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Eldridge II, Scott A.; Hess, Kristy; Tandoc, Edson C.; Westlund, Oscar

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Navigating the Scholarly Terrain: Introducing the Digital Journalism Studies Compass

Scott A. Eldridge II^a , Kristy Hess^b , Edson C. Tandoc, Jr.^c  and Oscar Westlund^d 

^aCentre for Media and Journalism Studies, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands; ^bSchool of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, Burwood, Australia; ^cWee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Nanyang, Singapore, Singapore; ^dDepartment of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

This article by the *Digital Journalism* Editorial Team surfaces with the explicit ambition to reassess the field of *Digital Journalism Studies* and map a future editorial agenda for *Digital Journalism*. The article dissects two important and closely interrelated questions: “What is ‘digital journalism?’”, and “What is ‘digital journalism studies?’” Building on the commissioned conceptual articles and the review article also published in this issue, we define *Digital Journalism Studies* as a field which should strive to critically explore, document, and explain the interplay of digital and journalism, continuity and change, and further focus, conceptualize, and theorize tensions, configurations, power imbalances, and the debates these continue to raise for digital journalism and its futures. We also present a useful heuristic device—the Digital Journalism Studies Compass—anchored around *digital* and *journalism*, and *continuity* and *change*, as a guide for discussing the direction of the growing field and this journal.

KEYWORDS

Compass; digital journalism; digital journalism studies; continuity; change; digitization; journalism

Introduction

In this article we grapple with core questions at the heart of this journal: what is digital journalism, and what is digital journalism studies? Building on the foundation outlined by founding editor-in-chief Bob Franklin in launching this journal, we begin by dissecting these two important and closely interrelated questions through discussions of debates and definitions in previous literature (Part I). Second, we establish the context for our examination and synthesize the key arguments and threads of inquiry from the conceptual and review article(s) we have presented in this special issue. In discussing these, we have developed a table presenting an overview of the concise definitions offered by all contributors to the special issue, adding our own discussion of the larger field of study (Part II). Third, and on the basis of these discussions, we

CONTACT Scott A. Eldridge  s.a.eldridge.ii@rug.nl; Oscar Westlund  oscarwestlund@gmail.com

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turn towards generating anchor points for the field of *Digital Journalism Studies*, a process that is aided by what we call the *Digital Journalism Studies Compass* (DJS Compass). This compass allows us to navigate the geographies of a dynamic field, and embraces the continuums between *digital* and *journalism*, and between *continuity* and *change*, reflected in digital journalism research and the contributions being made (Part III).

Our generation of a metaphorical DJS Compass is part of an effort to highlight what distinguishes digital journalism studies, and digital journalism as its core priority, from work in journalism studies. Why a compass? A compass provides navigators with clear direction when conditions are overcast—a useful metaphor for those studying the news during this period of intense digitization and disruption. A compass has no cultural bias—it has been used for divination as early as the Chinese Han Dynasty and was integral to the Age of Discovery, a period where extensive overseas exploration from Europe marked the beginning of globalization. In our thinking through this metaphor, and considering Digital Journalism Studies as a field as it has taken shape, we envisage the compass as an orienteering tool reflective not only of the ways the field has come into being, but of the different ways we, as an editorial team, consider the field from our own orientations—thinking through these ideas while we are situated in the East, South, North, and West.

Let us begin by interacting with two questions at the core of this effort, and this issue of *Digital Journalism*: “what is ‘digital journalism?’”, and “what is ‘digital journalism studies?’”. In doing so, we show here that these are not questions with isolated responses; rather, answering each helps better inform responses to the other.

Revisiting the burgeoning line of research into *Digital Journalism* (Part I)

To examine these questions, it is useful to first look back to the emergence of scholarly work making sense of the ways the increasingly accessible Web was opening doors to new ways of doing journalism online. At the outset of this century, this was first embraced in groundbreaking work by Singer (2003), Boczkowski (2004), Deuze (2005), Allan (2006), Robinson (2006), among others. These early studies on journalism’s transitions to the Web, and the integration of new technologies into familiar routines, identified a set of debates and discussions which have served as rocks on a cairn, incrementally building towards establishing a body of research into digital journalism; or, put differently, looking back from our current vantage point, scholars have amassed a notable body of work in the first two decades of research into the shifting nature of journalism following the emergence of the Web, which better allows us to understand the path this field has taken in its development. Further, the work in the first decades of research in this field offered guiding insights into how a new domain of journalism was emerging, how it was developing, and how quickly it was progressing.

