but rather represents acts of subjugation by the owners of proprietary platforms. In any such model, only a partial participation is present (Pateman, 1970). Arnstein (1969) points out that when participation occurs without the power to effect change, frus-

tration reigns as only one party sees benefits. For "full" (Pateman, 1970) or "maximalist" participation to be achieved, power between the participatory parties must be shared equally across the continuum of production to consumption (Carpentier, 2015; Servaes, 1999; White, Nair, & Ascroft, 1994). "Participation", then, goes somewhat beyond mere "access" or even "interactivity", suggested Carpentier (2015).

3. The Transnational Context

In addition to these more internally determined structures of participation, we must also understand external contexts, specifically through a transnational lens. In their model of comparative media systems, Hallin and Mancini (2004) put forward a set of parameters, including news market, political parallelism, journalistic professionalization, and state intervention, to measure how media operate in a given locality. This comparative framework suggests that the shape of media landscape is tied to specific nation-state contexts.

A felicitous case to demonstrate this complexity of civic participation in news production is China. Historically, the state has been playing a central role in media production since the Communist rule was established in 1949 (Zhao, 2011). It is too simplistic to conceptualize state intervention just as political censorship and suppression of civic participation. According to Zhao, the influence of the Chinese state also penetrates into the "democratic" dimension of media praxis, such as market-oriented commercialization, journalistic professionalization, and even the public's expectation of the "Fourth Estate". Through analyzing Chinese journalists' attitude toward user-generated content, Tong (2015) found that Chinese journalists (as "individual institutional producers") associated their professional identity closely with their affiliation to media organizations and deemed participatory journalism an outsider practice. In the Chinese context, such organizational affiliation, or *danwei*, entails both an employment relationship and a consent from the state. When performing the "watchdog" duty to monitor state power, Chinese journalists often need to step outside the institutional structure of *danwei* and switch their identity to "citizen journalists" (Xu, 2015; Yu, 2011). In the Chinese case, the ecological position of "individual institutional producers" is more a disjuncture rather than an extension of the institutional media agenda. It is difficult for professional journalists to bridge communities, facilitate networks, or cultivate niches despite their network position. Participatory news production is not only a challenge to journalistic authority, but also a challenge to state authority over journalism.

Social media constitute a crucial site for civic participation in China, both for journalists and for citizens (Liu, 2017). But user activities on social media are under comprehensive government surveillance as well. A group of opinion leaders emerged on Chinese social media, especially Weibo, around 2010. This group of social media opinion leaders, nicknamed "big V" after their verified VIP account and comprising professionals, pundits, and celebrities in the entertainment industry, served as the collective voice of grassroots netizens and gained significant power to guide public attention to various social affairs (Schneider, 2017; Svensson, 2014). In 2013, the government crashed down many "big V" accounts, accusing them of circulating untruthful claims and disturbing social order. This meso-level entry in the participation network was eliminated. Meanwhile, the Chinese government employed "counter-networking" agents who created more than 400 million bot messages yearly to override participatory voices on social media (King, Pan, & Roberts, 2017). Even the digital infrastructure of civic participation is infused with state power. Major technology companies in China rely heavily on the government for favorable policies. In exchange, domestic service providers enforced vigorous self-censorship, mandated identity verification, and made user data fully available to the government.

As demonstrated in the Chinese case, understanding participation through a transnational lens rejects a mechanical application of Robinson's (2016, 2018) typology of ecological roles. The interaction between "institutional producers" and other more amateur actors in the ecology (such as "niche networkers" or "issue amplifiers") affects a media ecology through the broader social structure of the given locality. Proprietary platforms can facilitate civic participation, but they are essentially private companies feeding on commercial success. Despite operating multinational businesses, platform companies like Google and Facebook—or "network facilitators"—do not have the means or the incentive to challenge local power arrangements that privilege certain social groups while oppressing others. Therefore, participatory media production should not be branded with either a teleological transcendence promising an ultimately civic paradise or a technological determinism glorifying the media platforms. Participation itself is a site of power struggle.

4. Participation and the New Information Elite

When we talk of "participation" in the digital age and understand that power must be a part of those discussions, we are speaking of the impetus for the formation of an "information elite", who understand how best to manipulate content, digitally, and then to distribute it within a highly networked mediated infrastructure. Any production by savvy actors or machine agents occurring on densely connected networks will result in a more superior impact. But we also know from viral videos, for example, that even smaller ecological players such as "niche networkers" or even "issue amplifiers" can "work" their networks to achieve greater participatory success. In effect, these non-institutional citizens—though connected in other ways as activists, community leaders, engaged experts, etc.—achieve status as a new information elite. We can see this participatory success playing out

at macro, meso, and micro levels with information elite infiltrating all the typological information-exchange, ecological roles of Robinson (2016, 2018).

At the macro or systems level, state power dynamics, commercial conglomerates, and "institutional producers" regulate proprietary platforms that commodify user-generated content, gain profits from online traffic, and set the rules for participation. Companies that operate at the macro-level such as Alphabet, Facebook, and Amazon ("network facilitators") join with other infrastructural and distribution platforms like AT&T and media empires like News Corp to form a new elite business club, which has significant control over people's daily communication and backs up a digital elitism in the name of participation. This prioritization of corporate interests is regulated by national policies and interests in exchange for administrative advantages. In this macro functionality, participation feeds these power structures.

These conglomerates nurture the networks at the meso-level via algorithms and aggregation and connect macro and micro levels of information participation. Anderson (2011) noted that we are moving toward "algorithmically oriented production" processes (p. 540) where machines themselves are "participating" by producing content (Dörr, 2016). The prevalence of computational tools in news production and circulation brings about new ethical and analytical questions regarding labor relations, data collection, and algorithmic transparency (Diakopoulos & Koliska, 2017; Lewis, 2015). Through their meso-level algorithmic strategies, platform companies co-opt micro-level citizen "participation" under the guise of civic acts. When we theorize about participation, we need to remember that algorithms are privately programmed, as Neff (2018) and others are researching; participants can employ "search engine optimization" (SEO) strategies, but in the end if their content properties are not picked up by the algorithms for distribution of Facebook, Google and other monolithic technology companies, the material goes nowhere (Nguyen, Kelleher, & Kelleher, 2015; Wang, 2015).

At the micro-individual level, most grassroots participators such as "issue amplifiers" or even would-be "community bridges" are constrained by these meso and macro functionalities. In the case of thousands of social media "celebrities," they form the silent pedestal of the economy of digital participation rather than democratize channels to set social agendas. Participatory platforms facilitate the mobilization and self-organization of alternative voices in their bid for challenging existing hierarchies. But these platforms, or rather their owner companies, rarely protect alternative voices from suppression by institutional or state powers. Finally, people who are better-off socially gain more from digital participation, while marginalized communities face more challenges in directing participation to their causes (e.g., Wang, 2018). That is, the class "information elite" is not solely about being active in the information flow and voicing opinions on digital proprietary platforms. They are the ones whose voices are really heard and amplified by the participation network because of their entrenchment into the macro-level structures.

