Inventive Factfinders: Investigative Journalism as Professional Self-representation, Marker of Identity and Boundary Work

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Abstract

This study explores the boundaries of investigative journalism by examining how investigative journalists compete to construct, reiterate and challenge acceptable epistemic practices. Departing from the notion that investigative methods are fixed tools and tactics, the paper argues that methods also serve as relational skills and epistemic resources in the struggle for identity and recognition within the field of journalism. By conducting a qualitative textual analysis of 44 method reports submitted to the annual Norwegian investigative journalism award (SKUP) in 2018, both the transformative and normative aspects of the investigative epistemology are examined. The findings suggest that the investigative method can be conceptualized as a continuum of intertwining epistemic practices whose distribution and emphasis are context dependent. Within these contexts, some identity markers emerge as more contingent than others. The study contributes to two streams of scholarship by deploying the concept of boundary work within the field of journalism, and by reassessing the epistemology of investigative journalism as an object of ongoing negotiations.

Introduction

The work of investigative reporters has come to represent some of modern journalism's greatest achievements, heroic stories and enduring myths (Aucoin, 2005; Schudson, 1992; Protess et al., 1991). Studying what investigative journalists do is therefore crucial to our understanding of journalism's legitimacy and role in society.

Defining investigative journalism often begins with focusing on investigative methods and how they differ from other journalistic methods. Yet the empirical basis for conceptualizing *what* "investigative methods" entails is weak, as scholars too often have allowed journalists themselves to define investigative work normatively (Bromley, 2008). A few exemplary exceptions do exist, but these studies were conducted in the US in the 1980s (Ettema & Glasser, 1989, 1988, 1985), before the transformation of the media industry. Following Ettema and Glasser (1998), scholars have noted that the epistemic practices of investigative journalists differ from those of other journalists (Ekström & Westlund, 2019; Örnebring, 2016; Parasie, 2015), but exactly what these practices are and how they are being developed and negotiated among practitioners is a topic that seems to be far less covered in the literature.

One theoretical framework that has proven to be useful for studying the ongoing transformations of journalism is the concept of boundary work. To study the boundaries of journalism implies an exploration of how journalists demarcate themselves from others by using textual strategies where explicit and implicit distinctions are created between journalists and non-journalists, between acceptable journalistic practices and deviant ones, and between insiders and outsiders of the journalistic field (Carlson & Lewis, 2020; Lewis, 2015). Usually, the boundary work concept is used to analyze disputes on the edges of journalism, where peripheral members' or outsiders' attempts of encroachment are fended off by journalists who wish to maintain and increase their legitimacy and authority (Lewis, 2011).

This paper, however, will turn the prism of boundary work inwards and focus on the demarcation processes going on *within* the field of journalism by exploring how investigative journalists attempt to stand out and profile themselves as a distinct sub-discipline of journalism. The site where this boundary work occurs is the Norwegian annual investigative journalism award SKUP in which journalists participate by submitting a published investigative project together with a method report outlining their work. An average of 46 method reports are submitted every year and made publicly available on the organization's website. The reports describe how the investigations were conducted and which methods journalists have used. Based on a two-step qualitative textual analysis of all the 44 method

reports submitted to the competition in 2018, the study will explore how submitters literally «compete to construct, reiterate and challenge the boundaries of acceptable practices and the limits of what can or cannot be done» (Carlson, 2016). At the heart of this objective lies two implied assertations:

1) The practices of investigative journalism are social, meaning that rules, routines and institutionalized procedures guide knowledge production and how knowledge claims are expressed (or implied) and justified (Ekström, 2002; Ettema & Glasser, 1985).

2) Practices are not fixed, but objects of ongoing negotiations within a discursive field. When journalists describe and reflect upon their work, they are partaking in these negotiations and engaging in boundary disputes and maintenance of which practices that should be allowed, discarded or lauded as cutting edge (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Gieryn, 1999).

The paper starts out by sketching a theoretical framework, explicating a link between boundary work, the boundaries of investigative journalism and the epistemology of investigative journalism. Then follows a brief outline of the SKUP-organization, its competition and online database, before the study's dataset, research questions and methods are presented. A textual qualitative analysis is then conducted in two steps to unpack the epistemic practices of the reports and how identities and distinctions are created by how contestants retell their investigations. Finally, insights and limitations of findings are discussed before strategies for further research are suggested.

