2020

What Is Digital Journalism? Defining The Practice and Role of The Digital Journalist

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ABSTRACT:
Through the lens of theories of field and normalization process, this research seeks to understand technology's current role in how self-identifying digital journalists define the field. Prior research has established that these definitions and practices are essential--they shape a range of crucial activities including how journalists prioritize sources to how journalists shape their content for audience consumption. Built on long-form interviews with 68 self-identifying digital journalists, this manuscript will argue that the digital turn in the industry has emboldened new entrants to the field and required traditional, dominantly-placed journalists to reconsider their definition of journalism as well as their practices.

NOTE: This is the ACCEPTED version of this manuscript. Hence, minor changes may not be reflected.

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Introduction

In an article published in July of 1997 in *The Columbia Journalism Review*, Pavlik (1997) examined the future of online news. In the piece, the author explained how the merging of journalism with digital technologies could be "interactive, on-demand, customizable" and "incorporate new combinations of text, images, moving images, and sound," but also "build new communities based on shared interests and concerns" (p. 30). While romanticizing the potential of online news, the article goes on to detail, fundamentally, a digital newspaper with traditional sections that could disseminate information in a variety of manners. Within three years, the same influential trade magazine published a piece about the converged newsroom at *The Tampa Tribune*, a merging of newspaper and television newsrooms that potentially could be a "dominant news source" and the blueprint for the future of journalism (Colon, 2000, p. 27). In those early years of digital journalism's growing popularity within the industry and beyond, much of the content optimistically predicted how technology could drastically improve journalism's relationship with its audience and help practitioners better accomplish their mission of service to citizens (Scott, 2005). At the same time, many industry players lamented that technology could destroy journalism and, in effect, weaken democracy (Kawamoto, 2003).

In reality, these dueling utopian and dystopian discourses surrounding the intersection of journalism and technology should not be surprising; whenever a new technology enters society, it goes through a process where people hypothesize consequences based on complete assumptions (Baym, 2010). Oftentimes, new technology

goes through a process by which its meaning is made and then remade by the public (Schulte, 2013). With digital journalism, this process is still ongoing. In the early days of digital technologies impacting journalism practice, practitioners utilizing digital technologies fought for acceptance from traditional journalists within the field, but recently research shows that digital journalists identify themselves by slightly separating themselves from traditional journalists (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017).

This current research aims to understand technology's current role in how self-identifying digital journalists define the field. Utilizing theories of field and normalization process as a framework, the study seeks to understand how digital journalists define their profession and conceptualize their practice. Prior research has established that these definitions and practices are foundational--they shape a range of crucial activities including how journalists prioritize sources to how journalists shape their content for audience consumption (Ferrucci, Taylor & Alaimo, 2020; Zelizer, 2005). Hence, this research provides the opportunity to better understand how digital practices have affected the very definitions of the field and how they have shaped developing practices within the field. We will argue that the digital turn in the industry has emboldened new entrants to the field and required traditional, dominantly-placed journalists to reconsider their definition of journalism as well as their practices.

Review of the Literature

Digital Journalism

Most historical scholarship on the nascent beginnings of digital journalism identify 1980 as a turning point (Mari, 2019). While the industry saw disruptive technologies such

as television before that, it was in 1980 when Knight Ridder began "Viewtron," an initiative dedicated to sending news to subscribers digitally (Kaye & Quinn, 2010). More than a decade later, in 1994, the *San Jose Mercury* became the first American large-circulation newspaper to deliver a daily electronic reproduction of its paper (Klinenberg, 2005). By the early 2000s, almost every major newspaper in the country offered a digital edition, and Media General's more than $40 million investment in a converged newsroom featuring *The Tampa Tribune* and an NBC affiliate became the industry's gold standard for producing what was then called converged journalism (Colon, 2000).

Newsroom convergence, or the coalescing of technologies from formerly dis-crete media such as print or broadcast, became a trendy buzzword in the industry at this time (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2005). Converged media became such a desired goal and mission for journalism organizations because it combined familiar consumption mechanisms such as text, photo, audio and video with digital delivery that allowed for a more seamless and engaging experience for the user (Singer, 2011). For journalists, this meant expressions such as "backpack journalist" and "MoJos" becoming commonplace; these terms describe journalists working in the field while carrying all of the tools necessary to file multimedia stories away from the newsroom (Singer, 2011). With technology becoming an essential part of most journalists' daily habits, the era of digital journalism – one that does not implicitly separate distinct technologies such as converged journalism – began (Mari, 2019).