Subsequent large edited collections took these into further consideration and presented a more coherent narrative of a field coming into shape. Key debates were brought together by Witschge, Anderson, Domingo, and Hermida (2016), Franklin and Eldridge (2017), and Eldridge and Franklin (2019), alongside journals, including this one and *Journalism Studies* and *Journalism Practice* before it. Through these collections,

scholars sought to grasp how digital technologies emerged and how journalism embraced them with an emphasis on the “fundamental changes in the ways that journalism is produced, engaged with, and critically understood” (Eldridge and Franklin 2019: 1). At the core of these efforts was a recognition that “digital journalism” was not merely a modified description of journalism, but a way of seeing journalism in fundamentally new ways (Figure 1).

Yet confronting the fundamental novelty of digital journalism has also required scholars to recognize that studying digital journalism involves “embracing the ambiguity, unease, and uncertainty of the field” (Witschge *et al.* 2016: 1). As it has wrestled with journalistic legacies, and digital unknowns, the tenor of research constituting Digital Journalism Studies was established, including in special issues of this journal devoted to its theories (Steensen and Ahva 2015) and methods (Karlsson and Sjøvaag 2016). In broad strokes, this has included work which both hearkens back to a long history of journalism research and the normative, theoretical, and empirical territory journalism studies has staked out, while also setting out to chart a discrete set of terminological reference points unique to the contemporary era. On one level, this continues to define digital journalism research, which rests somewhere between acknowledging continuity, while nevertheless making clear that *something* has changed. Such a bifurcated set of priorities has led to fruitful questions being asked—Was this change altogether, or rather evolutionary? Were the forms of digital journalism a response to digital technologies and how do we address the diverse facets of dependence of journalism on digital technologies, as tools and systems, within a socio-technical environment (Lewis and Westlund 2015)? Where do new forms of digital journalism also point our gaze towards other societal shifts? How much is “digital journalism” still a discrete phenomenon and, if so, how does it draw distinction from “journalism”?

Onward, ever onward, both digital journalism and the study of it has continued to develop, and each soon came to be reflected not only in the advancement of technologies into journalism, but in transforming distinctions between those “formerly known as audiences” and journalists (Bruns 2005; Rosen 2006), and the tensions that came with this shift (Lewis 2012). In time, critical scholarship began to emerge, confronting initial conclusions that the Web was an unbridled space for journalism, and upending the optimism that accompanied such views (Curran, Fenton, and Freedman 2012). A flurry of work reconceptualizing foundational concepts to accommodate digital journalism also followed, marking a shift from the industrial approaches of the twentieth century and a revisiting of journalism’s role as a public good (Peters and Broersma 2013), while also pushing through new definitions and boundaries around the field of journalism itself (Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018; Carlson and Lewis 2015; Eldridge 2018; Lewis 2019). Such work offers specific avenues through which scholars can navigate the interplays between “the digital” and “the journalism”, and assess what has changed and what nevertheless remains the same.

Of course, we should not be quick to assume that change equals progress. Caught in the melee of advancing technologies and their implications for the hitherto industry of journalism, further challenges have emerged including, most recently, confrontations to our understanding of journalism as malevolent actors spread something

other-than-news under the guise of journalism (Waisbord 2018, c.f. Tandoc, Ling, and Lim 2018), as audiences struggle to scrutinize and verify information as they too navigate change (Tandoc *et al.* 2018), and as advertisers seize on “fake news” as a revenue stream (Braun and Eklund 2019). The fact that content that disrupts journalism’s allegiance with truth-telling succeeds creates incipient challenges as does the success of third-party digital platforms such as Facebook, where distribution and exposure are beyond the control of newsrooms, and fail to provide significant revenue streams for “real” news media (Myllylahti 2018).

Further critical questions have also emerged as media platforms beyond journalism’s institutional control begin to come into our fields of view—social media as but one example. During the past decades there has also been tremendous research activity into the intersection of journalism and social media (cf. Bruns *et al.* 2015; Papacharissi 2015). This journey began with scholarship providing initial accounts of new social media practices (Hermida 2012) to developing a richer understanding of the interplay between social media, news and audiences (Nielsen and Fletcher 2018). This opened a new thread of research oriented towards understanding the ways social media and journalism intersected, alongside reflections on the assumptions, enthusiasms, and critical blind spots within such studies, all to be considered as this line of work continues to develop (Lewis and Molyneux 2018). Rather than suggest an insufficiency in the work which has been done, this has revealed that within the complexity of digital journalism there remains much to be learned as the texture of change continues to develop. Among the emerging questions, currently being addressed, for example, is how to account for actors and audiences engaging in “dark participation” (Quandt 2018), and sharing news on “dark social” networks (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2018).