Our major argument here is one that advances and nuances Robinson's 2018 typology of roles. Robinson delineated the different kinds of actors at work in the information flows of local community media ecology and then theorized how power dynamics influenced those actors' effectiveness. We are going one step further, noting that the literature points to a growing "information elite" that bubble up from that typology. The online and offline activity of these producers combine with an astute manipulating of their network position, the algorithms of the platforms and distribution systems, and their country's superstructure and regulations to create new groupings of successful participation. The members of these participatory groups hail from throughout Robinson's categorization of roles—not only institutional producers but also niche networkers and issue amplifiers. However, not all producers in these categories reach an elite status—defined as the point at which produced content or other kinds of participation in information exchanges are widely shared and discussed publicly. Whether they do or not depends upon the structures behind the participation. Although Robinson and Carpentier both write at length about actors and their power dynamics, neither aggregate the specific forces that include institutional commodification of participation, distribution systems' varying constraints and enablings, or transnational contexts or articulate the result in the same way as this concluding essay for this thematic issue.

5. Conclusion

The common narrative that identifies civic participation as a driving force for democracy presumes a certain normative ideal, which entails mobilizable publics and adaptable institutions (Jasanoff, 2011). Participation is considered civic and constructive when it empowers individual citizens to pressure institutional producers toward internal change. Carpentier (2015) pointed out how any effects of participation in one field may be felt in other arenas of that person's life. Playing this out, we imagine a non-networked person, perhaps an "issue amplifier" who posts often on the topic of social justice and in the course of that participation, she is motivated to participate offline as well. An updated version of this empowerment narrative connects civic participation with self-actualization and struggles in private lives (Bennett, 2008; Kim, 2012), highlights the ability of institutions to incorporate civic participation in political mobilization (Karpf, 2012; Kreiss, 2012), and centers digital media as the facilitator for both trends (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012). This narrative is reflected in theorization of participatory journalism, with citizen content producers as the grassroots, the established news organizations as the institution, and digital media as the bridge between the two.

However, the democratic promise of civic participation is not a fixed premise; it is constituted with cultural identities, ideological predispositions, social hierarchy, and professional journalistic praxis (Dahlgren, 2012). Furthermore, the transnational context of participation complicates the structural constraints within nation-state sovereignty, among other factors. The triangular relationship between individuals, their institutions and the digital-media connectors varies according to how democracy is organized in a particular society. As we have argued in this essay, "participation" is not merely the action that follows interactivity allowed by the Internet but reflects systems at work. This new elite class of participants are highly networked individuals who operate within structures and infrastructures that help amplify their information production according to already established sets of rules and regulations. Because of this amplification, the elite groups can contribute to the discursive isolation of more marginalized citizens and countries, just as easily as they can raise voices. Future research might go deeper into this question of the nation-state influence on individual participation, especially in an age of globalization when time and space are perverted and multiple countries are involved with a single post or tweet. How do the geographic, cultural, economic, or political backgrounds of a participant affect what is produced, why it is produced, and where it travels?

This situation is exacerbated by global trends of intentional division and authoritarianism combined with an aggressive animus toward formal channels of participation such as the vitriol against professional journalists coming from leaders like President Donald Trump in the United States. Increasing polarization and isolation will continue despite the increasing capacity for the amplification of ideas and the nurturing of deliberation. If all participants in the new attention economy share content that is polemic and quarrelsome without being dialogic or deliberative, can we still consider such actions to be civically oriented? Here we see the potential for new lines of research investigating what Quandt (2018) in this thematic issue called "dark participation," which is the "evil flip side of citizen engagement" (p. 37). Dark participation, according to Quandt, would entail activities such as trolling, cyberbullying, or the more nefarious and explicitly produced "fake news" created by Russian operatives to undermine U.S. democracy, for example. In this essay he begins a typology of these "dark" participants, but as this is a huge and emergent realm of participation, much more theorizing needs to happen. How do these citizens with such malevolent intention work? How do their countries of origin and their countries of attack differ in their informational infrastructure? What makes them effective as powerful, networked actors with real influence on information flows—and ultimately on political events such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election? What are the structuring conditions that lead to success or failure of "dark participation"? These particular dark actors would constitute a new role in Robinson's categorization certainly, but the parameters of that role are still emerging and evolving.

Our argument about information elites in networked news participation can help to give some directions for answering these questions. In the context of the United States, a group of alt-right "participants" rose to prominence with their savvy use of digital media platforms like Reddit and 4chan. Marwick and Lewis (2017) pointed out that although the xenophobic, racist, and sexist ideologies the alt-right groups promoted might not represent the mainstream opinion climate, their messages got picked up by right-wing politicians and then the mainstream media. The alt-right groups' successful entry into the information flow, which perpetuates the social hierarchy disproportionately benefiting a few, reveals the interaction between effective use of network and entrenchment in the macro structure.

At the same time, interactivity has opened new pathways for information exchange, and burgeoning lines of scholarship must situate that fresh new power as well, along with the subversion and even revolution. Even the new "information elite" emerging within these social-media-enhanced networks must constantly grapple with the explosion of what Castells (2013) called "mass self-communicators" who are working side-by-side (sometimes in opposition to and sometimes in collaboration with) more professional communicators hailing from established institutions and organizations. Consider for example the global #MeToo social-media movement in which hundreds of thousands of women shared stories of sexual harassment; as accusations could be verified, companies took action, firing high-profile men, and committees and fund-raising entities were formed (as in the Hollywood Time's Up legal defense fund for sexual harassment victims), changing professional life in these places. However, such a grassroots movement also embodies contestation among structural powers. Transnationally, information elites were instrumental in making this movement go viral in Western democratic countries. In just a few weeks in the fall of 2017, the hashtag #MeToo found its way to 85 countries (Collins, 2018). These women ran the gamut in terms of fulfilling different and complementary roles in global media ecologies, with many serving as "community bridges" that spanned continents. But the movement was confronted with state intervention in many informationally repressed countries. In China, the hashtag #MeToo (both in English and in Chinese) was banned on social media, although the state did not actively suppress the revelation of sex offenders. Under such scenario, movement participants needed to navigate institutional conduits like state media and official reporting systems in addition to "mass self-communication" on social media. The power dynamic of the #MeToo movement also manifested cross-racially. Black activists' earlier promotion of the movement was largely neglected until White celebrities chimed in. The experience of women of color were again marginalized

after the movement gained international attention. Despite the interactivity of networked participation, the ability to become an information elite is often conditioned by race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. Therefore, grassroots movements with their birth on social platforms offer much fodder for scholars of participation seeking to understand the characteristics of successful production and sharing in terms of civic work. What are the forces at work when online participation becomes offline change? What are the downfalls when people participate at such breakneck speeds? How do people move between roles in the media ecology, with what motivations and intentions and influences?

This article has explored the multifarious dynamics of acts of participation in a digital, socially networked, globally interconnected world. Recent research has gained a better understanding of how participatory impulses of engaged citizens affect the production of news as a form of knowledge. This concluding piece is part of a thematic issue full of articles that investigate participation. In the introductory piece, Lewis and Molyneux (2018) suggest social media are ephemeral, uncertain things that demand highly contextualized research. Other articles in this thematic issue put forth new theories around the anti-system nature of alternative media regardless of their political stances (Holt, 2018), brief case studies to recount the historical trajectory of an evolving "participatory epistemology" as a new form of journalistic knowledge (Anderson & Revers, 2018), a hybrid model of audience engagement adopted by entrepreneur journalism (Ruotsalainen & Villi, 2018), a typology of "peripheral workers" who innovate or disrupt traditional news production inside and outside of the newsroom (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018), and a deep dive into the German Spiegel Online to understand how comment moderation decisions are made (Boberg et al., 2018). In aggregate they provide both a taking stock of participation research to date in journalism studies as well as an interrogation of participation's status in the field as a construct and phenomenon.