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By this point, newsrooms began to innovate rapidly, oftentimes struggling to determine how to deploy resources in a shifting industry (Singer, 2011). And not only did media companies scuffle over how to invest in both technology and people and how to properly integrate new technologies into newswork (Boczkowski, 2004), journalists themselves struggled adapting to a changing industry more myopically focused on digital technologies (Briggs & Burke, 2009; Lowrey & Gade, 2011).

These digital technologies or tools are how scholars and practitioners have come to demarcate digital journalism (Deuze, 2008; Weiss & Domingo, 2010). Indeed, digital journalism is defined as news produced for a digital environment (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). When journalists utilize tools such as email, laptops, tablets, cellphones and digital voice recorders, blogs, self-publishing tools and inexpensive digital video recorders for digital publication, this is considered what separates traditional journalism from digital journalism (Mari, 2019). In effect, researchers and journalists themselves have not separated digital journalism from traditional journalists through communication routines or newsgathering processes, but rather the tools employed during those routines or practices (Ferrucci, 2017). In fact, journalists themselves, when determining who is a digital journalist and who is not, have marked the boundaries between the two using distinctions based solely on technology (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017; Vos & Ferrucci, 2018). How journalists use these tools can vary widely from organization to organization and from journalist to journalist (Tandoc Jr & Ferrucci, 2017; Usher, 2014).

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More recently, research illustrates that maybe technology is becoming less

important in terms of defining digital journalism or digital journalism (Carlson, 2019;

Ferrucci, Taylor & Alaimo, 2020). Eldridge II and Franklin (2019) argued that digital

journalists sometimes employ different professional role conceptions than non-digital

journalists. Likewise, Ferrucci and Vos (2017) noted that digital journalists, in interviews,

articulated more of an acceptance to the advocate role, but, yet, they still believed that,

primarily, digital journalism "incorporates a mindset that extends itself to the

newsgathering process (and) … to be a digital journalist, a journalist must consistently be

thinking about digital publication throughout the working of a story" (p. 874).

Field Theory

Building on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1980, 1998, 2005), this research aims to

understand how digital journalism positions itself within the journalistic field by

understanding how they define their work and their practices within it. The field is

inhabited by *incumbents*--who hold a dominant position in the field and desire to retain

its shape in a particular way--as well as, at times, *insurgents* who desire to change the

shape of field as they take on more responsibility and authority in the field (Vos, 2019).

Prior research has identified groups such as mobile journalists (Perreault & Stanfield,

2019) and bloggers (Vos, Craft & Ashley, 2012) as *insurgents* seeking to affect change

within the field.

From a field theory perspective, the resources within field theory are referred to as

journalistic capital (Vos, 2019). Capital refers to the forms of "agency and prestige" within

a given field (Sterne, 2003, p. 375) and focuses on three forms of capital: cultural, economic, and social (Benson & Neveu, 2005). Cultural capital indicates competence in an area valued by the field, often indicated by the presence of titles or awards (e.g. the Pulitzer Prize). Cultural capital can work hand-in-hand with economic capital, which refers to the economic resources available to journalists (Benson, 2006). Journalists might use their economic capital, which news organizations accumulate from the economic marketplace, to do award-winning investigation work, which increases their cultural capital (Vos, 2019). Economic capital is often assessed through circulation rates, advertising revenue, and audience size in journalism (Benson, 2004; Benson & Neveu, 2005). However, journalists have demonstrated a past willingness to part with economic capital if it would allow them obtain greater cultural capital (Vos 2019). Finally, social capital refers to the sum of a person's entire social circle and involvement in social groups (Siapera & Spyridou, 2012). An example of this could be considered a journalist's social media network.

Field theory's other key components of the field are *doxa* and *habitus*. The shared basic understanding regarding the nature of a field is called *doxa* (Benson & Neveu, 2005; Bourdieu, 2005). An example of journalistic doxa is news values in that they are an enduring set of criteria for newsworthiness (Tandoc & Jenkins, 2018). *Habitus* denotes an understanding of the "journalistic game" (Willig, 2013, p. 8), referring to personal and professional experiences that have been gathered to gain knowledge within a field.