Such critical reflection is not so much a note on the ebb and flow of meaningful studies and what they attend to, though this is only natural. Rather, it introduces to this discussion an example of how the body of work around digital journalism is coming into its own, with—as Delli Carpini (2017) has written—space for disagreements and, from them, richer developments. Thus, we can see where research has continued to reveal and then open new approaches for understanding what the audience for digital journalism may be; whether re-engaging questions of how journalists and audiences collaborate in different stages of the news production process using digital tools (Kligler-Vilenchik and Tenenboim 2019), or re-assessing the behaviours we associate with audiences and news (Groot-Kormelink 2015), or asking how journalists define their roles in relation to these audiences (Hanusch and Banjac 2019), now in a digital age. This burgeoning research agenda, and the way it continues to morph, has led to constant calls for scholars to grapple with our own position within fields of society, particularly as navigating these changes becomes all the more complex (Delli Carpini 2017). For ourselves, looking over a research field taking shape, it prompts further questions as to how to map digital journalism studies.

Beyond these approaches—which still place at their core an understanding of journalism within digital environments—work has broken from the traditional tripartite focus of content, producer, and audience to consider digital journalism within a much wider ecology. Open data platforms avail us of new avenues for telling stories of

environmental degradation which draw on resources beyond journalistic endeavor (Salovaara 2016), while critical questions are posed as to what all this digital technology means for the rather non-digital environment we live in, highlighting the implications for the natural world as natural resources are consumed in order to enable the expanse of digital technologies (Miller 2015). As the material traces of journalism are increasingly hard to pin down in a digital environment which we increasingly are immersed in, and experience our worlds through (Deuze 2012), the relationship between digital news and audiences is nevertheless being reconfigured (Broersma 2019). In melding, rather than adjoining, the digital and journalism, we are further prompted to ask how we might reimagine the public, both offline and online (Wenzel 2018; Zamith and Lewis 2014)? Are end-users the new imagined audiences (Picone 2016), where the functions of media become interlaced with other technologies and platforms, including those beyond journalism's control (Ekström and Westlund 2019)?

While a further discussion of the exhaustive set of topics is implausible here, we arrive at a point where we can confidently surmise that digital journalism represents a domain of research which progressed quickly from curiosity to description, and from description towards theoretical understanding (Eldridge and Franklin 2019: 8–9). Indeed, while Witschge et al. (2016) are right to point out that ambiguity and uncertainty seem to be ever-present in the field, we are heartened that scholars have done well to keep apace in their abilities to address ambiguity and resolve uncertainty. As they have done so, we have witnessed two fields of indistinct boundaries emerge.

The first of these is a field of digital journalism. The increasingly porous (or seemingly so) boundaries of the journalistic field (Carlson and Lewis 2015; Eldridge 2018) have both absorbed and challenged new entrants to the field, including those from well beyond the newsroom (Baack 2018). The second, is the emergent field of research in Digital Journalism Studies, which has broken in part from (while remaining indebted to) the predicate field of Journalism Studies (Carlson *et al.* 2018).

The emergence of these two fields has also led to an opening of doors into new ways of assessing journalism beyond the cognate disciplines of politics, sociology, economy, and communication science. This has allowed digital journalism scholars to find compatriots in the fields of computer science, who help us make sense of immersive technologies (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2018; Kang *et al.* 2018; Kuiken *et al.* 2017), massive analyses of information flows (Günther, Buhl, and Quandt 2019), and developing news stories (Zamith 2019). This has introduced new methods for scholars to grab billions of pieces of content (Malik and Pfeffer 2016), as well as avenues for enriching our assessment of content using natural language processing and machine learning (Boumans and Trilling 2016), and approaches for revisiting the distance between humans and machine using Human–Machine Communication (HMC) frameworks to understand machines as not only mediators, but communicators (Lewis, Guzman, and Schmidt 2019).

As we now turn to the conceptual arguments introduced in this special issue, it is worth returning, however briefly, to what remains constant in both digital journalism and our precursor understanding of journalism and the decades of research which unpacked its meaningfulness for our everyday societies. We see in both Journalism

Studies, and in the future of Digital Journalism Studies, an opportunity for dialogue between established theories and new developments; dialogues which, if allowed to develop more fully, can imagine each of these fields anew. In doing so, we confront the challenges which face any field moving stridently towards new territory—in what directions are the boundaries expanding, and what should they nevertheless exclude? Where does Digital Journalism Studies fit within the broader range of communications research which is committed to making sense of journalism? This forces us to examine whether, for all the potential that innovative and interdisciplinary research brings, there is also risk in opening up a field of academic understanding, replete with familiar concepts, terminology, and ways of meaning making, to new types of inquiry and methods for carrying these out.