The thematic issue in *Media and Communication* overall points to a way forward for participation as it continues to evolve for new information roles, changing demographics and power structures, and enduring institutions and nation-state infrastructures. Particularly, these articles question the simplistic understanding of news participation as unconditionally civic and problematize the role of proprietary platforms in the media environment. Established news organizations have long been holding a strong animosity toward digital news aggregators, which are accused of appropriating the content without sending enough advertising revenue back (Chyi, Lewis, & Zheng, 2016). Nielsen and Ganter (2018) found that the tension between news organizations and proprietary platforms often revolved around the control over communication channels. Although platforms can potentially generate a high volume of traffic, over-dependence to social media monopolies like Facebook renders news producers, including citizen participants, vulnerable to unpredictable changes in technical specifications and marketing strategies that are only accountable to shareholders of platform companies. As a result, the weakened accountability among content, participants, and platforms undermines the capacity of the media system to internally mitigate what Quant (2018) identifies as "dark participation".

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Kettering Foundation for allowing the reprint of the table from the report: Robinson, S. (2016). *Deliberation in networked media ecologies*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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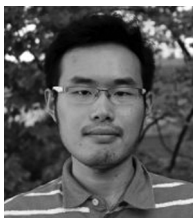
About the Authors

Sue Robinson (PhD, Temple University, 2007) holds the Helen Firstbrook Franklin Professor of Journalism endowed chair in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Journalism & Mass Communication. There she teaches and researches how the use of digital technologies in media ecologies can enhance and stymie participation among citizens. Her book, *Networked News, Racial Divides: How Power and Privilege Shape Public Discourse in Progressive Communities* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), explores new content-production roles in the information streams of highly liberal, mid-sized cities in the discussion of K-12 racial disparities.



Yidong Wang is a PhD student at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research focuses on the intersection of media technologies and cultural and political discourses, especially within a global context. His past works include a master thesis about the civic participation on digital media in the Hong Kong localist movement.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 103–106
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1743

Commentary

Commentary on News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media

James E. Katz

Division of Emerging Media Studies, Boston University, Boston, MA 02215, USA; E-Mail: katz2020@bu.edu

Submitted: 17 September 2018 | Accepted: 26 September 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
The far-seeing collection in this issue is arrayed across the terrain of journalism infused with social media. The authors take deep dives into the material and in the process contribute significantly to the research community's corpus on social media and proprietary platforms in journalism. In their wake, they leave an ambitious albeit hazy roster of research topics. My aim is to offer a brief critique of the articles and conclude with a few hortatory words.

Keywords
comparative methodology; critical studies; journalism; research agenda; social media

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

This far-seeing collection of articles in this issue is arrayed across the terrain of journalism infused with social media. The authors take numerous deep dives into the material and in the process contribute significantly to the research community's corpus on the topic of social media and proprietary platforms in journalism. They leave in their wake an ambitious albeit hazy roster of research topics. My aim is to offer a brief critique of the articles and conclude with a few hortatory words.

2. News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media

2.1. A Decade of Research on Social Media and Journalism: Assumptions, Blind Spots, and a Way Forward

Drawing on a decade-long retrospective of experience and analysis, Lewis and Molyneux (2018) attack three contentions about how social media should change journalism. These are that social media would be (1) a net positive, (2) reflect reality, and (3) would matter more than other factors. From today's perspective, these assertions would seem implausible, practically self-answering themselves in the negative. But in the halcyon days of social media's explosive growth, many researchers endorsed them. Lewis and Molyneux (2018) also identify two overarching narratives governing the arrival of social media: normalization and control. The first has to do with importing journalistic norms into new platforms of production and distribution. The second has to do with who determines what will be covered, that is, what constitutes news. Here they conclude that the audiences have been empowered significantly.

Arguing that these original contentions and narratives have led researchers in a certain direction, the authors can, with the advantage of hindsight, critique what has been overlooked. They now call for a revised research agenda that will take the field in a new direction and offer guidance as to what that might entail. Yet their brave new research agenda remains less of a roadmap and more of an incantation to today's version of what 400 years ago Sir Francis Bacon called in *Novum Organum* idols of the marketplace.

2.2. From Counter-Power to Counter-Pepe: The Vagaries of Participatory Epistemology in a Digital Age

Anderson and Revers (2018) provide an illuminating perspective on non-specialists' involvement in news creation. They highlight the value framework celebrating (at least in its potential) the authenticity of community participation in politics generally and journalism particularly. They do so by invoking the concept of "participatory epistemology", where public interaction modifies professional expertise of journalists. They draw on Fred Turner's work claiming that California's rising computer culture was predicated on the 1970s counterculture. As beguiling as the Turner thesis is, it must be acknowledged that Turner was selective in his choice of examples and that an argument could be built from what he omitted to prove exactly the opposite. Still, Anderson and Revers (2018) provide a valuable overview of the rise and fall of the hopes of citizen participation in the news production process. As such, they have added to our repository of examples of dashed populists hopes that opening processes to citizen participation would provide an antidote to technocratic elitism and political insiders' self-serving.

2.3. Dark Participation

Quandt (2018) notes that the utopian dreams of participatory online news, once celebrated as the savior of both newspapers and the public forum, are largely absent components of professional journalistic websites. Rather than "groves of academe", Quandt (2018) finds these outlets over-flowing with hateful comments, false information, and various forms of duplicitous manipulation. Quandt (2018) concludes his analysis with a surprise for the reader, which I will not give away. Regrettably, though, there is a missed opportunity of juxtaposing what happened with public digital engagement in journalism to what happened when the telephone was introduced because there are many illuminating parallels that could have been drawn. Initially telephone technology was designed to be a great way to spread useful information and news. Indeed, an early use was to read newspaper stories in a broadcast mode to telephone subscribers, a primitive form of multicasting. Yet accompanying such "light" forms of telephone usage were "dark" ones, ranging from obscene and distressing phone calls, spreading misinformation to harassing subscribers. As was the case with other articles in this collection, absent is an historical context that could have provided additional insight on the contemporary situation and a guide for likely future developments.

2.4. Alternative Media and the Notion of Anti-Systemness: Towards an Analytical Framework

Holt (2018) tackles a favorite trope among independent thinkers: the mainstream media, in alliance with those controlling the other levers of power in society, hide important information from the public. (This may or may not be an accurate contention depending on the specifics.) Although Holt (2018) chooses to go after those on the Right for believing in the existence of this informal conspiracy, it is safe to say that this trope has also been well-plowed by the Left and in quantitative terms, probably more so. Certainly, that has been the critique of Marxists and critical scholars, including those dedicated to anarchy, anti-capitalism, and environmental extremism. Holt (2018) correctly argues that similar standards should be applied to both Left and Right critiques. It seems that Holt may have noticed that when journalism scholars refer to extremist viewpoints, they are really speaking of those viewpoints with which they strongly disagree.