In operationalizing the field, it is also worth considering journalistic socialization through schooling, professional training, and their development in the profession (Benson,

1999). Despite expansion in the journalistic field to include bloggers (Vos, Craft, and Ashley 2012), gaming journalists (Perreault & Vos, 2018, 2020) and mobile journalists (Perreault & Stanfield, 2019), the norms and goals of traditional media "continue to dominate" (Vos, Craft, and Ashley 2012, p. 861). Yet, journalists perceive "capital instability within the journalistic field" that has opened up the opportunity for the audience to shape content (Tandoc 2015, p. 19). It could also be that this capital instability has offered the opportunity for *insurgents* within the field to find their place within and potentially reshape the field.

Normalization Process Theory

Normalization process theory is concerned with the "social organization of the work (implementation), of making practices routine elements of everyday life (embedding), and of sustaining embedded practices in their social contexts (integration)" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 538). In practice the theory has been used to explore the normalization processes of both technologically-oriented and routine-oriented fields, largely in the field of health sciences. Studies have explored the normalization of processes for patient discharge from hospitals (Nordmark, Zingmark & Lindberg, 2016), of a shared decision-making process for patients (Lloyd et al., 2013), and the implementation of tele-health services (Bouamrane, Osbourne & Mair, 2011). For the purposes of this study, journalism--and specifically digital journalism--has been conceptualized as a process not unlike those conducted in the health professions (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The theory originated out of an interpretivist paradigm and is aimed at understanding the factors that promote or inhibit routine embedding. The theory was first

applied in health care settings to understand how complex interventions are operationalized. This theory has been applied empirically through qualitative (Task et al, 2008; Mair et al, 2008), and experimental (Wilkes, 2007) methodologies; the present study will operationalize the theory through its most traditional qualitative approach given the root emphasis in theory on helping understand "the workability of a service and thus the potential for normalization" (Mair et al, 2008, p. 116).

Normalization, through the lens of this theory, refers to the work actors do in engaging with some ensemble of activities—these activities "may include new or changed ways of thinking, acting, and organizing"--and through which their work becomes routinely embedded in "the matrices of already existing, socially patterned, knowledge and practices" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 540). Normalization, it is worth noting, is not irrevocable in that some practices--like the use of a typewriter--have become denormalized (Murray et al, 2010).

Normalization process theory proposes that "material practices become routinely embedded in social contexts as a result of people working...to implement them" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 540). These implementation processes are "organizing expressions of human agency" (p. 540) that require the researcher to understand both what people do and how they work. This implementation is operationalized through four generative mechanisms:

1) *Coherence*- the meaningful qualities of the practice. Coherence places the practice in the context of the "set of ideas about its meaning, uses, and utility" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 542).

2) *Cognitive Participation*-Engagement of individuals and groups with the practice. This concept implicates that the normalization of a process involves "long interaction chains" that can "involve highly focused work"--such as a laboratory experiment--or more "diffuse patterns of activity"--such as operationalizing a policy decision in an organization (May & Finch, 2009, p. 543).

3) *Collective Action*-Interaction with already existing practices. The concept explains that while work may "reshape behaviors and actions" or "reorganize relationships and contexts" it involves a purposive, shared action toward some goal (May & Finch, 2009, p. 544). This mechanism may include resistance, reinvention, subversion as much as affirmation, but it involves the investment of effort from a collective group. Bamford et al (2012) conceptualized this as the *institutional support* for a process.

4) *Reflexive Monitoring*-How the practice is understood and assessed by the actors implicated by it. This involves the formal patterns of monitoring to focus attention on the "normative elements of implementation" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 545). These patterns contextualize a practice in terms how it ought to be, rather than how things currently operate. This may involve judgments on the effectiveness of a practice, and when these judgments are made they typically reference institutionally shared beliefs.

These mechanisms altogether provide a valuable framework in which researchers can "describe and judge implementation potential" of a work process--such as the practices of digital journalism (Murray et al., 2010, para. 26).

Therefore, while research suggests a slight moving away from a technology-centered definition of digital journalism, these digital tools remain the bedrock of how

practitioners define both the practice of digital journalism and the delineation of a digital journalist.

This leads us to pose the following research questions:

RQ 1: "How do digital journalists define digital journalism?"

