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Schapals, Aljosha Karim, Maares, Phoebe, & Hanusch, Folker
(2019)
Working on the margins: Comparative perspectives on the roles and motivations of peripheral actors in journalism.
Media and Communication, *7*(4), pp. 19-30.

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https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2374

Working on the Margins: Comparative Perspectives on the Roles and Motivations of Peripheral Actors in Journalism

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Abstract

As a consequence of digitization and other environmental trends, journalism is changing its forms and arguably also its functions – both in fundamental ways. While 'legacy' news media continue to be easily distinguishable by set characteristics, new content providers operating in an increasingly dense, chaotic, interactive and participatory information environment still remain somewhat understudied. However, at a time when non-traditional formats account for an ever-growing portion of journalistic or para-journalistic work, there is an urgent need to better understand these new peripheral actors and the ways they may be transforming the journalistic field. While journalism scholarship has begun to examine peripheral actors' motivations and conceptualizations of their roles, our understanding is still fairly limited. This relates particularly to comparative studies of peripheral actors, of which there have been very few, despite peripheral journalism being a global phenomenon. This study aims to address this gap by presenting evidence from 18 in-depth interviews with journalists in Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom. In particular, it examines how novel journalistic actors working for a range of organisations discursively contrast their work from that of others. The findings indicate that journalists' motivations to engage in journalism in spite of the rise of precarious labour were profoundly altruistic: indeed, journalists pledged allegiance to an ideology of journalism still rooted in a pre-crisis era – one which sees journalism as serving a public good by providing an interpretative, sense-making role.

Keywords digital news; innovation; journalism; journalism studies; media; news production; news start-ups; entrepreneurship

Introduction

While journalism as a profession and a practice has undergone periods of transformation throughout its history, recent technological, economic and societal developments have changed its forms and arguably also its functions in fundamental ways. Technological affordances in particular have led to an influx of new social actors into the journalistic field. These actors produce and distribute content that resembles journalism very closely, challenging but also contributing to journalistic practice as well as professional ideology.

For more than a decade, scholarship has examined how actors like bloggers, entrepreneurial journalists, citizen journalists, or civic hackers are impacting on and increasingly changing the journalistic field (Wall, 2015; Singer, 2015; Belair-Gagnon and Holton, 2018). While these have been immensely valuable in allowing for a better understanding of these actors' impact, the vast majority of such scholarship tends to be based on single-nation case studies, with a particular focus on the United States. This emphasis has so far made it difficult to better understand the extent to which political, economic, technological, historical or cultural contexts may influence the emergence and motivations of these peripheral actors.

Heeding the call for comparative scholarship to allow a better understanding of communication phenomena (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012), this article explores the professional views of peripheral journalistic actors in three Western media systems: Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom. Through interviews with 18 peripheral journalists from a diverse range of media, we explore how they position their work vis-à-vis legacy journalism and other peripheral actors. They differ in their motivations and role perceptions, as well as how legacy journalists perceive and accept them. This allows us to offer crucial insights into the ways in which traditional journalists' authority is challenged, based on the significant cultural impact such transgressive actors are having on journalistic practice.

Dissolving boundaries of journalism

For centuries, journalism has defined itself as an essential institution in democratic societies, even though it arguably has never been the only societal actor in the construction of knowledge. Through digitization, however, the journalistic field turned into an "increasingly messy definitional space" (Eldridge, 2016) with more and more fuzzy boundaries (Maares and Hanusch, 2018). The emergence of (micro-)bloggers, entrepreneurial journalists, and deviant actors such as WikiLeaks, has re-energized discussions about what actually constitutes journalism as a profession and a practice, both in academic and journalistic discourse (Carlson and Lewis, 2015; Vos and Singer, 2016; Vos et al. 2012; Eldridge, 2017; Loosen, 2015). Following Gieryn (1983), the boundaries of the field are here understood as sites of struggle, where the hegemonic ideal of journalism is defended or contested, by individuals and institutions alike. Since these discourses are "claims to authority or resources" (Gieryn, 1983: 781), established members of a field try to limit access to it. This struggle is even more pronounced in journalism, as the journalistic field's boundaries are more permeable because degrees or certified knowledge are not prerequisites for entry (Lewis, 2015). On the other hand, journalists enjoy benefits such as access to information via press passes and a broader legal protection for publishing leaked material, one reason why new and peripheral actors demand to be treated equally when they offer functionally equivalent content (Eldridge, 2019).

