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Commentary

Journalism at the Periphery

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Abstract
The increasing influence of actors who might not fit into traditional definitions of a journalist but are taking part in processes that produce journalism has attracted scholarly attention. They have been called interlopers, strangers, new entrants, peripheral, and emergent actors, among others. As journalism scholars grapple with how to refer to these actors, it is important to reflect on the assumptions that underlie emerging labels. These include: 1) what journalistic tasks are involved; 2) how and why these journalistic tasks are performed; 3) who is making the definition; and 4) where and when these actors are located. However, journalism being the centre of our investigation should not automatically assume that it is at the centre of social life. So, it might also be that for the technological field, journalism is at the periphery; that for these technology-oriented actors whose influence across fields is increasing, journalists and what they do are at the periphery. For a field that supposedly plays an important role in public life, this has important implications.

Issue
This commentary is part of the issue "Peripheral Actors in Journalism: Agents of Change in Journalism Culture and Practice" edited by Avery E. Holton (University of Utah, USA), Valerie Belair-Gagnon (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, USA), and Oscar Westlund (Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway / Volda University College, Norway / University of Gothenburg, Sweden).

1. Introduction

This thematic issue offers a timely and important exploration of the rise of actors who might not fit into traditional definitions of a journalist but are taking part in processes that produce journalism. These actors—such as data scientists making sense of web analytics data (Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018), technologists who provide automation services to newsrooms (Wu, Tandoc, & Salmon, 2019), bloggers and blogs that produce a variety of media content that includes journalism (Eldridge, 2018b), as well as those producing user-generated news (Tong, 2015)—have been referred to in different ways.

Eldridge (2018b, p. 858) wrote about "interloper media," which referred to "a subset of digitally native media and journalistic actors who originate from outside the boundaries of the traditional journalistic field, but whose work nevertheless reflects the socio-informative functions, identities, and roles of journalism." Holton and

Belair-Gagnon (2018, p. 72) referred to "strangers" in journalism, or those who "did not belong in journalism from the beginning, and are importing qualities to it that do not originally stem from the journalistic profession." This thematic issue itself focuses on "peripheral actors," defined as "those individuals or organizations not traditionally defined as or aligned with journalism" (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018).

The introduction of these terms into journalism studies lexicon to describe non-traditional actors in journalism is important. First, these terms help facilitate a systematic study of the actors they attempt to label as well as these actors' practices and their impact on journalism. Second, the terms we use to label these actors can shape our understanding and expectations of how these actors should behave, which can affect how we study them and their practices. It is, therefore, also important that we scrutinize and reflect on the assumptions that underlie these different terms.

2. Defining Non-Traditional Actors

The term "stranger" is not a strange word in journalism studies. It has been used to refer to news sources (Gans, 2007) and audiences (Carey, 2007; Venables, 2003), which are both considered to be external to, but influencing, journalism. Nor is the term "peripheral" at the periphery of journalism studies. However, the studies that have used notions of the periphery in the field of journalism referred to less dominant types of journalism, such as free daily newspapers (Lamour, 2019), non-metropolitan news outlets (Hutchison & O'Donnell, 2011), and entertainment journalism (Loosen, 2015), among others.

These terms, along with newer terms such as "interloper" and "emergent" (Eldridge, 2018a), among others, are now used to refer to actors doing journalism but are not (yet) considered as journalists. Embedded within these labels are particular assumptions, referring to: 1) what journalistic tasks are involved; 2) how and why these journalistic tasks are performed; 3) who is making the definition; and 4) where and when these actors are located (see Table 1).

2.1. Journalistic Acts

The proposed definitions of these terms refer to a range of acts supposedly related to journalism. For example, in categorizing interlopers as either explicit or implicit, Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018, p. 73) referred to actors who "work on the periphery of the profession while directly contributing content or products to the creation and distribution of news." Such delineation of the term based on acts and the outputs of such acts provides, at most, a tentative definition, one that is challenging to operationalize, as the set of processes that directly contribute to news production is also expanding. Social media, for example, brought about new routines, such as promoting one's work. These are tasks that were, in the past, not possible and therefore not required to produce news. These new tasks that many news organizations now consider to directly contribute to news production also require new editorial positions needing new skillsets that were not part of traditional journalistic training, with big news outlets designating social media managers or audience engagement editors to work alongside news editors (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018). In classifying these new job designations as editor-level functions, some news outlets seem to clearly recognize the tasks involved as directly related to journalism. Thus, whom journalism scholarship might consider as peripheral actors by virtue of the acts they perform might be occupying central roles in some newsrooms.