RQ 2: "How do digital journalists practice digital journalism?

Method

In order to address the research questions, researchers reached out to 262 journalists from across the country. For the purposes of recruitment, researchers defined journalists as "people who work for a journalistic medium as their main job" and "carry out journalistic activities" such as publishing on "current and socially relevant topics" (Fröhlich, Koch, & Obermaier, 2013, p. 815; Weischenberg et al., 2006, p. 30-31). Those that responded were asked if they identified as digital journalists. Digital journalists were conceptualized as doing the majority of their journalistic work toward a digital product.

This included journalists who worked for strictly digital outlets such as *Buzzfeed*, *IGN*, *The Intercept*, and *Topic* as well as journalists from more traditional outlets, like the *Raleigh News & Observer*, Entercom Charlotte, NBC San Diego and *Newsweek*. Participants were recruited via email and contacted on the phone after IRB approval. This resulted in a total of 68 interviews with journalists who responded and identified themselves as a digital journalist.

The interviews probed the journalists' experience with digital journalism and their journalistic roles, asking journalists to describe the priorities in their coverage using questions from the Worlds of Journalism survey as a model (e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2013;

Perreault, Stanfield, & Luttman, 2019). The structured interviews were each about 30 minutes to an hour in length. Questions were divided into five areas: (1) questions about journalists' professional background and current occupational context, (2) questions about journalists' priorities in regard to their journalistic roles (Hanitzsch et al., 2013), (3) questions about their most important roles as digital journalists, (4) questions about journalists' potential sources of influence on their work and (5) questions about how they define and think about the practice of digital journalism. Questions were posed such as, "what does the term 'digital journalism' mean to you?" and "how is digital journalism done in your newsroom?" Additionally, the interview questionnaire asked participants specific questions about how they choose digital journalism stories, what they perceive as influencing their coverage, and what technology they use in digital journalism. Some of these questions included measures for how often journalists use technology such as drones, virtual reality, mobile devices.

Recruitment efforts resulted in 68 respondents. All of the participants were located in the United States. The sample of journalists who described their work operated with an emphasis on "print and digital newspaper/local" (n=31), but there remained a mixture of "print and digital magazine/local" (n=10), "digital only" (n=6), and "print and digital newspaper/national" (n=4). There was a slight majority in female respondents (n=37), and the vast majority of respondents described their ethnicity as "white" (n=51), 5 respondents identified as "Asian," and 2 identified as "Black" or "African-American." This was an experienced sample of journalists, with the average journalist having 14 years of experience in the journalism industry.

Interviews were conducted until the researchers felt they reached saturation of responses. Researchers then transcribed the interviews for textual analysis. The authors analyzed the data using a constant comparative approach to arrive at themes that addressed the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). While the constant comparative method is often associated with grounded theory, Fram (2013) argues that constant comparative analysis is well-suited to both etic coding, driven by theory and literature, and emic coding, driven by themes that emerge from data analysis. During this process, aspects of the responses considered were any allusion to the journalistic field, journalistic role performance, and journalistic definition making. After each response was coded, themes and thoughts emerging from the coded interviews were compared with one another to establish resonance and find associations, unities, and differences among them. All participants were granted anonymity in part because this study is most interested in understanding perspectives on digital journalism held as a field. In the interests of respecting participant anonymity, responses will be reported by participant letter.

Defining Digital Journalism

After a thorough review of the data for RQ1, the participants defined digital journalism in three different, but related manners. To the journalists, digital journalism includes utilizing technology to tell stories; involves disseminating information in the quickest way possible; and focuses on the audience in a market-driven manner. Participants reiterated and, generally, discussed these three themes in a significantly consistent manner. Perhaps surprisingly, no other theme emerged even slightly; these three occurred unfailingly, though.