For nearly a century, journalists have relied on professional norms as the basis for boundary work (Singer, 2015). These norms over time became an ideology that could be seen as almost universal, given many journalists around the globe subscribe to central tenets such as the need for

objectivity, autonomy, or ethical conduct (Deuze, 2005). In trying to exclude others from the journalistic field, traditional journalists have tended to dismiss peripheral actors as too emotional, too opinionated, too activist, or as relying too much on hearsay (Eldridge, 2016). This makes boundary work also extremely relational; depending on the characteristics of the 'other', journalists focus on different aspects of their identity and accentuate different norms or professional practices that distinguish them from the deviant group (Ferrucci and Vos, 2017). At the same time, boundaries have also always been drawn within the field, rather than merely around it. For instance, metajournalistic discourse that portrays highly professionalized political legacy journalism as 'real' journalism creates an idea of a core of journalistic culture. At the same time, it dismisses other journalistic work and actors, such as more entertaining formats, lifestyle journalists, or freelancers (Wiik, 2015; Sjøvaag, 2015; Hanusch, 2012). Much of this discourse has been essential for the creation of professional standards, including the strict separation of editorial and advertorial content (Coddington, 2015). Similarly, internal discourse scorning tabloid journalism as 'bad' has created a hierarchy within journalism, in order to strengthen journalistic norms and ethical guidelines (Eldridge, 2016). Yet, these widely shared values remain open to debate and are continuously shaped through stories and discourse within the journalistic community to adapt to non-institutionalised practices (Zelizer, 1993). In that sense, boundary work does not only defend journalism's autonomy and expels deviant actors or practices, but also enables the inclusion of new participants, practices, or professionalism to its repertoire (Carlson, 2015).

Given journalism is typically not a protected profession in terms of access to the field, talking about the boundaries of journalism is "primarily a discussion of identity markers" (Tandoc and Jenkins 2016: 4). Actors aim to discursively define and legitimate a specific vision of the journalistic profession and journalistic practice within the field, as well as in broader society (Carlson, 2016; Gieryn, 1983). A central concern in this regard relates to how journalists view their role in society. Hanitzsch and Vos (2017: 120) have suggested that we need to understand journalistic roles as the "discursive articulation and enactment of journalism's identity as a social institution". Thus, examining journalists' role perceptions contributes to a further understanding of where and how the boundaries of the journalistic field are drawn. The study of journalistic roles has a long history in scholarship, dating back to Bernard Cohen's (1963) influential study of the relationship between the press and foreign relations. A large number of studies followed, including a range of comparative examinations of journalists' role perceptions (see, for example, Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Weaver, 1998; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). One influential theoretical framework that considers journalists' role was offered by Hanitzsch (2007), who located it within his operationalization of journalistic culture. In relation to journalism's institutional role, Hanitzsch (2007) identified three dimensions: first, the extent to which journalists are *interventionist* in pursuing certain missions; second, the degree with which they challenge *powerful individuals* in society; third, the degree of *market orientation* journalists have in their work (the audience as consumers vs. citizens). Mellado (2014), in her study of journalists' role performance, identified very similar roles, which she referred to as interventionist, watchdog, supporters, service providers, infotainment and civic roles. Even more recently, Hanitzsch & Vos (2018) have offered an elaborate framework that aims to combine both journalism's roles in political and everyday life. Still, such roles have mostly been studied in the context of mainstream journalism, making it necessary to also study how peripheral actors conceive of their role in society.

With digitization, new peripheral actors take part in these discursive processes more easily all over the world. A number of studies have tried to explore the boundaries of the journalistic field by focusing on specific new actors, such as citizen journalists, (micro-) bloggers, activists, programmers,

or entrepreneurial journalists (Carlson and Lewis, 2015). If we view these as singular cases, we do not fully understand how they might be affecting the journalistic field as a whole, but if we collapse them to one group of peripheral actors, we might be unable to differentiate them accordingly. While these new actors are all "strangers to the game" (Belair-Gagnon and Holton, 2018), their claims to legitimacy and authority differ, and so does their reception by the journalistic field. To further understand them and the ways they may be transforming the journalistic field, a more differentiated approach than the simple dichotomy of 'insiders' vs. 'outsiders' is needed.

Peripheral actors – contesters, maintainers, or innovators?

Eldridge (2014) has referred to peripheral actors who overtly claim membership to the journalistic field as "interlopers": They strongly embrace journalistic ideals such as an adversarial role, and criticise legacy journalists for failing to adhere to this role, or believe they are offering something that is functionally equivalent to journalism. As their practices are sometimes deviant from journalistic ethical norms, traditional journalists mostly reject their claims to legitimacy and membership in the journalistic field. But not all peripheral actors are perceived as divergent, and some of them, or their practices, are embraced by the journalistic field (Carlson, 2015). Belair-Gagnon and Holton (2018) propose a typology of peripheral actors based on Eldridge's term of interloper. They distinguish between *explicit interlopers*, *implicit interlopers*, and *intralopers*. While these categories are relational, as the one essential aspect of differentiation is how journalists perceive these actors, these terms can be useful as an analytical tool.