With reference to analysis of media groupings, Holt (2018) disambiguates relational from ideological anti-systemness. His analysis cleaves off what might be considered irrelevant (from a political/ideological viewpoint) alternative media from other types. It further allows the distinction between polarizing alternative media versus those that are opposed to the dominant system. The merit of this approach is that it downplays the value judgments that are often applied to groups that one either supports or opposes, and concomitantly minimizes the teleological fog that subsequently beclouds analysts' minds as they seek to celebrate or denigrate media outlets according to their ideological stripe. Echoing elements of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*, Holt (2018) provides a valuable heuristic for examining relationships among contested media perspectives.

2.5. The Moral Gatekeeper? Moderation and Deletion of User-Generated Content in a Leading News Forum

Boberg, Schatto-Eckrodt, Frischlich and Quandt (2018) explore not only what is *in* the comment sections of a newspaper but also (quite laudably in terms of analysis) what is *excluded*. Comments can provide insights on topics at hand and well beyond and can offer vital correctives and countervailing viewpoints. Yet many news outlets don't allow them, often for good reasons. Given the benefits of a well-run comment section, improvements to commenting procedures could enhance the quality of users' experiences and add to the outlet's value.

Drawing on a German newspaper's database, the authors derive several findings. More than a third of comments were rejected. The authors also discovered "no general pattern of moral redlines". Moreover, the absence of clear rules may lead to systematic bias concerning certain ideological representations, or at least the perception thereof. Not without cause, this is what the conservative and Right-leaning partisans have argued in the related context of social media giants such as Google, Facebook and Twitter. These findings suggest yet another ambitious research agenda.

2.6. Strangers to the Game? Interlopers, Intralopers, and Shifting News Production

Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) seek to update the way journalistic participation is categorized to better understand the realities of news production. The authors wish to reconceptualize the role of "outsiders", those who have not been traditionally considered journalists but who are now central to contemporary journalism. These include bloggers, web analysts and app designers, among many others whom they dub strangers. To improve the accuracy of our perceptions, the authors suggest a new categorization schema as well to gain greater analytical depth.

Drawing on the fecund Georg Simmel, they find much grist for their analytical mill. Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) conclude that these new strangers will not have the same traditional commitment to the ethical standards and personal aspirations of professional journalists. They end their work with a clarion cry for tracing out the implications of this situation for larger political and social spheres that journalism serves, a cry that should be heeded.

Going forward, they suggest that researchers have greater reflexivity. It may be that many researchers long for a restoration of the journalistic equivalent of the *ancien régime*, that is, an era with ample resources and expense accounts along with talented fact-checkers, editors and sub-editors to do quality control; deeply staffed newsrooms would go after the important stories of the day. Nevertheless, greater reflexivity would call into sharper question who benefited from the old system, as well as provide a more critical analysis of today's pursuit of citizen participation in journalism.

2.7. Hybrid Engagement: Discourses and Scenarios of Entrepreneurial Journalism

Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018) consider how journalists can produce stories that are both relevant and true. Yet even the term "true" is fraught because in the world of journalism it usually refers to two levels of meaning. First, that no statements in a story that are false. The other is that the journalistic report is a reasonably faithful transmission of reality as perceived by an objective outsider. However, neither definition is a full and complete definition of "true" because there can be no one-to-one correspondence between objective reality and a journalistic report; the report must always be an incomplete perspective and therefore not, in a narrow technical sense, true. But most stories are true enough to satisfy editors and audiences, although that is decreasingly the case in controversial areas.

Although given the topical framework of the collection and the fact that the authors bring up the topic, it is unsurprising that the authors do not delve into this complicated area. Still, when Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018) explore discourses surrounding what they term entrepreneurial and hybrid journalism, they sidestep the issue of truthfulness and how the potential diminution of objectivity may increase audience engagement but at the cost of legitimacy. Nonetheless, they are to be complemented for considering ways to generate both trustworthy quality on the production side and audience engagement on the consumption side. Additional research and analysis is their recipe for finding innovative solutions to the dilemma.

2.8. Networked News Participation: Future Pathways

Robinson and Wang (2018) explore networks of participation in the production of news. Focusing on the once and future vision of having major civic participation in news production, they arrive at an inescapable conclusion: contrary to vision of a glorious new era of democratic participation (which the intelligentsia has aspired for since the Internet era's inception), they find that today's elites continue to control the levers of power concerning information creation, interpretation, and distribution.

Commendable is the authors' focus on networks of information flows and personal contacts. Marching through several different bodies data, the authors examine the situation from multiple cultural perspectives (albeit primarily that of the United States) and, as they do so, develop a coherent and logical argument. They see several forces converging to create today's journalistic world, one that seems to them as both dim and diminished compared to its unrealized democratic potential.

What are the reasons for this sad state? Prime among them say the authors is the way journalists draw upon viewpoints of coincidently involved members of the public to make their stories colorful and meaningful to audiences. This increases the audience's feelings of belonging. Yet familiarity seemingly breeds contempt. When anybody can comment on anything, the role of the expert—already under assault throughout society nowadays—is further downgraded.

Robinson and Wang's (2018) narrative does not engage with the historical record of what happened when earlier technologies were introduced to journalism. The radio and then television were in their day seen as revolutionary technologies that would lead to an empowered citizenry, rapid dissemination of information, and better governance, not to mention promote health, welfare, and education. Readers can judge for themselves the cumulative impact of radio and TV. But my point is that an historical perspective would have contextualized and enriched the analysis of a situation that may otherwise seem unprecedented and specific to the technology. Such a perspective would also provide some comparative points when the time comes to evaluate remedies.

3. Conclusion

This issue's authors are to be applauded for their thorough engagement with an important topic, one that becomes increasingly pivotal as social media and digi-

tal communication allow people to find ever more contestable issues. Yet from my critical reading of the articles, two observations may be suggested to help the collective research enterprise. First, the focus on journalism without reference to historical analogs and contemporary systems of information distribution forfeits an opportunity to add analytical force and validity to arguments. Second, calls for action and new research directions remain vague: aspiring researchers need specific recommendations, especially for work that is "outside the box" of contemporary fixation. Despite these criticisms, overall the authors deserve congratulations on their thought-provoking studies.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Valerie Belair-Gagnon, Oscar Westlund and Mats Ekström for their thoughtful advice.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

James E. Katz (PhD, Dr. H.C.) is the Feld Family Professor of Emerging Media at Boston University's College of Communication. His latest book concerning journalism and the search for truth is scheduled to be published by Oxford University Press in 2019. His other recent books include *Philosophy of Emerging Media*, co-edited with Juliet Floyd, also from Oxford University Press and *The Social Media President: Barack Obama and the Politics of Citizen Engagement*, published in 2013 by Macmillan. In a 1998 article, he predicted many of the problems we are now confronting concerning journalism and the Internet ("Struggle in cyberspace: Fact and friction on the World Wide Web", in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 556, pp. 194–200).

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 107–110
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1751

Commentary

The Midlife Crisis of the Network Society

Nikki Usher [1,*] and Matt Carlson [2]

[1] College of Media, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL 61801, USA; E-Mail: nusher@illinois.edu
[2] Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA; E-Mail: carlson1@umn.edu

* Corresponding author

Submitted: 21 September 2018| Accepted: 24 September 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
The network society is moving into some sort of middle age, or has at least normalized into the daily set of expectations people have for how they live their lives, not to mention consume news and information. In their adolescence, the technological and temporal affordances that have come with these new digital technologies were supposed to make the world better, or least they could have. There was much we did not foresee, such as the way that this brave new world would turn journalism into distributed content, not only taking away news organizations' gatekeeping power but also their business model. This is indeed a midlife crisis. The present moment provides a vantage point for stocktaking and the mix of awe, nostalgia, and ruefulness that comes with maturity.