Synthesizing *Digital Journalism* (Part II)

This issue of *Digital Journalism* has sought to further advance the debate and understanding of digital journalism, and has offered us a specific opportunity to engage with the questions surrounding these two fields to further our understanding and definition of both digital journalism and Digital Journalism Studies. In order to advance this, we offer some reflexive insight into the types of articles that this very journal has published from its inception in 2013 until mid-2018 (Steensen *et al.* 2019). This research reveals a strong emphasis on the changing nature of digital platforms and a dominant social science perspective, at the expense of articles that explore, for example, history and context or which would build new and novel theories drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge. Steensen *et al.* (2019) also highlight that current definitions of digital journalism—when based on this literature—need to further consider the types of knowledge that digital journalism creates, its role as a meaning-making system, and its relationship to other social institutions and issues of power. This brings us to the second debut within this issue: the rich and diverse array of conceptual articles, each focusing on digital journalism as a key concept. These have presented us with a broad set of approaches, arguments, and authoritative definitions. In [Table 1](#) we capture the way these authors and their contributions, both from a review of the literature and their own conceptualizations, bring such conceptual definitions into a discussion.

Looking at the table above, it is immediately apparent the field benefits from a diverse set of perspectives into how we can understand and define digital journalism. Some definitions privilege *Journalism* over *Digital* focusing on how digital technologies transform journalistic processes, practices, and norms. Steensen and colleagues have highlighted how digital journalism refers, for instance, to “transforming” journalistic processes, whereas Robinson and colleagues refer to the digital as transcendental to these processes, and Waisbord argues that the digital expands journalism. At the other end, others place *Digital* at the core of their definitions, focusing on digitization as a process running across social domains, of which journalism is but one. Duffy and Ang, for example, focus on how digitization brings its own processes, norms, and rules into journalism. While each provides its own take on digital journalism, a common thread promptly emerges in this collection of work—that referring to the “digital” is more

Table 1. Definitions of *Digital Journalism (Studies)*.

<p>Steen Steensen, Anna M. Grøndahl Larsen, Yngve Benestad Hågvær and Birgitte Kjos Fonn, 2019, 320–342</p> <p>Digital journalism is the transforming social practice of selecting, interpreting, editing and distributing factual information of perceived public interest to various kinds of audiences in specific, but changing genres and formats. As such, digital journalism both shapes and is shaped by new technologies and platforms, and it is marked by an increasingly symbiotic relationship with the audiences. The actors engaged in this social practice are bound by the structures of social institutions publicly recognized as journalistic institutions</p>	<p>Sue Robinson, Seth C. Lewis and Matt Carlson, 2019, 368–377</p> <p>The “digital” is the modes of production that transcend the temporal and spatial constraints of analog media, with their particular physical limitations of production and distribution. Emergent characteristics of digital journalism as reflected in algorithms, automation, networking tools and mass posting, sharing and production with a click of a button bring on transformations that must be theorized holistically, contextually and relationally as part of a subfield of journalism studies called <i>Digital Journalism Studies</i></p>	<p>Andrew Duffy and Ang Peng Hwa, 2019, 378–385</p> <p>Digital journalism as the way in which journalism embodies the philosophies, norms, practices, values and attitudes of digitisation as they relate to society. These include the efficiency of control, storage, retrieval, accessibility and transmission of data; inclusivity, interactivity and collaboration in the propagation of information and opinion; flexibility and innovation in presenting news stories; and state, institutional and individual ownership of data and its implications for privacy and transparency</p>	<p>Silvio Waisbord, 2019, 351–358</p> <p>Digital journalism is the networked production, distribution and consumption of news and information. It is characterized by network settings and practices that expand the opportunities and spaces for news</p>	<p>Jean Burgess and Edward Hurcombe, 2019, 359–367</p> <p>Those practices of newsgathering, reporting, textual production and ancillary communication that reflect, respond to, and shape the social, cultural and economic logics of the constantly changing digital media environment. To study digital journalism is to study the transformative and isomorphic impacts of digital media technologies and business models on the practice, product and business of journalism, as well as the ways that journalistic discourses, practices and logics in turn shape the cultures and technologies of those digital media platforms through which journalism is practiced, and its products are shared and consumed</p>	<p>Barbie Zelizer, 2019, 343–350</p> <p>Digital journalism thus takes its meaning from both practice and rhetoric. Its practice as newsmaking embodies a set of expectations, practices, capabilities and limitations relative to those associated with pre-digital and non-digital forms, reflecting a difference of degree rather than kind. Its rhetoric heralds the hopes and anxieties associated with sustaining the journalistic enterprise as worthwhile. With the digital comprising the figure to journalism’s ground, digital journalism constitutes the most recent of many conduits over time that have allowed us to imagine optimum links between journalism and its publics</p>
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Scott Eldridge, Kristy Hess, Edson Tandoc, and Oscar Westlund, 2019, 386–403.