Explicit interlopers comprise a group of non-traditional actors who challenge journalistic authority and compete with news organizations for the audience's attention. They contribute to the transformation of the journalistic field when legacy media shift their practices and norms based on these interlopers' successes and failures. The motivations of explicit interlopers are manifold. Some want to transform the journalistic field, or re-energize its 'original' ideals; for others, the primary goal is financial or political. For example, bloggers aim to hold journalists accountable to a normative journalistic ideology (Vos et al., 2012), while platforms that leak government information, such as WikiLeaks, claim to perform journalism's watchdog and investigative role (Eldridge, 2014). Entrepreneurial actors such as news aggregators or digital-only platforms for pop cultural news and listicles often pursue a for-profit agenda. They challenge the field by collapsing long-established editorial and business roles in journalism and are therefore considered deviant (Coddington, 2015; Singer, 2015). Moreover, socialized by start-up culture, they want to distinguish themselves from legacy media and disrupt journalistic practices to "make journalism better" (Usher, 2017: 9). However, as the case of Buzzfeed shows, deviant actors may be accepted into the journalistic field when they adapt to its dominant norms and include investigative news (Tandoc 2018; Tandoc and Jenkins, 2017).

While some for-profit projects are criticized on ethical grounds, much of journalistic discourse has high hopes for entrepreneurial journalism to help journalism as a profession to survive (Vos and Singer, 2016). As such, some entrepreneurial journalists could be considered implicit interlopers. They do not overtly challenge journalistic practices and some are more closely dependent on legacy media (Belair-Gagnon and Holton, 2018). They are also more accepted by the journalistic field as they possess valued knowledge such as programming skills and offer innovative funding ideas or technological applications, or contribute to news production, for instance through free content (Nicey, 2016; Wall, 2015), as civic hackers (Baack, 2018), or entrepreneurial fact-checkers (Singer, 2018). They often do not consider themselves as journalistic actors (Baack, 2018; Belair-Gagnon and Holton, 2018) and their motivations could be considered to improve civic discourse and aid the journalistic profession. For

163 instance, entrepreneurial projects such as *Mediapart*, *De Correspondent* or *Krautreporter* are not
164 interested in profit maximization and draw on normative journalistic ideology to provide 'good old'
165 journalism (Wagemans et al., 2016; Witschge and Harbers, 2018). As such, their motivations differ to
166 some degree from journalists in general. As research on journalism students has shown, motivations
167 for pursuing the profession lie in following their creative passions and seeking a varied career, as well
168 as to provide a public service (Hanusch et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2014; Sparks & Splichal, 1994).
169 While much of the research on boundaries focuses on the purposely disruptive agents, implicit
170 interlopers have been more researched through the lens of innovation and opportunities to
171 reinvigorate journalism and less through their discursive position-taking or position-claiming within
172 the journalistic field. Research, however, has shown that new entrants to the field that have been
173 granted membership try to distinguish themselves from other peripheral actors (cf. Ferrucci and Vos,
174 2017), and thus preserve its dominant vision (Tandoc, 2017). Thus, we still have an incomplete
175 understanding of how this plays out across different kinds of work of implicit interlopers, as most
176 studies rely on particular case studies. Based on the literature reviewed here, we therefore developed
177 the following three main research questions:
178
179 *RQ1: What are implicit interlopers' motivations to engage in journalistic work in a "profoundly*
180 *precarious context" (Deuze and Witschge, 2018) characterised by "a culture of job insecurity" (Ekdale*
181 *et al., 2015)?*
182 *RQ2: How do implicit interlopers discursively construct their work – and potentially contrast it*
183 *from that of others?*
184 *RQ3: What, if any, are the differences between implicit interlopers' motivations and discursive*
185 *construction of their work across national contexts?*
186
187 **Method**
188 To answer the research questions and uncover the discursive construction of implicit interlopers'
189 work, we took a comparative approach in an attempt to better understand the extent to which a range
190 of political, economic, technological or cultural contexts may influence differences across countries.
191 While a few studies exist of peripheral actors' motivations and conceptualizations of their roles in this
192 regard, these have mostly focused on single-nation contexts. Yet, peripheral actors in journalism are
193 a global phenomenon, and studying journalism in singe-national contexts can blind us to experience
194 elsewhere that may challenge existing theories and understandings. Our study thus seeks to elicit such
195 responses across three Western media systems: Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom.
196 Moreover, journalistic work can be conceptualised as a stratified space along three dimensions:
197 material security, possession of journalistic capital – that is status and recognition from other
198 journalists –, and access to resources (Örnebring et al., 2018). We thus aimed at including outlets and
199 actors with varying possession of these resources. For instance, we examined both outlets with a high
200 level of audience reach (in terms of monthly page views, both desktop and mobile), as well as
201 particularly innovative outlets known to the researchers for other reasons (e.g. those having received
202 a significant amount of media coverage, i.e. journalistic capital). For the UK, we relied on data gathered
203 by digital marketing intelligence company *SimilarWeb*, which provides monthly market updates on the
204 most popular websites by audience reach. In Australia, we relied on data gathered by *Hitwise*, a US-
205 based marketing company measuring audience behaviour across platforms. For Germany, we used
206 data gathered by the governmental organisation IVW (*German Audit Bureau of Circulation*), as well as
207 the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Online-Forschung (AGOF) and their 'Daily Facts' database, the latter of which