2.2. Norms and Roles

These terms and their definitions also refer to norms and roles that guide and motivate the performance of journalism-related acts. Journalistic rules and roles are important. How journalists view their roles is assumed to shape their performance and, consequently, their outputs (Donsbach, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In defining interloper media, Eldridge (2018b, p. 858) referred to a kind of work that "reflects the socio-informative functions, identities, and roles of journalism." But Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018, p. 73) also said "technology-oriented media interlopers" might bring "new practices and norms in journalism." Therefore, while these definitions refer to adherence to a set of norms and roles, what these norms and roles actually are remain constantly negotiated. On one hand, new actors are expected to play by the rules of journalism. But on the other hand, they also bring with them rules from their previous fields.

Non-traditional actors entering the field of journalism can also be considered as "new entrants" to the field (Bourdieu, 1993). As new entrants, these actors might contribute to either the preservation or the transformation of the field, for while they might play by the prevailing rules in order to gain legitimacy in the field, they also bring with them the norms and roles that originate from their own fields. For example, Wu et al. (2019, p. 15) argued that the influence of the technological field, which focuses heavily on markets, audiences, and data, "is al-

Table 1. Components of key terms.

What	What do these non-traditional actors do in relation to journalism?
How	How are they performing these tasks?
Why	What roles do they seek to (or currently) fulfill?
Who	How does the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be a journalist reflect the changing power dynamics among traditional and non-traditional actors in journalism, and in what ways do journalism researchers normalize, if not perpetuate, such power dynamics in how they design their studies?
Where	What do we really mean when we dichotomize between the centre and the periphery in journalism, when boundaries of the profession are ever changing?
When	How do we shift from considering what is not journalism to *when* does something become journalism?

Note: Scrutinizing the assumptions embedded in how we label non-traditional actors now playing significant roles in journalistic processes will help in drafting a nuanced research agenda, one that interrogates each of the assumptions embedded in these labels.

ready evident in journalism's shift towards data-centric and short, easy-to-digest content that cater to audience preferences."

2.3. Definitional Control

These terms also interrogate the ones making the definitions. Holton and Belair-Gagnon (2018) referred to non-traditional actors who may or may not be welcomed by journalists, and who may or may not define themselves as journalists. Eldridge (2018b, p. 876) also referred to how non-traditional actors "portray their own journalistic identities and intentions" as well as how they are "perceived by the publics being addressed." These definitions represent an ongoing negotiation between traditional and non-traditional actors in defining and locating the latter's position in journalism. This is consistent with the assumptions of boundary work in journalism (Carlson, 2015). But Eldridge's (2018b) definition also brings into the mix the role of audiences in this ongoing negotiation of journalistic identities, consistent with previous work that investigated how news audiences are taking part in journalistic boundary work (e.g., Jenkins & Tandoc, 2017). The power to define the location of these non-traditional actors is still being contested, but what is rarely highlighted is the role of journalism scholars in this discursive contest.

2.4. Location

Finally, these labels tend to locate this group of actors either outside or at the edges of journalism. Interloper actors are said to originate from "outside the boundaries of the traditional journalistic field" (Eldridge, 2018b, p. 858), while journalism strangers "did not belong in journalism from the beginning" (Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018, p. 72). Thus, location is not just spatial but also temporal. Existing outside journalism at the beginning does not preclude being within journalism's boundaries at some point in time.

But what constitutes the boundaries of journalism? Where is journalism's core? A common approach in tackling these questions is considering traditional journalistic standards as forming part of the core, and then using these traditional standards that have dominated journalism to evaluate non-traditional actors. We see new developments from the lens of history; we examine new data using frameworks grounded in dominant theoretical approaches and previous studies. For example, the use of big data in journalism has been examined based on traditional news values and routines (e.g., Dick, 2014; Tandoc & Oh, 2017). And yet, while discourse about boundary work and peripheral actors assumes a journalistic centre, the literature remains unclear on how that centre looks like and what it constitutes. Studies that sought to identify journalism's boundaries, including my own work, relied on journalism studies literature that is heavily skewed toward hard news, arguably at the

expense of other types of journalism, such as lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, 2012). What audiences now consider as news and what they consider as responsible journalism are also changing; documenting and unpacking these might serve journalism studies a better purpose than reifying standards that scholarship has designated to be dominant.