Digital Journalism Studies should strive to be an academic field which critically explores, documents, and explains the interplay of digitization and journalism, continuity and change. *Digital Journalism Studies* should further strive to focus, conceptualize, and theorize tensions, configurations, power imbalances, and the debates these continue to raise for digital journalism and its futures.

than an allusion to new tools and hardware in online spaces and instead it must always be situated within a larger socio-technical environment; there, it is seated amongst broader concerns of economics, labor, organizational cultures, technological innovation and cultural and social practices. Where technology is prominent, it is also embedded within a broader set of dynamics.

We can draw further on these threads in bringing together the disparate approaches to understanding digital journalism to assess where differences are strengths which can be woven into a shared agenda within Digital Journalism Studies, one which substantiates this growing body of work into a discrete academic field. Drawing on these definitions, we turn now to developing the key ideas and provocations that our invited scholars prompt from their theoretical, geographic, and practical perspectives on digital journalism, to offer our ambitions for Digital Journalism Studies, and for this journal committed to shepherding research within the field.

For us to label such a body of work as reflective of a field is a conscious and deliberate choice to provide some necessary clarity within Digital Journalism Studies. In the growing pains of Digital Journalism Studies, questions as to whether this badge better describes a subfield of Journalism Studies writ large, or its own unique field, have continued to bubble up. This is, in a sense, reflective of the definitional struggles all societal fields experience as they seek to resolve a dominant vision which can center their priorities, and in that sense Digital Journalism Studies is not so unique. It is furthermore a reflection of the myriad approaches to understanding digital journalism as an object of study; approaches embedded in the conceptual approaches in this very issue. Yet it also reflects a group of scholars, and a body of research, well-equipped to make apparent these tensions, and in doing so to provide a vantage point towards mapping the field. As readily as scholars examine the shifting boundaries of journalism, work prodding the boundaries, the dominant visions, and the agreed sense of belonging which define Digital Journalism Studies can also be addressed. Here, struggles revolve around how best to acknowledge the antecedent legacy of Journalism Studies, while focusing attention on an increasingly distinct sphere of research focused on digital journalism.

Thus, we argue, to position Digital Journalism Studies as a sub-field of Journalism Studies, rather than an emergent field in its own right, limits its value and potential to scholarship not just within media studies and communication, but its wider interdisciplinary reach. It also continues to reinforce a journalism-centric approach when we need to consider the interplay between news, digitization, and the wider social spaces where everyday audiences and media users generate engagement with matters of public interest and the world(s) around them. As new and hybrid practices and organizations emerge, it must be argued that change occurs not just through transformation of existing and established organizations, but also in the founding of new and hybrid organizations that develop their own distinct sets of norms and values. That a bevy of introspective studies, questions, methods, and frameworks have emerged to ask key questions of digital journalism bolsters our view that this is not an area of scholarship nestled within Journalism Studies, but a field with its own core demands and replete with ways of approaching these, including those that have grown out of the work in Journalism Studies.

There is nevertheless a tension in this decision, one which also sits between the ways scholars take on digital journalism as an object of inquiry; this is, we argue, a fruitful tension, within a field which needs to have work that strives towards resolving such strains. Yet we do not, in defining a field, need to resolve this first in order to then proceed. Indeed, just as decades of journalism scholarship left open the question of “what is journalism?” to periodically be explored anew as new understandings emerged and new generations of scholars introduced new perspectives, so too do we see the tensions within Digital Journalism Studies at the core of questions which drive the field. For a field which sees its object of study—digital journalism—defined in part by its technological shifts, and in part by its journalistic legacy, the push and pull between an emphasis on *continuity* and *change*, or between *digital* and *journalism*, provides a useful way for scholars to consider their work as they grapple with discrete aspects of digital journalism. It also prompts awareness of other forces at play in the field which surrounds them. At the center of innovative work which moves from defining towards understanding, and from identifying towards theorizing, these tensions can be useful—if taken advantage of.

Digital journalism studies, and the DJS Compass (part III)

We turn now to offer a more precise forward-looking definition of the field, through which we can navigate our discussions. In the definition, below, we highlight where Digital Journalism Studies has emerged as a field, and where we as the *Digital Journalism* editorial team argue it should continue to address the mechanisms, processes, rules, philosophies and norms in seeking to make sense of digital journalism.

Digital Journalism Studies should strive to be an academic field which critically explores, documents, and explains the interplay of digitization and journalism, continuity and change. Digital Journalism Studies should further strive to focus, conceptualize, and theorize tensions, configurations, power imbalances, and the debates these continue to raise for digital journalism and its futures.

Thus, the field is a place for work focused on what has changed and what remains the same, emphasizing “digitization” or “journalism”, within a robust body of scholarship which continues to develop its modes of understanding while drawing on its cognate, and multiple, disciplinary backgrounds. This definition also reflects, as we have shown in Part I, the constant negotiation and renegotiation of understanding, as work moves from describing towards explaining digital journalism. While we are not alone in defining this field, we are keen to emphasize here our definition is normative. While it builds on the burgeoning line of research at its foundation, and reflective of how this has contributed to defining the field, it is equally aspirational in setting out the future ambitions for what the field should endeavor towards. In pursuit of this ambition, we metaphorically navigate between four foci which continue to shape the work ourselves and our colleagues take on.