provides cross-media digital media reach across German audiences. Despite the evidence-based approach taken in identifying relevant outlets, it is worth noting that the process of determining these was heuristic. While the aforementioned platforms do indeed use page views as an indicator for audience reach, they do not provide conclusive evidence in terms of the size of the audience reached, nor are these figures adjusted for potentially automated bot traffic. For the purpose of this study, however, they did provide the most comprehensive and commercially available dataset to advance our shortlist.

This study is part of a larger research project which seeks to evaluate the emerging assemblage of journalistic forms, practices, and uses in a comparative study in the three countries. To cater for the transnational nature of the project, the researchers subscribed to the *Cision Media Database,* a platform which hosts contact details of media professionals working across all three different countries. Editors and reporters who covered only one particular journalistic beat (e.g. sports), or those exclusively engaged in overly specialised reporting, were excluded. These potential participants were first approached via email, and, later, if applicable, followed up on with a further email reminding them of the research project.

For the purpose of the present paper, the researchers extracted a total of 18 interviews with implicit interlopers from the existing dataset: seven in Australia, six in the UK, and five in Germany. The Australian respondents worked at the following outlets: *Techly, Mamamia, Buzzfeed Australia*, *New Matilda, Junkee, VICE Australia,* and *The Saturday Paper*. In the UK, they include: *Huffington Post UK, The New European* (2)*, Open Democracy*, and *Buzzfeed UK* (2), while in Germany, respondents worked at *Huffington Post Germany, jetzt.de, Correctiv* (2)*,* as well as one journalist working for several digital-born outlets on a freelance basis. Despite the fact that these are vastly different outlets pursuing diverging editorial styles, what unites them is that they are digital-born platforms known for a level of innovation that deviates from long-established practices by established, 'legacy' media, including opportunities to reinvigorate journalism, e.g. through successful content and audience engagement (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018). All interviews were conducted between January 2017 and May 2019. Of the 18 interviewees, thirteen were male and five were female. Thirteen worked in senior roles, while five were in the lower ranks of the editorial hierarchy (though it is worth noting that the nature of these 'peripheral actors' deviating from the norms of traditional journalism dictates a less-rigid, less-formalized hierarchical structure to begin with; at times, the journalists' narratives suggested they had a rather high degree of editorial oversight despite their more 'junior' job titles). The youngest journalist was 27 years old and the oldest was 65 years old. The average age was 40 years. Half of the interviewees had prior experience working for mainstream media, while the other half had worked solely for digital-born journalism start-ups. Their total work experience in journalism averages 15 years.

The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to elaborate freely upon their motivations to engage in a profession characterised by significant levels of precarity, as well as their conceptualisations of what journalism *is* or *should be* at a time when normative definitions of journalism as traditionally understood are poorly placed to encapsulate the various forms and formats of journalism that not just *coexist*, but crucially, also *compete* with each other. Of the 18 interviews, 11 were conducted face-to-face and seven via telephone or Skype. Interviewees were assured anonymity. The interview data was transcribed verbatim and eventually clustered and analysed using the qualitative content analysis software *MaxQDA*.

Findings

Our findings are separated into two parts: first, we explore our respondents' *motivations* to engage in journalistic work; second, we examine their *definitions* of journalism in the digital age. Throughout, we discuss comparative differences across national contexts where they emerged.

Journalistic motivations

When it comes to the ways in which journalists articulated their motivations for engaging in journalistic work, this study identifies two dimensions present in our respondents' narratives. These refer to motivations to work in journalism in general, as well as specific motivations for peripheral, journalistic work. While we need to bear in mind that of course these motivations are discursively constructed by our respondents in the process of the interviews, our findings suggest that the motivations these peripheral actors have for engaging in journalistic work are broadly in line with established, professional journalists' frequently-voiced motivations (Hanusch et al., 2015, Carpenter et al., 2016, Sparks & Splichal, 1994). Many expressed a general sense of curiosity to understand peoples' lives and experiences, and, crucially, the urge to give those not usually granted a voice the ability to speak out. A *Buzzfeed Australia* journalist remembered volunteering for a radio station during her student years, an experience she described as taking her "over the edge": "The rigor in doing that was something I really enjoyed: being able to tell stories, and being able to have a voice. Or at least to provide an outlet for other people who could really use that outlet to get their message heard was really cool; it was a really humbling and yet empowering thing to be a part of" (personal communication, 17 June 2017). Following her student years, she now regards her role as one of an intermediator between her audience and parts of the public she described as "voiceless". Giving others a voice has been a relatively common role conception in studies of journalistic roles around the globe, even if it has not always ranked at the top of the list (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