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Technology. While previous studies found that journalists often defined the digital journalist through the explicit use of specific technologies or, more likely, the explicit combination of multiple storytelling tools, the participants here described the technology inherent in digital journalism in a much more nebulous manner. They did not perceive a specific technology such as social media or a particular medium such as video as fundamental to digital journalism. Rather, they believed technology generally must be a component of journalism if it is to be considered digital. The technology inherent in digital journalism is more of an evolutionary process to the participants. Said one journalist, "Digital journalism is the way we've had to adapt. I mean, the shift had already happened when I graduated college. I had a smartphone back in high school. It's the way we have to move forward." To that particular subject and a substantial percentage of the others, as long as the journalism ended up online – and therefore some digital technology was involved – it was digital. "The production of stories and spreading of them online using a variety of different mediums," is how another defined the term, which is essentially the same thing, just in differing wordage. In a similar manner, one participant described the term through the lens of their organization. He said, "It means everything being online. We go by a phrase of 'digital first,' which means every story that you do that posts online." To them, the term is all about posting news on the web, which can then be distributed in a different manner than legacy media. A different subject summed up this idea by defining all journalism produced in current times as digital: "All journalism is digital these days.

Even if it's produced by a non-digital entity (newspaper, TV station, radio, magazine, etc.,)

it will still wind up on the web." That might sound simplistic, but it is a significant change

from prior definitions featuring technology as a more central aspect of digital technology.

Now, according to this study's subjects, specific technology is a peripheral part of

digital journalism; it is something that's essential, but in a very general, evolutionary

sense. Said one subject, digital journalism is "Journalism presented on a digital platform.

When I first started that meant a computer, but now it's a lot of mobile devices." To that

subject, the technology used did not matter, only the very act of delivering utilizing

technology mattered. One journalist contended that digital journalism is impossible to

define succinctly, saying,

> I think digital journalism is an increasingly nebulous term because the internet
> basically (lets) anybody become a journalist (or) a loose interpretation of that. … So
> if you work for a newspaper or an official website you are playing by the rules of
> that organization and if that means your managers or advertisers or what the
> readers want, you got a considerable disadvantage over some guy with a cellphone
> who maybe is able to get the same information out there.

Embedded in that argument is, again, the idea that digital journalism simply means

disseminating information through technology, regardless of who is doing it or using what

technology, as long as some technology is utilized.

Speed. The second theme that emerged from the data revolved around the notion

that digital journalism "reached" the audience in a more timely manner. This did not

mean simply that journalists could break news more quickly – although that is part of the

theme – but also that digital journalism was always at people's fingertips since journalists

disseminated it through computers and, more saliently, mobile devices. The speed with

which digital journalism reaches the audience came up repeatedly in interviews. One

journalist described this speed in two different but related ways. They argued that digital

journalism gets to the audience more quickly, but also noted tools such as Twitter, which

can provide virtually instant information. They said,

> I think it's a new (and) different way of doing what we've always done. Delivering accurate comprehensive news about a community in a timely manner. Back in the day, you could go to a meeting and have six hours to think about it until your deadline; now we want you tweeting during the meeting, you have to do it quicker.

Another journalist echoed those remarks. They talked about the positives and benefits of

such speed. "If used in the right way, (digital journalism) gives people the information that

they could get in print (more quickly). It also allows anyone to become a journalist. It's

definitely very positive … but there's also a lot of over-saturation." To that participant,

digital journalism means getting news to the audience quickly, but this can result in

anyone acting in the role of journalist, which could result in less factual information and a

glut of news that is difficult to digest for the average citizen. Another participant

contended roughly the same thing, but in different language. They said, "I think digital has

helped to democratize journalism, however, just like a democracy, that has its pros and

cons. For instance, it has led to issues with determining what is and isn't credible."

Therefore, while speed is, overall, a positive and consistent attribute of digital

journalism, it comes with drawbacks. The results of this speed could include a lack of

accuracy. The technology inherent in delivering information quickly also impedes on the

gatekeeping process intrinsic to traditional journalism, opening up information delivery

mechanisms to those outside the field of journalism. However, generally, participants

believed these drawbacks and negative unintended consequences were worth it. As one

noted, digital journalism is "about getting news to your audience quickly and keeping

them more informed than waiting for my 6 a.m. paper to come out the next day."

Therefore, the positives concerning speed outweigh the negatives.