The Digital Journalism Studies Compass

Turning now to explore the DJS Compass, we present in this section ways in which we can navigate these developments through the heuristic device of a compass,

orienting between four key aspects of Digital Journalism Studies. In our metaphorical compass, Digital Journalism Studies research can be seen in relation to four key components that serve as anchor points for positioning research within the field: *digital*, *journalism*, *continuity* and *change*. As anchor points, these are relational rather than hierarchical, offering guides rather than dependent paths. In such a field, regardless of the directions one heads, a compass allows us to orient our work and the direction we are headed in, doing so in relation to the rest of the field. Just as North is made distinct in that it differs from South, East, and West, the directions of digital, journalism, continuity, and change are also made more salient in relation to one another.

Such a tool allows us to think through while remaining aware of the positionality of our work as it relates to the field around us. In reflecting on the field, and the work underpinning it, we find that such positioning is critical. We also find, as outlined in Part I, that this is often reflected in work which demonstrates an awareness of the larger body of scholarship. We consider such positioning integral in work which will continue to be developed, and yet to emerge. The DJS Compass allows us a series of ways to explore, among more general research questions, how the “digital” can, and does, help preserve a powerful position for “journalism” in society. In another direction, it helps us consider the role of journalism in generating new digital processes, practices and nodes of power. Further embedded in our imagining of such a compass, we see where it may encourage scholars to engage multiple dimensions at one time, balancing the key considerations in any one study across the other dimensions which define the field. For example, it can challenge us to consider what remains the same, and where there is “continuity” within and between digital and journalism undergoing “change”.

Between “digital” and “journalism”

Moving further, and building on the conceptual essays and review essay in this issue, we have identified these dimensions as a series of, on the one hand tensions, and on the other hand opportunities. For one, such anchor points provoke debates over whether one or the other should be prioritized, thereby setting some form of “true north” for Digital Journalism Studies. Alternatively they can be viewed equally, and as

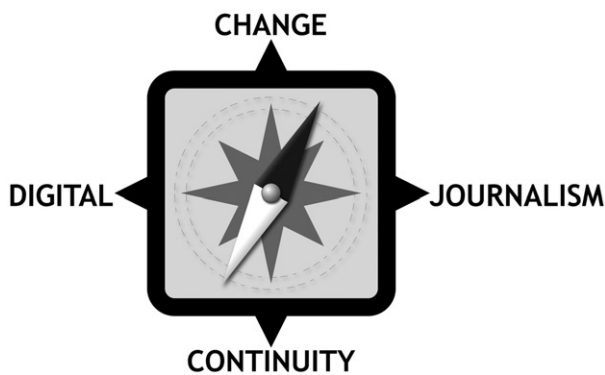


Figure 1. The DJS Compass.

such each can anchor research which charts new directions for the field. As an editorial team, this has been a salient question as we seek to steer the direction of this journal, while remaining mindful of the breadth of work around us, and that which we have yet to discover. Some scholars, for example, will continue to orient their research towards understanding and advancing journalism practice, and indeed many studies that place themselves within Digital Journalism Studies have focused on how journalism is reshaped, or for some transformed, by digitization. Burgess and Hurcombe (2019) argue as much in their contribution within this issue, highlighting the ways digitization has had an impact on news gathering processes. This is further reflected in the definitions provided by Steensen et al. (2019) from an extensive review of the literature, and in the conceptual definition proposed by Robinson, Lewis, and Carlson (2019). Their definitions point towards work which has documented how various stages of news production, for example, have been affected by digitization, and how new technologies, data, and analytics have brought about changes in both news routines as well as in how journalists conceive of their audiences (Linden 2017). Offline, scholars are focused on the ways the political economy of journalism, and the implications of decisions made in boardrooms, and shaping policy and regulation for journalism, also remain pressing concerns (Cohen 2016; Pickard 2019).

There is also, however, a growing contingent who argue the need to position the digital as central to digital journalism studies, as Duffy and Peng Hwa (2019) do in their conceptual essay, arguing that it warrants equal footing in our re-orienting of the field. Rarely, for example, have scholars examined how journalism has *also* impacted digitization. Facebook refers to the space where a user gets to see posts from her network as the “newsfeed,” clearly a reference to news platforms as socially important and recognized spaces. “Fake news” producers build networks of fake sites populated by a combination of human troll armies and bots, but ultimately designed to mimic the news ecosystem, comprising of competing news outlets pushing out often similar content—a seeming recognition of the social resonance news and journalism continues to hold. In situating digitization and journalism within the quadrants of the DJS Compass, it is important to consider that an often assumed but under explored dimension of our metaphorical instrument is that of a wider social space.