Keywords
digital journalism; fake news; hybridity; Networks; Media; participation; reflexivity

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction: The Network Society Reaches Midlife

The network society is moving into some sort of middle age, or has at least normalized into the daily set of expectations people have for how they live their lives, not to mention consume news and information. In their adolescence, the technological and temporal affordances that have come with these new digital technologies were supposed to make the world better, or least they could have. The ability to capture, to record, to share, to broadcast from our phones, made all much easier by social media platforms, and then, watch it scale; the ability to transfer near-instant information across wide, post-geographic nodes of exchange; the enabling of openness, transparency, and data-sharing; the ability for people, not just traditional gatekeepers, to hold power to account, and beyond—well, we knew, as journalism studies scholars, that this would fundamentally reshape professional journalism as a practice, its normative epistemology, and perhaps, even its authority. This excitement may seem puerile, but it was born of the optimism of youth. As a result, there was much we did not foresee, such as the way that this brave new world would turn journalism into distributed content, not only taking away news organizations' gatekeeping power but also their business model. This is indeed a midlife crisis. The present moment provides a vantage point for stocktaking and the mix of awe, nostalgia, and ruefulness that comes with maturity.

2. Darkness and Temporal Reflexivity

This thematic issue comes at a critical time, both geopolitically but also in terms of much needed academic reflection—asking what has happened and what we don't know about the nature of news and participation in a platform era. As scholars, we have seen just how nasty, or "wicked", even actors can be on these platform, as Quandt (2018) writes in this issue, and as schol-

ars, we must ask, "What has such research wrought?" (p. 42). Participation and participatory journalism are words that scratch the surface of the myriad conceptions of what it means to shift the modes and terms of engagement, as Anderson and Revers (2018) discuss here, as they try to unravel a "participatory epistemology" to describe "journalistic knowledge in which professional expertise is modified through public interaction" (p. 26). The hybridity of journalism today recalls some sort of mutant mix of journalist plus something else, or what we think of as a standard news outlet plus some other, not always desirable enhancement, as Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018) discuss. When new modes of online participatory media can be thought of as Holt (2018) puts forward, as "anti-systemness" and when even the most ordinary commenters on news outlets swear, a lot, creating all sorts of new swear words that AI content analysis must be taught capture, as Boberg, Schatto-Eckrodt, Frischlich and Quandt (2018) do, what are scholars, not to mention the public, supposed to do? Boberg and colleagues present the quandary of comment section moderators grasping for standards as they bat away comments deemed unworthy of being admitted to the public space.

One cannot help but think of a Hollywood X-man battle between the "good" half-journalists, half- Frog. To carry this superhero metaphor further, Pepe-the-Frog might have once been a good mutant participatory journalism leader but became, due to the toxic sludge of populism, a frog-headed, swastika wearing anti-hero, a genealogy discussed here by Anderson and Revers (2018). Surely, as Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) suggest, taking cues from George Simmel, there is some value to the benefit of the doubt for these new entrants into journalism; thinking of them as strangers already puts their potential contributions in a negative framework rather than a more productive one. But to wit, we are in comic-book world of participatory journalism; we do have, indeed, hybrid journalism strangers entering today's world of participatory journalism; and perhaps we have engendered a form of hyper-reality that demands thinking about who is good, who is bad, from an individual, group, and structural level, why this has happened and some of these strangers, as Quandt (2018) suggests, will indeed practice the "dark participation" wielding a pernicious, evil cloud over what could be a productive vision of mutual reciprocity that Lewis, Holton, and Coddington (2014) hope might be possible.

At the outset, this thematic issue tries to be generative and reflective, no easy task, and the mixing of theoretical articles with empirical ones sets forward a productive path for what must come next. Quandt tricks the reader in his essay (spoiler alert), after ⅔ of an article on the deep dark platform world, writing "If you now believe that the future is all doom and gloom, then you have stepped into a trap I have set" (2018, p. 44). What do we make of the past, present, and future for news, news and participation, and participatory journalism in a proprietary platform world? We need to ask these questions and provide some sort of "temporal reflexivity" (Carlson & Lewis, 2018), and in particular, chart the waves in our own academic discourse about participation as emancipatory and generative and participation as dark, evil counterpower. These essays suggest a need for balance—that the past was not as rosy as we scholars might like to remember, but more important to keep at the forefront of our present consideration. The present, in fact, might not be so bad either—there are ways in which marginalized groups can connect, new accountability is fostered, new ideas and practices can be introduced into newsrooms and professional journalism that might well enable future sustainability or at least more targeted and successful strategies. This means good strangers bearing presents and new powers, not bad ones with dark arts—as we have seen recently, when programmers bring their skills to journalism (Usher, 2016), and historically, when photographers came to journalism (Zelizer, 1995).

But the benefit of age is often the shift from a fascination with immediacy to a longer, deeper vision of the world. Lewis and Molyneux (2018) make this clear in the look back at guiding assumptions of social media within the journalism studies research. Could we begin again with what we have learned, how might have these studies been carried out? Robinson and Wang (2018) provide some help here by starting from a point of inequality rather than an assumption of social media equality; social media gives rise to elites who marshal offline resources and capital into online status. But, as they argue, this should not be entirely deterministic; we can't derive from social structure all we need to know about social media. We just need to be aware that what we study is deeply rooted in and reacting to the larger whole.

3. Into the Light: Moderating Dystopia and Utopia

How do we move forward then? Entrepreneurial journalism can both ground us in pre-existing normative boundaries, but it can also provide a way out (Carlson & Usher, 2016; Usher, 2017a). The thirty-years out vision that Ruotsalainen and Villi (2018) suggest has multiple modes for seeing the journalism of the future—but the idea of niche, elite, quality journalism for a small few is deeply concerning even as we can already see signs of this happening with membership models. On the other hand, perhaps the very understanding of participation as a possibility in journalism unsettles the knowledge claim of journalists to begin with and invites new people to retake this claim to knowledge in alternative form of participatory expression. We see this discussed here in a number of essays—in comments, ordinary people are now free to push back in very visible ways on news outlets, and even after over a decade of news comments on websites, there's no real method through which to distinguish the good from the bad—but we can at least say people are passionately talking back and questioning

their received wisdom. But of course, that received wisdom is sometimes important, too—at some point, there has to be a commons for public deliberation as Boberg et al. (2018) note, but what happens when this commons goes away—when we are only sharing on our private, siloed platforms?

To be in a midlife mindset is ideally to find comfort in stability while not entirely surrendering oneself from novelty. When applied to the participatory potentialities of digital journalism, we find evidence of stasis that does not suggest we are stuck, but a recognition that the same tired, structural, political economy patterns repeat themselves, perhaps more so in a post-capitalist, globalist society. As one of the authors of this essay argues, user-generated content and citizen journalism have been full-on appropriated by professional newsrooms, who haven't shifted their normative frameworks much (Usher, 2017b). Appropriation is an endless swirl, starting with the least powerful being appropriated and normalized into the slightly less powerful (turtles all the way to the top, as it were), as the drivers of capitalism and power struggle to dig in their tentacles of power.