Serving the Audience. While prior literature found and speculated that the

technology inherent in digital journalism could provide a mechanism for more audience

involvement in the news, the journalists interviewed for this study believed that

technology did affect the audience, but in a manner that would boost audience agency in

construction of news processes. Rather, the data suggested participants believe that digital

journalism affects the audience in primarily a market-driven manner. Most specifically, the

participants thought of digital journalism as a quasi-panacea for the shrinking financial

outlook at most news organizations. Essentially, they saw digital journalism as a way to

grow audiences, which might not directly result in, for instance, more digital advertising

revenue, but rather better brand awareness and, therefore, indirect financial success. One

participant not only discussed larger audiences, but also differing audiences. They said,

""Digital journalism reaches a wider audience, than print. … Digital journalism is also

more likely to reach a younger audience." Another said that it provides a "platform for

your work to reach a larger audience." And another, echoing the same sentiment,

remarked that digital journalism reaches "more people." Nowhere in these comments

appeared a desire to include "more people" in the making and reporting of news, but just

the idea that news could reach a bigger audience.

In more direct nod to a market-driven approach to the audience, some participants

explicitly addressed the audience as consumers and a desire to satiate the audience's

wants. For example, one participant said that digital journalism is

> just an acknowledgement that digital platforms is where people primarily get their news. It's an appropriate shift from cutting down trees that comes with newspapers and giving people news when they want it, which is an improvement. People want their news when they want it.

In a similar remark, a participant noted that digital journalism includes following trends

since that is what the audience wants. They said, "It means more and more people get

their news from phones and Facebook. It means you have to attract the reader's attention

for them to read it." Another said something similar, arguing that digital journalism

"means being online and hitting the trends." In summation, digital journalism does

include the audience, but not in a necessarily democratic manner, but rather in a more

capitalistic manner as it forces journalists to adhere to the audience's wants not needs,

thus treating them as consumers and not citizens, and it also provides a promise of larger

audiences.

Defining Digital Journalism Practice

In RQ 2, the question was posed "how do digital journalists practice digital

journalism?" According to the interview sample, digital journalists largely articulated their

practices in regards to timely display of information through the use of (1) social media technology and (2) team coordination.

Participants largely articulated the mandate for the timely display of information in regard to their "heavily audience focused" approach and at times in competitive terms (e.g. "being first"). Journalists noted that they had a responsibility to "give people accurate information as quickly as possible" and keep "news as current as humanly possible." They saw this as essential for their audience in that "information can mean police capture a suspect faster, find a missing person quicker or tell people a storm is coming sooner." Yet they simultaneously noted challenges with operating with timeliness in that it runs up against both accuracy and the need to provide relevant context. "Accuracy needs to play a key role" noted one participant while another noted this "isn't always possible due to the speed of digital journalism." Digital journalists, according to one participant, also need to explain "why things happen" through background and context for stories. These comments taken together emphasize that timeliness is responsive to the needs of their audience, but there was an equally essential component in this timeliness seen in the desire to be first. Journalists spoke matter-of-factly of this need, while acknowledging that it has its problems. One participant noted his regions' (the North Carolina Triad) news competitive environment resulted in them "constantly competing to be first and a lot of times that means we're working fast which can lead to errors." While journalists never articulated *why* they were working hard to beat out the competition it's worth noting that they did emphasize the importance of "fighting for"[1] your audience on things that "matter to your audience, given that "the audience is probably the biggest consideration we take."

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This information needed to be shared on social media, although platform emphases differed according to their newsroom. One participant, a digital content editor, noted that the "rural audience is more likely to look at Facebook before Twitter" whereas in the "city limits a lot of my readers are turning to Twitter." That said, digital journalists conceptualized "social media" in regards to "Facebook as number one, Twitter, and Instagram." Journalists at times articulated Facebook as a content hub or "our main digital support at this point." Yet journalists, while they felt that these platforms provided an opportunity to reach their audience in a way that increased engagement also noted that the platforms lend themselves toward commentary more than news. One participant noted "reporters who are engaged in the production of non-commentary news can't give into their temptation on Twitter to express such opinions or they may be restrained by their Twitter is the most dangerous area for journalists." Other journalists noted that they used avenues such as YouTube and their podcasts to try to reach their audience in a novel manner.