This reminds us that not only are the four directions on the compass relational, so too are the ways we conceive of their importance at a larger scale. At the base of our compass, we position the domains of everyday life and the spaces and places in which people interact—what we argue should serve as the common denominator between journalism and the digital moving forward. In this way, the process of digitization serves as an exemplar of the interplay between the digital and the journalism—that is, the way domains of social life are structured and restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures. And further, even as our attention shifts online and we make sense of the digital ecosystem as a location for journalism, and its audiences, the spaces and places where news is created or engaged with continue to have purchase, even when they seem destined to be linked to the screens we view content through (Gutsche and Hess 2018; Peters 2012). So too do the communities within which digital journalism is found (Bosch 2014), and the ways in which we navigate towards, and through, these spaces.

Between “continuity” and “change”

As a second set of guiding points, the continuum between *continuity* and *change* forms a red thread throughout many of the existing approaches to, and discussions of, digital journalism. More generally, over the past decade journalism has been surrounded by a discourse giving emphasis to crisis. Many of those come from researchers, practitioners and pundits alike who have made calls for the need to innovate, innovate, and innovate more. Essentially, these have been calls for change, jumping on the bandwagon, appropriating, and developing emerging technologies of diverse kinds for journalism’s purposes. Critically, Zelizer (2019) in her essay in this issue reminds us that we can draw meaning from such discussions, as digital journalism is defined both by the practices involved *and* the rhetoric surrounding these. Discourse around change has tended to evolve from viewing change as a revolution to change as deconstruction, in the sense that Digital Journalism Studies today is preoccupied with deconstructing previously established notions of what journalism is (Steensen and Ahva 2015). If we take one step back and reflect on these normative calls for change, as Zelizer encourages, we can conclude that there is now, as has been the case previously (Eldridge 2015; Peters and Carlson 2018), a pro-innovation bias. Scholars have been attracted by “the bright, shiny things” (Posetti 2018), and journalists fall into reporting on emerging technology such as artificial intelligence largely in an industry-led way (Brennen, Howard, and Nielsen 2018).

This has brought about a dislocation of journalism, with news appearing on platforms which are non-proprietary to news media organizations, affecting not only audience traffic and revenue, but the very epistemic practices of news media as they adapt to producing content for digital platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Ekström and Westlund, 2019), including by engaging in “platform counterbalancing”, strategically addressing the influence of social media platforms (Chua and Westlund 2019; c.f. Newman 2019). These studies nevertheless reflect how news industries, with their isomorphic and path-dependent behaviors, often strive towards embracing emerging technologies and opportunities, bringing into starker relief the tension Lewis (2012) spoke of, as control from homespun websites shifted to social media spaces and platforms in new, complex, entanglements with news producers (Artwick 2018; Westlund and Ekström 2018). This includes examining, for instance, what journalists, technologists and businesspeople do, and how they relate to each other. Such shifts have also signaled the expansion of a journalistic field beyond the erstwhile newsroom and its traditional denizens (Lewis and Westlund 2015; Nielsen 2012; Westlund 2011; Wu, Tandoc, and Simon 2019). Recent research also includes the study of digital journalism in relation to civic technologists and Web analytics firms external to the news organizations (Baack 2018; Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018).

In our discussion of continuity and change, therefore, we do not subscribe to any singlehanded rhetoric calling for innovation, as there may well be great reasons for not engaging in innovation as well. Moreover, the pro-innovation bias arguments in journalism have repeatedly boiled down to discussions of how the news media industries are innovating less and performing less well than other industries. However, few scholars provide any substantial basis or evidence for such comparison, and those who do report relatively minor differences, based on crude measures of money spent

on innovation as reported by companies, which may not capture innovativeness (see, e.g., Bleyen, Lindmark, Ranaivoson, and Ballon 2014). Further, as Waisbord (2019) helpfully highlights here, while innovation and technologies have a place within *Digital Journalism* and Digital Journalism Studies, they are often best seen as “opportunities and spaces” for news, where scholars examine tendencies towards change, alongside the resonance of continuity. Thus, we see the engagement with emergent change as best set in relation to the ways it draws and departs from aspects of continuity to speak meaningfully about digital journalism within a more complex interrelationship.