Does this all get better somehow? Can we move toward a moderatism where dystopian and utopian visions co-exist, where the anti-heroes and heroes of the platform news and information ecology surrender their arms and instead of unconditional surrender, work out terms where free expression can coexist with respect? Or, perhaps even better, where public knowledge production can coexist with respect for expertise, with working in a symbiotic relationship rather than a lopsided parasitic one? Certainly, the powerful platforms have this in their best interest, and have begun funding academics to research how healthy discourse may survive. The bigger question is whether moderatism is, in fact, dead—or whether it can, in fact be rehabilitated—given how many find this call for balance undesirable. In our small pocket of the world, where we think big ideas and study those who produce them, what they look like, and how others consume them, we need a call to remember balance in our research questions such that we are able to capture a broad perspective of what the world is—and then ask, what it shall be.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the thematic issue journal editors and contributors for their robust contributions to this discussion.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Nikki Usher, PhD, is Associate Professor in the College of Media at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the author of two books, *Making News at The New York Times*, and *Interactive Journalism: Hackers, Data, and Code*.

Matt Carlson, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota. Recently he authored *Journalistic Authority: Legitimating the News in the Digital Era*.

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 111–114
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1744

Commentary

Why We Should Keep Studying Good (and Everyday) Participation: An Analogy to Political Participation

Neta Kligler-Vilenchik

Department of Communication and Journalism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 9190501 Mount Scopus, Israel;
E-Mail: neta.kv@mail.huji.ac.il

Submitted: 17 September 2018 | Accepted: 19 September 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
Research on participation is currently characterized by a trend towards studying its "darker" sides. In this commentary, I make an argument for why we should keep studying good participation. In addition, I claim that the flipside of studying exceptional case studies of participation shouldn't be only focusing on dark participation, but on everyday, mundane forms of participation, that may happen in surprising contexts (such as non-proprietary platforms) and may take different shapes. To make these claims, I introduce a case study of "good participation" in news production processes, and explain why it may merit this distinction. I then use a three-pronged analogy to the cognate field of political participation to show what it can tell us about good—and everyday—participation in the news.

Keywords
citizen journalism; dark participation; everyday participation; good participation; news; participatory journalism; political participation; social media

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

Academic scholarship is somewhat notorious for being shaped by trends. In his essay on "Dark Participation" in this issue, Thorsten Quandt (2018) begins by vividly describing the early 2000s when journalism scholarship was seeped deep in an optimistic trend, with promises that user participation will help revolutionize the outdated legacy media. Quandt's tales of the optimism in journalism research reminded me of a similar enthusiasm in a cognate field—that of youth political participation. This area too was strongly influenced in the early 2000s by emerging scholars who, to some extent, saw online youth participation as holding the promise to mend an outdated institution—in this case, the political system.

One does not need to look far to determine that much communication research is now trending toward "the dark sides of participation" (in this issue, see also Anderson & Revers, 2018; Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Robinson & Wang, 2018), and this trend may be particularly pronounced in the field of political participation. As Quandt (p. 44) succinctly states, "positive forms of participation now seem awfully outdated". The attention paid to "fake news", incivility, the role of bots and foreign influencers—all those factors that Quandt describes under "dark participation" in the context of participation in news—are also occupying researchers of political participation, who, particularly in the context of the surprising outcomes of the 2016 US Presidential election, are similarly devoting attention to "wicked actors", "sinister motives", and "nefarious processes/actions" (Quandt, 2018, p. 41).

Although we are now—both in political participation and in journalism studies—in a "dark participation" trend, some of my research presents an outlier, stubbornly insisting—in a currently unfashionable way—to focus on what Quandt (p. 37) calls "the light side". It may be that I am simply a late adopter, still stuck in the old fad, but in what follows I will make the case as to why there is merit to focus on the more positive aspects, and not

to forget the benefits of examining *good participation*. More importantly, perhaps, I will argue that the remedy to focusing on positive extremes should be a focus not solely on negative (extremes), but rather on the *mundane and everyday*.

To do so, I will first introduce a case study that may count as "good participation" in news production processes, and explain in what ways it may merit this distinction. As I'll readily admit, I am thus making the mistake identified by Quandt as plaguing the overly-optimistic research on participatory journalism, though I'll aim to justify why I still do so. Next, I will use an analogy to the cognate field of youth political participation, in order to make three inferences that may be useful for considering good—and everyday—participation in journalism. Though we may be reaching it from opposite sides, my end goal will be very similar to that of Quandt's: to encourage "the development of integrative theories on the conditions of participation that are neither driven by wishful thinking nor doom and gloom" (Quandt, 2018, p. 44).

2. A Case Study of "Good Participation"

In a forthcoming article (Kligler-Vilenchik & Tenenboim, in press), my co-author Ori Tenenboim and I examine the case study of a large-scale instant-messaging group on the application WhatsApp, opened in 2015 by prominent Israeli journalist Tal Schneider for her followers. The group is open to anyone willing to pay a nominal subscription fee. In the group, subscribers both receive and share information and updates on the behind-the-scenes of the news, participate in crowdsourced interviews with politicians and pundits, and conduct vibrant discussions around the days' news, both with the journalist and among themselves.

Why may we classify this group as exemplifying good participation? As we show, based on a combination of in-depth interviews and a qualitative analysis of the group chat content, this group provides shared benefits to both the journalist and her audiences, and thus presents an empirical example of "reciprocal journalism" (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). The audiences—mostly self-defined "news junkies" who love the news—enjoy "information gifts" (Lewis, 2015) provided to them both by the journalist and by other group members. The journalist receives monetary support, but more importantly, benefits from audience participation in producing journalistic knowledge. Importantly, and unlike many other empirical cases (e.g., Singer et al., 2011), audience members' participation is not limited to only symbolic participation, but rather occurs across the news-production process.

2.1. A Mea Culpa

Describing the early research on participatory journalism, Quandt (p. 39) claims that one of its limitations was the focus on "case studies and 'outstanding' best-practice examples" that pronounce "the extreme", while "neglecting the (potentially boring, but more prevalent) normal". This is a fair critique to make of the case study we examine. It is indeed extreme: its participants are characterized by especially high interest in the news, which accounts for their especially high motivation to participate in news production processes. Moreover, the journalist administering the group opened it at a time when she was not bound to a mainstream media organization, and thus enjoyed much institutional freedom, as well as an acute need for additional data sources. In these ways and others (further detailed in the article), this can indeed be classified as an "outstanding" example. In what follows, I'll explain—through an analogy to political participation—why such examples of good participation should still merit our scholarly attention and, no less importantly, why they need to be supplemented with research on mundane, everyday participation.

3. What an Analogy to Political Participation Can Tell Us about Studying Good (and Everyday) Participation in the News

3.1. Who Participates, Where and How?

Quandt critiques early research on participatory journalism for focusing on rare examples, rather than the "normal". Yet the "dark participators" he discusses—as he himself points out—also do not represent the participation of most people, but of a (different) select few. Quandt (p. 44) cautions media and communication research to not take "the exception as the rule".

Indeed, most people aren't dark participators nor avid citizen journalists, just like most people don't participate much politically. I echo Quandt's claim that it may be naïve to expect most people to do so. In the field of political participation, Michael Schudson's (1998) *The Good Citizen* has addressed the unrealistic expectations we often have of citizens in democracy. In most areas of life, Schudson claims, we do not attempt to independently supply all our needs, but rather rely on the work of others. "Why, then, in public life, do we expect people to be political backpackers?", he asks (Schudson, 1998, pp. 310–311). Schudson suggests we might instead envision most citizens as "monitorial citizens", who scan the informational environment and are only alerted to action when there is immediate need.