Journalists also articulated their digital journalism practices in terms of their work on a team. This was articulated both explicitly and subtly. In subtle references to their work journalists articulated their practices in regards to "we" whereas many of their responses to interviews were often articulated in terms of "I." At other times, journalists were more explicit about how this team work influences everything from how "we try to pick stories" to updates in the form of the "results from the team so far." This also was how they identified their audience as journalists argued "we could do more to engage our online audience." But it also was how they saw their role in accomplishing digital

journalism. Many of the more experienced journalists in the sample clearly articulated their non-digital nativancy, yet saw the skills in reporting and source building as still essential to a digital team. However, this then requires that "younger people" be hired onto the team to provide a "diversity of experience." However, this teamwork then presents a requirement for interpersonal communication given that success in digital journalism does require that "you have to be good at communicating with the rest of your team online." Many journalists spoke of this communication happening through particular software such as Trelo, Slack, and Skype. Given that many of these teams are not physically in the same location, this requires reporter to be "quick in replying to your editors, jumping on assignments, and providing important information." Participant 15 noted that this interpersonal communication is vital given that "your team needs to be able to rely on you – especially in a remote journalism job where there's no other way to reach you."

All of this together indicates the degree to which interview subjects saw their digital journalism as being immensely audience focused—requiring timeliness, technological savvy and teamwork in order to provide them what they need.

Discussion

In the field of journalism, journalists are expected to be responsive to changes in technology in order to best reach their audience and successfully tell stories relevant to that audience. Yet journalism has traditionally either embraced changes late--only conceiving of the need to charge for online content after audiences had become used to receiving it for free--or embracing change only later to realize the negative implications

associated with it--journalists for example realized only the structural limitations of storytelling via social media and the ways in which algorithms can work to limit and divide their audience. We suggest that such lack of understanding of new mediums is possibly unavoidable and a standard part of normalization of practices within the field. However, we would also suggest that a lack of clarity within the field regarding the role of a digital journalism and the essential practices integral to digital journalism only exacerbates this reality (Ferrucci, 2018). Hence, this research sought to explore how journalists who define themselves as digital journalists conceive of digital journalism and how they conceptualize the practice they undertake.

In RQ 1, the question was posed regarding how digital journalists define digital journalism. Participants defined digital journalism in three different manners: a method of using technology to tell stories, a method of most quickly disseminating information--which would by nature require a digital platform, and a market-drive method aimed toward the audience. The responses from RQ 2 consistently flow from the first. Digital journalists argued that they undertook these methods through the use of social media technology and through team coordination.

The participant pool itself tells a story--most of those interviewed in this study, journalists who self-identified as "digital journalists," do not work at "digital only" news sources but rather an array of fairly traditional news outlets--television news stations, newspapers and radio stations--that have embraced the digital turn of the industry. From a field theory perspective, a field is traditionally understood as being contested between *incumbents*--who hold a dominant position in the industry--and *insurgents*--who seek to

change the shape of the field to better serve them (Vos, 2019). From this perspective, it is worth considering the possibility that the shape of the field changed out of the control of traditional journalists in part because of instability in *economic capital*, the pull from the audience through *social capital*, and, to some degree, as a result of traditional journalists attempting to maintain their position of power by instituting changes they thought would maintain their position within the industry. In large part, this study would argue, they were successful. As with Vos, Craft and Ashley (2012) and Perreault and Stanfield (2019), traditional journalists continued to hold the power. The concession was that, to some degree, they had to embrace the values and practices of *insurgents*. In maintaining their own position of power, they also created space for *insurgents* to operate within the field. And so, in a sense, traditional journalists maintained a position of power despite changes in the field in part by becoming that which they initially contested.

Through the lens of normalization process theory, journalists clearly saw digital journalism as a "material practice" that had become "embedded in social contexts" (Murray et al, 2010, p. 540). The implementation of a new technological practice, it is argued, occurs through the use of four mechanisms: coherence, cognitive participation, collective action, and reflexive monitoring. Journalists articulated coherence through an obvious understanding of the "meaning, uses, and utility" (May & Finch, 2009, p. 542) of digital journalism as illustrated in their defining of digital journalism in RQ 1; digital journalism allowed for the quick dissemination of information, it was a storytelling medium, and the use of journalism in this way--journalists acknowledged--did indicate a turn toward the market. When one participant noted that "'digital first,'" described "every