Scrutinizing the assumptions embedded in how journalism studies label non-traditional actors now playing significant roles in journalistic processes will help in drafting a nuanced research agenda, one that interrogates each of the assumptions embedded in these labels. What do these non-traditional actors do in relation to journalism? How are they performing these tasks and what roles do they play (and how does that role compare with the one they originally sought to play)? How does the ongoing negotiation of what it means to be a journalist reflect the changing power dynamics among traditional and non-traditional actors in journalism, and in what ways do journalism researchers normalize, if not perpetuate, such power dynamics in how we design our studies and choose the labels we use? Finally, what do we really mean when we dichotomize between the centre and the periphery in journalism, when boundaries of the profession are ever changing? Who decides where the centre is and where the periphery is?

3. Journalism at the Periphery

A general assumption that underlies many of these agendas and dilemmas is the consideration of journalism as occupying the centre. This is, of course, a logical consequence of our research focus on journalism studies. However, journalism being the centre of our investigation should not automatically assume that it is at the centre of social life. Schudson (1997, 463), for example, argued that "the importance of journalism, relative to other factors in human affairs, is to be demonstrated, not assumed."

When Bourdieu (1998) applied the framework of field theory to journalism, he focused on television's impact on politics in France. Bourdieu (1998, p. 2) observed that journalism has presented to the public a "particular vision of the political field" that was consistent with what journalism considered as newsworthy more than with the routinized and usually unappealing processes of the political field. During its heyday, journalism extended its influence to the political field and to other fields (Bourdieu, 2005), occupying what others might argue as a "central position" in social life. News organizations became big businesses and amassed political and social capital.

Now, traditional news organizations are losing audiences and, consequently, advertising revenues. News media credibility is decreasing as fake news becomes more convincing and influential (Wahutu, 2019). A few studies have examined how some people intentionally avoid the news (e.g., Song, 2017; van den Bulck, 2006).

Faced with eroding economic and cultural capital, many agents in the journalistic field turn to external actors for help. News outlets welcome, if not seek, non-traditional actors, such as data scientists, into their newsrooms. In doing so, these agents expose the journalistic field to external influence, in this case the influence of the technological field, which operates with a different set of rules. This can be seen as journalism's attempt to regain its once central position in social life, now lost to the technological field, whose agents dominate societies in accumulating both economic and cultural capital, expanding their field's influence along with its set of rules across different facets of social life, from interpersonal communication to healthcare, from community-formation to manufacturing. For example, social media platforms and search engines get the lion's share of audience attention and advertising online as media consumption now increasingly occurs on social media platforms and messaging apps. This has led the news media to play by the rules of the technological field, such as by tweaking headline-writing conventions to suit the purposes of search engine optimization (Dick, 2011) and by producing more native videos when Facebook decided to tweak its newsfeed algorithm to prioritize native videos (Tandoc & Maitra, 2018). Newsworthy content also now routinely flows from companies that began as technology start-ups (Kung, 2015; Prasad, 2019). Those who seek to influence public opinion no longer relies solely on news media coverage—they can now potentially command public and media attention with just one tweet.

Many studies in journalism have focused on examining social media platforms using the lens of traditional journalism, but rarely do scholars interrogate journalism through the lens of the technological field. From January 2013 to November 2019, *Digital Journalism,* one of the top journals in journalism studies, published 499 articles containing the keyword "journalist," while it published 42 articles studying automation in journalism containing the keyword "robot." The *International Journal of Robotics Research* published in the same time period 629 articles containing the keyword "robot," while it published only two articles containing the keyword "journalist." This reflects a clear imbalance between journalism scholars' focus on automation in journalism and automation scholars' focus on journalism in automation. While automation in journalism is attracting attention from an increasing number of journalism scholars, automation scholars rarely investigate how journalism figures in automation.

By operating under the assumption that journalism is at the periphery of social life, we can examine how it attempts to regain its position at the centre by playing by the rules of other fields. This requires a refocusing of our conceptual lenses and an increase in interdisciplinary work. It also means that while it is important to understand the perspective of journalists about journalism, it is equally important to understand how non-journalists perceive journalism. For example, stud-

ies have conducted observations of and interviews with technology professionals and managers at web analytics and automation companies to understand journalism's place in the technological field (e.g., Belair-Gagnon & Holton, 2018; Petre, 2018; Wu et al., 2019). These studies have shown that many non-traditional actors are reluctant in labelling themselves as journalists, even if they acknowledge that the work they do is directly related to journalism. Where is this reluctance, if not resistance, coming from? What does it mean to willingly engage in journalism and not consider oneself as a journalist? These technologies now attracting the attention of journalism practitioners and researchers were not developed specifically for journalism (Moyo, Mare, & Matsilele, 2019). So, it might also be that for the technological field, journalism is at the periphery; that for these technology-oriented actors whose influence across fields is increasing, journalists and what they do are at the periphery. For a field that supposedly plays an important role in public life, this has important implications.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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