Similarly, it is probably a fallacy to expect most users to take an active, daily part in participatory journalism. In this way, the participants of the journalistic WhatsApp group, who on a day-to-day basis take part in discussing and even producing the news, are indeed the outliers. Yet there is still good reason to continue to pay attention to the few who do take part (in either politics or participatory journalism). Precisely because they are a minority, they accrue more relative power (see Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018, on other overlooked influencers in

journalism). Some of the WhatsApp group participants told us, for example, that they serve as opinion leaders to their less informed friends and acquaintances. The "good participation" of the few thus merits our continued attention.

But this doesn't mean that most people aren't participating at all. The opposite of studying the extraordinary should not necessarily take the form of studying "dark participation", but rather *mundane*, *everyday* participation. In my own research on youth political participation, this means examining the myriad ways and contexts young people find to express themselves politically. Youth political participation happens not only in the ways we expect (e.g., voting) or the places we expect (e.g., the websites of political parties), but can take the form of, for example, creative production of anti-Trump computer games on a website that teaches kids programming skills (see Kligler-Vilenchik & Literat, 2018). This means we often have to adjust our expectations of *what participation looks like, and where it takes place*.

Returning to journalism, this links us back to this special issue's focus on non-proprietary platforms. When we don't expect participation in news processes to happen only on the websites of news media, but rather examine those non-proprietary platforms where people are most active anyway, we may encounter new and surprising practices. In terms of the *how* of participation, we should keep our eyes open for emergent ways to participate, that may differ from what the early optimistic scholarship has expected, but may still be meaningful to participants. One area that may merit further attention is information sharing via social media as a mundane, everyday form of participation in the news, that is very prevalent and routinized (see Hermida, 2014). What are its merits? Could it be usefully considered as a form of participatory journalism?

3.2. Why Are They Participating?

Quandt devotes much important attention to the question of motivation in participatory journalism. As he claims, research on participatory journalism has not given sufficient thought to the question, "why should anybody want to be a 'citizen journalist'?" (p. 39). In dark participation, as he shows, this problem is "solved", as dark participants are highly driven—though by quite sinister motives.

Here again the merit of studying good participation can be gleaned. The participants in the journalistic WhatsApp group are highly intrinsically motivated to participate in the news, for the simple reason that they are, as one participant told us, "people who love the news in terms of being informed and informing others" (Kligler-Vilenchik & Tenenboim, in press).

In political participation, political interest is known to be one of the most important predictors for political participation (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1978). But it is a very stable construct, that establishes in youth and is hard to shape afterwards. In the analogy, we can assume that interest in the news would be a strong predictor for participation as a citizen journalist—that was certainly the case for the participants of the journalistic WhatsApp group. Paying attention to those "news junkies" can help us understand the lifelong processes that led to their increased interest in the news, and perhaps learn how to encourage interest in the news in general.

Parallel to that, we should also be paying attention to everyday participation. Many people are interested in "news"—but not necessarily the "hard news" we usually pay attention to. Could we find interesting forms of participatory journalism out there if we open up our purview to the sorts of news many people are much more interested in, such as entertainment or sports? What may such forms of participation teach us?

3.3. Why Do We Want Them to Participate?

Which brings us to the third point. We are by now hopefully in agreement that most people are not engaging in good participation or dark participation—they are either not participating, or participating in everyday, mundane ways that we are not paying much attention to. The question is, *why do we want to encourage them to participate?* In politics the answer is quite straightforward: we want to encourage participation because we believe it is beneficial for citizens—because more political participation (should be) translated into more political influence (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). But in journalism research, do we have a good answer to the question why people should participate in the news, and why we should encourage them to do that? As Quandt points out, the merit can't just be free labor for the news media industry. One way to address this question may be through the concept of reciprocal journalism (Lewis et al., 2014), which highlights *shared benefits* for both journalists and community members.

4. Conclusions: Why We Should Keep Studying Good—and Everyday—Participation

I echo Quandt's call to study the "(potentially boring, but more prevalent) normal" (p. 39). But studying the normal shouldn't mean (only) studying the dark—it means opening our eyes to the mundane and everyday. It means coming with less pre-conceived notions of what participation should look like and where it should take place. Moreover, the study of the normal should continue to be complemented by studying the good. This is vital in order to know *what we'd like to achieve*, and *get a better sense of how to do so*. There is a continued need to understand good participation, but instead of an abstraction derived from idealistic notions, we should do so in a way that is empirically informed by the actual participation practices of real people (even if a select few). "Case studies and 'outstanding' best-practice examples" (Quandt, 2018, p. 39) are still important in showing us the way.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Ori Tenenboim, with whom the argument around the journalistic WhatsApp group was developed; as well as journal editor Oscar Westlund for suggesting the theme for this commentary.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Neta Kligler-Vilenchik (PhD University of Southern California, 2015) is Assistant Professor of Communication at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. Her research interests revolve around changing forms of civic and political participation in the context of the new media environment. Her work has been published in outlets such as the *Journal of Communication*, *New Media & Society*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, and *Social Media + Society*. She is also a co-author on the book *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism* (NYU Press, 2016).

COGITATIO

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183–2439)
2018, Volume 6, Issue 4, Pages 115–118
DOI: 10.17645/mac.v6i4.1769

Commentary

Designing a Renaissance for Digital News Media

Anette Novak

Swedish Media Council, 115 53 Stockholm, Sweden; E-Mail: anette.novak@statensmedierad.se

Submitted: 5 October 2018 | Accepted: 8 October 2018 | Published: 8 November 2018

Abstract
User participation in the journalistic context has theoretically been possible since the emergence of the Internet. The few interface formats which have been developed to link newsrooms and citizens have, however, not followed the same explosive development as other parts of the media landscape. One reason often referred to by the scientific community is the defensive newsroom culture. This essay presents an alternative interpretation and argues that bridging the gap between interaction design research, media and communications research, and practitioners within digital news media, could shed new light on the stalled process of newsroom co-creation with users.

Keywords
design; media; news; participation

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "News and Participation through and beyond Proprietary Platforms in an Age of Social Media", edited by Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway) and Mats Ekström (University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Participation and News Media: It's Complicated

Since the Internet's childhood, the potential for participation has been present (Rafaeli, 1988). Early on, some scholars emphasized the need to develop "interactive journalism", favouring participation (e.g., Lawrence, 1993). At that time this was a challenging thought for the news industry, due to part of its identity being anchored in the gatekeeper role. Retrospectively, with 25 years of experimentation, news media have amassed substantial experience in the field. Conclusions differ regarding whether or not these attempts have been successful. We also note a trend of early adopters reducing or abandoning their efforts altogether.

As a manager and practitioner, I have followed the evolution of participatory journalism from an industry perspective. Since 2012, when I left my last operative post, I have been active on the board of the World Editors Forum and have served on Wan-Ifra award committees. From this outlook, I have gained somewhat of an international overview. Over the last five years, as the CEO of the Interactive Institute, an ICT and design research institute, I have experienced the strong impact that design-driven development can have on a multitude of application areas. In this commentary, I argue that if interaction design was embedded in news media's innovation efforts and practices, participatory journalism could serve as a vehicle for a renaissance in journalism.