Moreover, other than a general 'passion' for writing – something that was referred to as a "craft" by a *Huffington Post* UK journalist – pursuing a career in journalism was an idea that for many of our interviewees manifested itself as early as their formative years. Many referenced their humble beginnings working for a student newspaper: working on their first story, and seeing it published, was a "lightbulb moment" for the *Junkee* journalist. In the words of one freelance journalist working for several digital-born outlets in Germany: "It was a childhood dream, combined with that very first initial professional experience that really made it feasible for me to see myself in a career in journalism" (personal communication, 15 July 2017). Studies have shown for some time that a passion for the profession, in particular a passion for writing, are key factors in people deciding to become journalists (Sparks & Splichal, 1994).

In terms of their motivations, our interviewees were clear that they did not enter the profession in order to be financially secure. Quite the opposite, respondents were acutely aware of the levels of precarity inherent to much of contemporary journalism. A journalist interviewed at German NGO *Correctiv* said: "It's not like I'll be a millionaire as a journalist. I would really have to go for another job if that was my goal. But there are reasons why I've decided to become a journalist: it is simply my own *conviction*" (personal communication, 5 July 2018). Again, the amount of money journalists can earn have never played much of a role in journalists' decisions to pursue their craft. Studies of journalism students have repeatedly shown that pay is not an important consideration, particularly in Western countries (Hanusch et al., 2015).

Specific motivations for peripheral work

While their general motivations broadly align with views held by 'traditional' journalists, our respondents also expressed reasons why they decided to work in peripheral or non-traditional outlets. Certainly, the technological affordances motivate many to engage in journalistic work as they dissolve institutional boundaries – or hurdles – to have themselves 'heard' and to 'cut through the noise' in a field formerly dominated by long-established, 'traditional' media. In the words of a journalist working for the tech journalism start-up *Techly* in Sydney: "I think this speaks to how the digital landscape has evolved: you don't have to have 20 years of experience to be considered good enough. I don't personally have that experience, but I know a lot of people who kind of make their own media" (personal communication, 1 June 2017). As such, they exploit the available resources to show their work, a motivation especially common among aspiring or semi-professional actors (Nicey, 2016). This is also echoed by respondents who perceive emerging forms of digital journalism as outlets where they can express themselves and their views; in contrast to informational-instructive role perceptions they embrace more analytical-deliberative roles such as the mobilizer role (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018). For one respondent, this enabled her to communicate the views of the voiceless, which were already noted earlier, as well: "I can truly express myself in a very meaningful way, and allow my ability to really express myself to also express the views of others that don't have the chance to be expressed, so it [my motivation] was a combination of being a storyteller – but also a vehicle by which opinions can be shared" (personal communication, 17 June 2017).

Moreover, emerging forms of journalism provide the opportunity to report on niche topics or stories that might be ignored or missed in legacy media. A journalist working for the Australian female-only journalism start-up *Mamamia* was motivated by the need not just to have those marginalised – and often female – voices featured more prominently in her output, but to diversify journalism offerings targeted at female readers in order to add "something different". In her words: "I realised that as a consumer, one of my big frustrations when I was in magazines was that they're not seeing the shift in consumer behaviour – particularly among young women, and especially towards digital. So I really wanted to be where the action was – and I really also saw a tsunami coming that was really going to decimate traditional media. So I took the decision to walk away from traditional journalism" (personal communication, 2 June 2017). Mass redundancies have been particularly acute in Australia in recent years, where one-quarter of the mainstream journalistic workforce is estimated to have lost their jobs, with the major media companies faced with significant losses due to digital challenges (Ricketson et al., 2019).

Walking away from mainstream media, however, had its trade-offs: not only did this respondent describe the many boundaries she faced coming up towards the 'behemoths' of established, 'legacy' media targeted at a female audience, but the act of combining "both high-brow and low-brow content" was seen as a novel offering in her field, underlining the need to strongly position her "brand" in what already was a "crowded field". This points to an important aspect of boundary work raised earlier: Journalists do not only try to draw boundaries between the journalistic field and outsiders, but also clearly demarcate within the field what is considered 'good' journalism, and what isn't (Eldridge, 2016). According to this narrative, journalists ought to focus on what this respondent referred to as high-brow content, but avoid 'low-brow content'. Worse still, one ought not to mix the two.