story that you do that posts online" largely taken for granted was the value implicit even in the term digital first. The "first" in "digital first" certainly describes priority, but digital is granted priority given its ability for quick dissemination. This acknowledgment of the utility of digital then is so deeply understood that it is written into the language of the field. Similarly, journalists articulated cognitive participation in digital journalism as a "highly focused," if standard, part of their work (May & Finch, 2009, p. 543). As one participant put it, "Everyone is a digital journalist...We rarely even use the term "digital journalism" anymore — it's just journalism, the way it is produced now," and this certainly describes how ingrained the practices are. The work, journalists acknowledged, was significantly more than what would have been expected a generation ago with the requirement of "video, audio, print, long form, short form" all in needing to be considered in the telling of a story. The mechanism of collective action clarifies the degree to which a process has garnered institutional support (Bamford et al., 2012) and journalists articulated it in regards to seeing their work as a part of a team: it is an activity taken on by "we" not "I." Here journalists identified the fact this wasn't simply an individual mindset but rather reflected the values of their newsroom. One participant argued that "everyone plays a role in digital, everyone has to think about SEO when they're writing, what digital tools can we use to best improve readers understanding and how to present it, if a story lends itself to video or podcast, every reporter has to think about this so its newsroom wide" and hence, because of the degree to which it involves a team this reflects the collective action taking place.

What is Digital Journalism?

Generally, in the mechanism of reflexive monitoring, practitioners judge the effectiveness of the practice and discursively construct a shared understanding of the relative value of the practice (May & Finch, 2009). Normalization process theory makes clear that the May and Finch (2009) mechanisms are not merely for description but also for *judging* the effectiveness of a technological implementation and journalists in this sample largely did this through the lens of reflexive monitoring. Journalists had coherence in their understanding of the value of digital technology, they were cognitively involved in the practice and engaged it as a newsroom, but upon reflective practice some journalists did see the implementation as being uneven in the field. One participant for example argues that it is print newsrooms on the "forefront of digital journalism," while television newsrooms have been slower to adapt because "they still make most of their money from broadcast news." Others argued that while their newsroom collectively thought of journalism with digital in mind "there really isn't a consistent kind of style." So while they argue certainly that digital practices have been normalized, it is a process that still remains inconsistent in their newsrooms.

.   Also, it is worth considering the interplay between the two theoretical lenses applied for this study. From a Field Theory perspective, what occurs in Normalization Process Theory is implementation of practice into the *habitus* of the field. What this study displayed was the degree to which digital practices are no longer an item of individual adoption--shaped as a result of the pull of *economic capital* and *social capital*--but rather had become imbedded organizationally within the field. This normalization even appeared in how journalists reflected on their own *doxa*--certainly articulating traditional

journalistic concerns in terms such as the "watchdog" and "journalistic autonomy"--but in addition described a process that was much more audience oriented, from their perspective, than what legacy media afforded.

Finally, it is important to explicitly state and interpret one major contribution of this study. Schulte (2013) documented the manner in which technology imbeds itself within society in general, or more specifically, within an industry. Technology, as argued by normalization process theory, becomes part of a field through a process. First, technology is often thought about by actors within a field in utopian or dystopian manners but then it moves on to disruption and, finally, a completely normalized piece of the field (Baym, 2015). In the case of journalism, more than 40 years since the industry first attempted to introduce digital technologies (Kaye & Quinn, 2010), the field might finally have arrived normalization. The data here suggests that unlike when Pavlik (1997) romanticized how much positive digital technologies could do or even when Ferrucci and Vos (2017) found journalists building their professional identity around digital disruptions, journalists are now treating digital technologies as just another part of their jobs. It is a normal, everyday fixture of the field and piece of newsmaking practices. Thus, in a sense, somewhat hyperbolically, there is no such thing as "digital journalism" anymore to actors within the field; it is simply journalism.

Limitations

This research emerges from the interpretivist tradition and, as such, no claims can be made as to the generalizability of the study. Culturalist research assumes the researchers to be a central tool in the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2010); however, it

should be noted that researchers compared findings as a team and arrived at a shared

interpretation of the data. Another potential limitation of the study is reflected in the

demographics of its population which is largely white--this is not reflective of the

interviewers attempts in recruitment; indeed, the recruiting pool of 262 journalists were

substantially more diverse. It could be that a more ethnically diverse sample may have

had a different perspective on the relative normalization of digital tools. However, we

believe the sample included here, based on prior research, accurately reflects the

normalization of digital practices in the newsroom. If "everyone is a digital journalist"

then digital journalists have found themselves in a field shaped in their very image.

What is Digital Journalism?

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