2. Opening Up, Without Relinquishing Control

In 2009, whilst working as Editor-in-Chief at the Swedish regional daily Norran, I developed an open news desk format, called the eEditor. The format rested on three pillars: transparency, dialogue, and feedback:

1) *Transparency*, being the daily publishing of the newsroom agenda and inviting the audience to influence the agenda, add know-how, suggest sources, and co-create content;
2) *Dialogue*, involving, discussion of topics and angles, new perspectives and follow-ups with the users;
3) *Feedback*, publishing the names of the participants who wished to be recognized.

Norran experimented with this format for three consecutive years, a work that fostered stronger ties to the lo-

cal user base, increased both revenue and the paper's international reputation. (The Guardian, 2011; Wan-Ifra, 2011, 2012). Since then, parts of this strategy have been implemented by other news publishers, exploiting not only proprietary but non-proprietary platforms as well.

These different initiatives, however, have not been viewed as an overall success for the participatory formats. The reason for its so-called failure has often been attributed to an internal culture, unable to embrace change, and which is defensive of its institutionalized perception of what quality represents and what verification should entail (e.g., Ananny, 2018; Lewis, 2012). Behind the notion of reluctance, however, is the assumption of consciousness. This commentary introduces an alternative assumption: that it is the lack of awareness of the potential of interaction design that has hindered the development. Design thinking replaces the engineer-led, linear, solution-focused innovation process with a user-centred process filled with loops leading step-by-step to a deeper cognitive understanding of the problem at hand. Using a combination of design thinking and an experimental approach, legacy media could develop ways of combining external contributions whilst maintaining high professional standards. This would shift the perspective from news media involving the users in the co-creation of their products to involving the media companies in the users' lives.

2.1. Case Studies: Legacy Media Co-Creating with Users

Early on, in 2008, CNN's iReport opened its platform to external contributions. The format has since evolved from a simple proprietary web page with a vague question ("What's happening?") to the use of a combination of proprietary and non-proprietary platforms as well as a stronger framing of the requested contributions, with assignments like "Show me how hot it is where you are?". Participation in open formats follows the 1–9–90 rule of thumb: 1% will actively contribute, 9% will actively contribute sometimes, and 90% will passively watch without contributing (Sloan, 2011). Experimentation with different designs to explore the elements which can have a positive impact on participation has been rare within news media.

One design feature that has been used is feedback loops. News publishers have tried different approaches, from paying contributors cash (e.g. Swedish Aftonbladet, 2018, who claims paying for "published tips and photo material") to personally inviting them into the editorial process (e.g., The Guardian's crowdsourcing initiatives; The Guardian, 2011–2013). Although design research results have indicated that the strongest engagement occurs when the matter relates to the user's personal experience of the service (Ghazarian, 2009). A more recent example is the Swiss, digital news magazine Republik which has managed to create co-ownership of the platform, using a similar methodology of open innovation and dialogue through conversation with users, as in the previously mentioned Norran example. As of April 2018, Republik had assembled 18,480 members and attracted CHF 4,595,000 in capital. Olivia Kühni, a journalist from Republik, says: "We believe people don't pay for articles anymore. They pay to be part of the community" (Niemanlab, 2018).

2.2. Case Studies: Online Community Co-Creating Autonomously

WikiTribune (2018), a follow-up initiative of Wikinews, aims to bring "journalists and a community of volunteers together" (Wales, 2017). WikiTribune has a simple, text-based design, filtering, and comments. Contributors are featured with names and pictures. Some contributors engage for these types of extrinsic rewards. Research on open source software communities has, however, indicated that collaborators participate for the intrinsic reward of contributing with their thoughts and ideas (Sharma, Sugumaran, & Rajagopalan, 2002), a finding that should alter participatory innovation approaches in the journalistic context.

Over the past decade, pioneers in both the previously-mentioned categories have started limiting or abandoning their participatory efforts. Collaborative journalism site Newsvine, which operated from 2005, was closed by its owners in 2017. The community-driven Allvoices, which published user-generated news from 2008, closed in 2011 having reached 3 million unique visitors. In 2018, Huffington Post dissolved the part of its site which encouraged citizens to report on the news, attributing the decision to the upsurge in "misinformation online", relating to what Quandt (2018, this thematic issue) refers to as "dark participation". There is a need for further research to isolate general drivers and personal motivations behind this trend. Ultimately, is it time to give up on the vision of positive kinds of participatory journalism?

3. Building a Bridge between Media and Design Research

Scholars have argued that citizens have the right to a news narrative (Wall, 2017). In the post-mass-media era, legacy media are forced to transform, not only through new practices but also by shaping a new identity. It has been claimed that journalism's responsibility is "not only to influence masses by exposing them to ideas they might not seek for themselves but also to engage with them as people who can also produce novel and democratically valuable interpretations of social life" (Ananny, 2018). Having altered a legacy media company's brand proposition from "bringing you information" to "including you in building a successful future for our community", I believe this is a path which peers should explore.

We have seen how interaction design can point companies towards ways of building stronger relationships with their users. Traditional news media, whilst in a dif-

ficult transition, could benefit from incorporating design intelligence into its business development. More tangible benefits range from broadened coverage, reduced information gathering costs, and stronger quality. It is important to remember that the early attempts at participatory journalism did not benefit from big data mining, artificial intelligence and block-chain technology, elements which should be included as this field moves forward. Some of the experiments took place in a time when the major industry currencies were quantitative: clicks and page views. Companies lacking a deeper understanding of the user relationship might have mistaken quantity with quality.

4. Conclusions

Participation is the default for a news outlet's current and future users. Younger generations are growing up connected, with AR-, VR-experiences, and sense-making games. The reason to continue developing interactive formats is that people love interaction, but it can also develop a sense of belonging and in doing so open individuals to the idea of cooperation. Consequently, news media would benefit strongly from integrating design thinking as well as new, participatory formats to strengthen customer relationships.

My experience indicates that not only is it possible to open the newsroom to external participation without relinquishing control, but also that transparent, interactive formats create a strong bond between the brand and the public. The process is complex, demanding digital as well as analogue interventions and cannot be simply copied into any context. By adopting interaction design research and practices, however, news media would have a guiding beacon and participatory journalism could fuel a journalistic renaissance within the networked world.

Finally, there is one more important rationale why attempts to find models for journalistic co-creation should not be abandoned: in a time when disinformation, security, and integrity issues are affecting users, as well as media distribution platforms' credibility, building co-ownership between quality news outlets and citizens should be more important than ever.

Acknowledgements

The author declares that this commentary was written in a personal capacity, rather than a professional capacity.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Anette Novak is the Director of the Swedish Media Council. She has had a long leadership career within media. As Editor-in-Chief of the regional daily Norran in Sweden she won international acclaim for launching a ground-breaking open newsdesk. She is the VP of the Fojo Media Institute and has previously held positions as Director of the board at the Swedish public service radio, the Swedish Media Publisher's Association, the Tinius Trust, and the World Editors Forum. Between 2013–2018, Novak was the CEO of the Interactive Institute and 2015 she was appointed to be the special counsel on future media policy by the Swedish government.

Media and Communication (ISSN: 2183-2439)

Media and Communication is an international open access journal dedicated to a wide variety of basic and applied research in communication and its related fields. It aims at providing a research forum on the social and cultural relevance of media and communication processes.

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