Given its initial success in the United States, one *Buzzfeed* respondent joined its UK bureau in the hope that its potential would replicate itself elsewhere, too; as of 2019, however, the company announced 17 redundancies to its UK operation (Walker, 2019). Likewise, one of our German respondents was inspired by the diversified journalism 'genres' conceived in the United States –

342 distinct to his motivation was the practice of investigative, non-profit journalism. Indeed, one of the
343 journalists working at *Correctiv* was so motivated by the genre that he proclaimed: "This has been
344 following me throughout my professional career" (personal communication, 5 July 2018).
345 Finally, emerging forms of journalism may take higher risks, as sites like *VICE* dare to follow
346 unusual investigations in what are often dangerous territories for journalists. A journalist at *VICE*
347 Australia explained this with the need to convey the – at times extreme – experiences of people living
348 in such areas. He said: "For me, it's always just been about storytelling: understanding other people's
349 lives. Talking to people whose experiences I've never had … So, exploring the far ends of what it's like
350 to be human" (personal communication, 15 January 2019). As such, these new formats are broadening
351 the conventional journalistic genres as well as challenging norms such as objectivity (Deuze, 2005).
352
353 *Defining journalism*
354 In relation to the interviewees' definitions of what constitutes journalism – or what it *should* constitute
355 – we find some boundary markers across all nations, but also differences due to geographic and
356 historic peculiarities. Indeed, our respondents continued to adhere to existing – and widely discussed
357 – notions of professional journalistic ideology (Deuze, 2005). Once again, our findings indicate that the
358 long-held, frequently idealistic and often almost noble definitions of journalism as a 'social good' still
359 apply in the minds of peripheral actors, too. At the same time, there was a growing sense that while
360 change of journalism's forms and particularly its distribution modes seemed inevitable, its core
361 functions of informing and educating the public remained intact. In fact, it was striking how frequently
362 "the need to inform" was voiced amongst our interviewees, irrespective of sociodemographic
363 backgrounds or their level of seniority: the role of journalism as a provider of information was
364 expressed by journalists at *Techly, New Matilda, Junkee, The Saturday Paper, Buzzfeed UK* and
365 *Correctiv*. Considering that informing audiences is widely reported as a universal role of journalism in
366 global surveys of journalists (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Weaver & Willnat, 2012), this is interesting, as it
367 suggests that even these implicit interlopers do not deviate from this ideology, displaying a relatively
368 conservative stance.
369 The UK journalists in our sample frequently referenced a political climate they described as
370 "divisive", which they believed made it ever more urgent to uphold the role of journalism – to inform
371 and to educate – even more strongly (journalist at *Open Democracy*, personal communication, 14 June
372 2018). However, technological and economic transformations affected our respondents' often
373 traditional definitions of journalism. For instance, respondents highlighted journalism's societal role
374 to inform and educate, as well as to mediate (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018), whilst simultaneously being
375 aware of economic limitations. A journalist working for *Techly*, for example, said: "Its [role is] primarily
376 to inform and to question someone broader on the landscape, whether that'd be cultural or political
377 – or whatever it is. The media, for all the public relations bullshit that goes on behind the scenes,
378 should be like a beacon of truth and people should respect it; perhaps in some ways that's maybe a
379 little bit earned" (personal communication, 1 June 2017). For the journalist working at *New Matilda* –
380 an Australian outlet similar to the widely-referenced *The Conversation*, but with a somewhat stronger
381 focus on public policy – journalism's role as an intermediator or enabler of dialogue had not really
382 changed, but that there were transformations both in terms of business models and distribution
383 channels. Similarly, a respondent from *Junkee* – a digital-born outlet focussed primarily on popular
384 culture – explained: "The core function of journalism is telling people what they need to know. That's
385 as true now as it's ever been. … We are quite light-hearted and we try to be quite entertaining [and]
386 we try to make news digestible. That's not the way it's always been done – but that's the way we need

to do it in order to reach our audience. … I think it's better to reach them at all than not to reach them – but … you can write this beautiful, long, eloquent article that goes deep and is very dry. But if no one reads it, it doesn't matter" (personal communication, 20 December 2018). This respondent's statement points to an interesting development that shows journalism can also approach stories in entertaining ways, combining its entertainment role with the function of educating and informing its audience (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). In the Australian context, this appears to be an increasingly frequent occurrence, as a representative survey of Australian journalists showed some years ago (Hanusch, 2013).

With a political divisive climate and economic constraints limiting journalists' ability to act as fourth estate, it is not surprising that some respondents also defined journalism and its role normatively. A journalist at *Buzzfeed Australia* said they thought journalists' role was to "be the beacon of truth in society like never before – to really, really question *everything*" (personal communication, 17 June 2017). This may be a reaction to slander by reinforcing long-held journalistic norms and ideals (Witschge & Harbers, 2018), as well as discursively laying claim to belong to the journalistic core by distinguishing themselves from actors who do not adhere to 'real' journalistic norms (Ferrucci & Vos, 2017).