Conclusion

There is an inherent tension in Digital Journalism Studies between the priorities placed on either “digital” or “journalism”, as well as between “change” and “continuity”. We recognize that the quick transformations taking place in digital journalism as an object of inquiry may also result in challenges with regards to what theoretical frameworks can be sensible to employ, and sometimes may be absent altogether. Nevertheless, we argue it can be useful to present, clarify, and employ key concepts that guide the research design and analysis, including points of departure and continuous threads. By commissioning conceptual articles in *Digital Journalism* on timely and important concepts, from key scholars working in distinct areas of research, we strive towards facilitating the advancement of the field in a way that balances such aspects of continuity and change. Importantly, we envision such conceptual articles will serve as anchoring points which, by applying these in future work, scholars can continue to contribute to continuity within the field. Mindful of the tensions and viewpoints shaping the field, the *Digital Journalism* Editorial Team will work towards careful consideration of new concepts, scrutinizing those which hold little potential for being used in empirical research or which struggle to situate themselves within the broader field.

The debates in this issue present deep divides, divisions which can be made productive and which are evident within our own editorial team and our approaches to scholarship. At the risk of overusing a very technological cliché, these divisions are a feature, not a bug. They highlight that the very work of Digital Journalism Studies is not to dismiss either side but to acknowledge these tensions, accept and/or challenge them through rigorous study, in the pursuit of generating new and hybrid ways of understanding digital journalism and its place within the world around us.

As a guide, the DJS Compass should help navigate our work in this pursuit, and a means of orienting work which conceives of digital journalism, and Digital Journalism Studies, within a broader body of work concerned with similar dynamics, mindful of that which surrounds it. Yet, as the field continues to move forward, we caution that inasmuch as it offers us a means to position ourselves, there is no “true north” in our compass. Drawing from the conceptual and review essays in this issue, and our discussion above, the five key points below provide further guidance to consider moving forward. Following these, Digital Journalism Studies research should work towards:

- Acknowledging the tension between continuity and change (i.e., avoid solely emphasizing “new” innovation without *also* embracing what has been before).

- Embracing scholarship that positions itself in relation to extant theories and concepts, including interdisciplinary perspectives that advance understandings of digital journalism. This includes work which challenges those theories which have been dominant, but may be due for reconsideration.
- Avoid confining research to familiar spaces of news production, distribution, or consumption, nor to be limited to recognizable forms of content, but instead push towards examining where to locate journalism within the digital.
- Rethinking the relationship between journalism and digitization—considering digital journalism as a discrete focus of research, and Digital Journalism Studies as a discrete domain of research.
- Embracing work which recognizes the ongoing power struggles between individuals and institutions (new and existing) in society, including those shaping or shaped by journalism, technology, and the ways this has an impact on our societies, for journalism, its publics, the individuals involved, and the worlds around us.

Guided by the DJS Compass, and considering these priorities, we see digital journalism as something that should continue to be theorized, conceptualized, and studied in a contextual and relational way that makes central this tension between the push and pull between digital technology and journalism, and between what has changed with digital journalism and what it owes to its journalistic forebears.

For this journal, our ambitious and straightforward *vision* reflects these priorities, and remains focused on fostering such discussions: *Digital Journalism* should be the most important journal in the world for research in Digital Journalism Studies. By this we mean that the journal should feature a substantial volume of high-quality research into digital journalism, making it the primary gateway to access such work. Moreover, the importance of the research published is demonstrated in terms of the level of depth and insight which can be found in the work we publish, and may be further demonstrated by how widely the articles are being downloaded and read (by scholars, students, and practitioners), and to what extent the articles are cited in other scientific publications. This means that, qualitatively, we strive towards publishing articles which advance the field by further developing and supporting existing theories and concepts, or presenting empirical evidence that questions these foundations.

As we look forward, we also see *Digital Journalism* as a space for scholars positing new concepts and theories that importantly acknowledge or pose a challenge to other traditional approaches or contemporary ideas and can be put to use in digital journalism practice. We firmly believe that the research published in *Digital Journalism* should balance continuity and change; continuity in terms of taking departure in theoretical frameworks and/or conceptual constructs, and change in terms of continuously identifying and studying important areas of change. The importance of research can also be seen in terms of public engagement, gaining significance among media managers, journalists and policy makers, especially when such stakeholders reconfigure their practices or policy based on research published. We hope our compass helps navigate the path towards fulfilling our ultimate aim:

That *Digital Journalism* should serve as an authoritative and forerunning journal advancing the field of digital journalism studies, by publishing double-blind peer-

reviewed articles that make theoretical and/or conceptual advancements, as well as those which offer critical and reflexive scholarly discussions and where, in all empirical work published, scholars must apply sound methods and carry out rigorous analysis. *Digital Journalism* further aims to identify and engage with submissions that truly engage with the dynamic, interwoven, and interrelated aspects of digital journalism, its various concepts and definitions, and the growth of Digital Journalism Studies as a field benefiting from such work.

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ORCID

Scott A. Eldridge  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2184-1509>

Kristy Hess  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3027-7492>

Edson C. Tandoc  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8740-9313>

Oscar Westlund  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2533-6737>

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