Contextual definitions

As definitions of journalism are somewhat dependent on contextual factors related to different media systems, we unsurprisingly found nuances across our sample. Several of our UK and German respondents referenced a struggle between the ideal of journalism and the reality of every day work, however, with different reason and effects.

Crucially, within our UK sample, journalists identified a gap between what journalism *is* in its ideal form, and the extent to which the current status quo struggled to deliver on that idealism. In the words of one entertainment journalist at the *Huffington Post UK*: "In an ideal world, you will perhaps hold somebody to account who sits on a platform of power, and you would champion somebody who's at the bottom and who needs to be higher up in life. I mean, that's the ideal world. … [But] In my case, you deal with huge film studios, huge television distributors who have a huge amount of power, so they get to decide [who gets access]" (personal communication, 17 January 2017). This power imbalance and the economic constraints on every-day work are echoed by a journalist at *The New European* – a printed magazine set up in the aftermath of the UK's vote to leave the European Union to cater for the 48% of the population who voted to 'remain' – who explained: "[Journalism] is the pursuit of holding those in power to account, especially with journalists right now in the UK. And I think there still is a place for this; I think it will get better. … [But] It pains me that there are some people that are getting away with murder" (personal communication, 1 October 2018). The role of journalism in acting as a safeguard to accountability was also referenced among several Australian interviewees, notwithstanding the challenges in terms of effectively catering to that role. For example, the journalist working at *New Matilda* said that journalism "is super powerful, and it is amazing how much and how quickly things change when you start asking uncomfortable questions of people in power. But I'm pretty much worried where things are going and how the media [operate] in 2018. I don't think the role of journalism has changed. What has changed are business models. … We've lost so much diversity in the media landscape" (personal communication, 20 December 2018). One such example is the merger between Nine Entertainment and Fairfax Media, leading to concerns on the erosion of 'quality' media (Muller, 2018).

431 A similar sentiment but with different reasoning was expressed by the German freelance
432 journalist when he explained what journalism *is* – to his mind, "to synthesize complex information for
433 a lay audience" – but made clear that whether it was actually able to *achieve* this was a different
434 question altogether. The need – but also the difficulty – in fostering greater public understanding for
435 such frequently complex matters was featured prominently amongst our German respondents. Many
436 referred to the mediating, 'sense-making' role of a journalist to help navigate their readers at times
437 when distrust in the media continues to be high (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019).
438 One journalist working for the *Huffington Post* Germany stressed that "journalism is taking on more
439 and more of an explanatory, sorting role. … Back in the day, it was a journalist's role to gather
440 information. To research, to investigate – all that will continue to play an important role in the future,
441 too. But I do believe that this explanatory, sorting role is ever more important in light of the explosion
442 of information that's out there (personal communication, 4 September 2018). Another German
443 journalist at the digital-born outlet *Correctiv* agreed with the need to guide readers through an
444 environment he described as an "information tsunami". As such, his understanding of journalism went
445 beyond merely reporting on events as they happen, but to contextualise and interpret them. To his
446 mind, "every democracy needs a functioning, independent press that watches over society. Nothing
447 has changed about this. It's just the way we go about it that has changed. … It's not exactly difficult to
448 get information in the digital age. … But that makes it even more important to separate what's
449 important from what is less so, and that requires the ability to prioritise and evaluate the information
450 at hand" (personal communication, 5 July 2018).
451 While it is important to be cautious about extrapolating from the small samples examined
452 here, one may still hypothesise that the nuances we identify may be related to the different media
453 systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and, thus, the varying journalistic cultures and traditions inherent to
454 them. While such hypothesis would need to be scrutinized using representative samples, the UK has
455 a long tradition in watchdog journalism, the intellectual and interpretative role of journalism has
456 traditionally been more pronounced in Germany (Köcher, 1986). Yet, both media systems are affected
457 by changes. Traditionally, the UK, as a liberal media system characterised by high levels of competition
458 and partisanship, has been more prone to commercialisation (Esser, 1999). Economic constraints on
459 British journalism as a whole are particularly distinct (Örnebring, 2016); hence, it may be more difficult
460 to establish a viable business, especially for 'new' media. The German journalists in our sample, in
461 turn, focus more on the increasing availability of information as a result of digitization – and less on
462 economic constraints, perhaps partly because economic uncertainty has been somewhat less
463 pronounced comparatively. However, this abundance of information may affect journalists' ideal of
464 thorough, interpretive reporting. By drawing on long-held roles of their respective journalism cultures
465 as journalistic ideals, our respondents reinforce and sustain the boundaries of the field, maintaining
466 "journalism as a distinct and valued occupation" (Örnebring, 2016: 173), regardless of their status as
467 peripheral journalistic workers. It would therefore be important for future research to test these
468 assumptions in more comprehensive studies.
469 Despite such challenges, however, our findings suggest that the idealistic and often noble
470 notions of journalism as a profession still held water for many of the actors lying at the periphery of
471 journalism, too. Journalism was linked to "bravery" and "idealism": although journalists were not
472 always able to "control that outcome" (journalist at German journalism start-up *Correctiv*, personal
473 communication, 2 October 2018), crucially, respondents did identify examples in recent times when
474 journalism was indeed in a position to effect (policy) change: in the UK, for example, they referenced
475 the 'Windrush' scandal leading to the resignation of former Home Secretary Amber Rudd; in Germany,

they referenced the Cambridge Analytica revelations leading to a drop in the share price of Facebook. This suggests that, although crucial parts of the journalism ecosystem are subject to change (the difficulty in securing a long-term viable business model was referenced particularly frequently across the board), the journalists interviewed still subscribed to the long-held notion of their respective journalism cultures: journalism as a 'watchdog' and a 'Fourth Estate' in holding power to scrutiny, as well as by interpreting social reality and educating audiences to "give the public the tools to control the powerful themselves" (Witschge & Harbers, 2018: 71).

Conclusion

This study sought to better understand implicit interlopers in journalism from a comparative perspective, particularly through these actors' discursive position-taking and position-claiming within the journalistic field – rather than to replicate existing research looking at the ways through which peripheral actors more generally may be able to innovate or even to reinvigorate journalism as a profession. How do implicit interlopers discursively construct their work from that of other actors in a growingly crowded journalistic field operating in an "increasingly messy definitional space" (Eldridge, 2016)? And how can we better comprehend these actors' genuine motivations at times in which their work finds itself in a "profoundly precarious context" (Deuze and Witschge, 2018)?

Irrespective of cross-national perspectives, the way journalists' discursively (re-)constructed their motivations to engage in journalism in spite of the rise of precarious labour were profoundly altruistic: indeed, journalists pledged allegiance to an ideology of journalism still rooted in a pre-crisis era – one which sees journalism as serving a public good by providing an interpretative, sense-making role. Journalists took pride in a profession that was described as one of craftsmanship, suggesting a striking level of ideological *continuation* in the face of industrial *disruption*. Regardless, journalists also voiced specific motivations to engage in peripheral work, thus highlighting the limitations of the varying practices, hierarchies, as well as foci of interest inherent to much of contemporary, legacy media. As such, our respondents were seemingly motivated to explore innovative means to engage in journalism – while their definitions of what journalism *is* continued to adhere to existing ideals.

Despite the significant challenges, evolutions and transformations journalism as an industry is subjected to, our findings suggest that long-held ideals of journalism as a 'public good' appear to remain intact: among these were journalism as a provider of information (serving an audience with relevant news) as well as a custodian of accountability (acting as a 'watchdog' over society). Even though the sample is not representative of a wider cross-section of journalists in the three countries investigated in our study, the findings confirm that even peripheral journalists seem to exhibit many of the roles that journalism scholarship has previously identified among mainstream journalists (Hanitzsch, 2007; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). Specifically, we found that respondents valued journalism's role in providing a market-oriented service, as well as its adversarial role in challenging existing power structures, and roles relating to everyday life such as providing entertainment. This points to a striking level of continuation notwithstanding the aforementioned industry disruptions: journalists expressed loyalty towards journalism as an ideal, thus upholding its long-held reputation of being "the noblest of professions" (Deuze, 2019). By reinforcing idealistic and normative standards of journalism, our respondents discursively located themselves within a long journalistic tradition, regardless of their innovative approaches. As such, they do not, in fact, *disrupt* the field, but rather *preserve* the essential functions of journalism. This is even

more striking as they encounter similar constraints as legacy journalists – and struggle to keep a balance between journalistic ideals and the realities of 'the daily grind'. Yet, their responses to such a differentiation between the status quo and an ideal scenario draw on the traditions of their respective journalism cultures – instead of focusing on less established and thus disruptive functions. Overall, our findings also detail the challenges posed to the authority of traditional journalists based on the significant cultural impact such transgressive actors are having on journalistic practice, which helps further our understanding of journalism in its existing and emerging forms and functions from a comparative point of view.

Of course, this study also has some limitations. To some degree, the ongoing adherence to such long-held notions may be a consequence of the interviewees' professional backgrounds: nine of the 18 interviewees had previously worked for a mainstream media organisation. Thus, our respondents' motivations and discourses about journalism need to be interpreted in light of this. Crucially, however, given the expressed similarities amongst respondents in pledging allegiance to long-held ideals and notions of journalism – irrespective of previous work experience – this limitation may in fact be mitigated and, thus, be far less pronounced as a result of it.

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