Boundary Work
Applying boundary work to journalism means departing from the notion that journalism is a stable profession or practice; its boundaries are on the contrary «ambiguous, flexible, historically changing, contextual variable, internally inconsistent and sometimes disrupted» (Gieryn, 1983a, p. 792). The boundaries of journalism are constructed, contested and transformed by actors from outside or within journalism, either *explicitly* through categorization, or *implicitly* through embedded assumptions in talk about journalism (Carlson, 2016, p. 363). Boundary work is a negotiation of journalistic identity or means through which journalists make sense of their work and implicitly define who a journalist is. A discussion of journalism's boundaries are therefore primarily a discussion of identity markers (Tandoc Jr & Jenkins, 2018, p. 4). Invoking the concept of boundary work entails conceptualizing journalism as a field (Bourdieu, 2005) where struggles for symbolic capital and jurisdictional control (Abbott, 1988) are happening both within journalism and between journalism and other surrounding fields. Boundary work is most commonly associated with discourse

analysis (Carlson, 2016), but boundaries can also be explored in the ways journalists use narratives to assert authority and consolidate their «truth-telling» position vis-à-vis other competing fields to maintain internal group coherence (Zelizer, 1992, p. 197).

An underlying premise of boundary work is that negotiations and shared understandings shape and influence actual practice. Boundaries are therefore not just talk, they are «symbolic contests for control and legitimacy as well as material struggles concerning the allocation of resources» (Carlson & Lewis, 2020, p. 123), which means that they can be material as well (Anderson & De Maeyer, 2015; Anderson, 2013).

According to Gieryn (1999, 1983b), boundary work involves three main processes: *expansion*, *expulsion* and *protection of autonomy*. In the case of journalism, expansion can be adopting new technologies, methods or ways of thinking; while expulsion perhaps best is demonstrated by how deviant actors sometimes are rejected as journalists. The protection of autonomy process can be found in discourses about editorial independence and watchdog talk about the press as a safety valve for democracy (Carlson & Lewis, 2020). Characteristics attributed to journalism may in some cases, however, be inconsistent or in direct conflict with each other creating *tensions*. Since negotiations are always happening on multiple fronts, journalists need to «respond to challenges from different obstacles in their pursuit of authority and resources» (Gieryn, 1983a, p. 792). This means that patterns of arguments, repertoire of traits and discursive strategies may vary, depending on who is talking, who the recipients are, and the contextual circumstances of the sites where the boundary work takes place (Carlson & Lewis, 2020, 2015).

Since boundary work highlights differences and changes, researchers have naturally focused mostly on the fringes of journalism, where struggles and disputes at times have been vocal (Maares & Hanusch, 2020; Revers, 2014; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2014; Örnebring, 2013; Coddington, 2012; Lowrey, 2006; Bishop, 1999). However, when explicitly contrasted with actors from other surrounding and competing fields, journalism and journalists tend to emerge as one unified entity. This actually contradicts the concept's basic premise, namely its anti-essentialism and the notion that the field's entire structure in principle is unstable and exposed to negotiation. Focusing on journalism's external border zones has also minimized the emphasis on the ongoing struggles, negotiations and demarcations within the field, between «sub-disciplines and specialties» (Gieryn, 1983a, p. 792). Carlson (2016) warns against this tendency to collectivize disputes and outcomes and encourages researchers to pay more attention to internal strife and take seriously the dividing lines that may also exist among journalistic subgroups.

Although internal border maintenance may seem trivial, and distinction making between sub-groups may be difficult to spot, they deserve our attention because their outcome affects the distribution of resources and the power to define, and, ultimately, who gets to speak on behalf of journalism in the overall struggle over authority and dominance with other competing fields. This paper will focus on investigative journalism, a sub-discipline whose jurisdiction largely is undisputed and taken for granted by agents within the field of journalism. The idea is that it is in the examination of how «the best of the best» (Ettema & Glasser, 1998; Protess et al., 1991) construct and consolidate their epistemic authority (Ekström & Westlund, 2019; Gieryn, 1999) that the boundaries of investigative journalism will emerge.

The Boundaries of Investigative Journalism

The agenda-building nature of investigative journalism presupposes that it can lead to societal or political change (Feldstein, 2006; Aucoin, 2005). Impact, however, depends on the characteristics of the investigations (Lanosga & Martin, 2018) and a wide range of systemic mechanisms and factors, such as the inner workings of a given country's policy system and the dynamics of particular media markets (Stetka & Örnebring, 2013).

While the post-Watergate myth of investigative reporters being guardians of democracy may be fading, they are still considered among the most respected practitioners within the field of journalism (Hovden, 2008; Ettema & Glasser, 1985). However, this has not been without boundary disputes. Ever since the term investigative journalism was coined in the early 1960s – being a relaunching and rebranding of exposure journalism and a continuation of the muckraking tradition (Feldstein, 2006) – there have been ongoing negotiations to demarcate and conceptualize it as a unique journalistic endeavor. This has resulted in both debates over definitions, objections towards the term itself (Aucoin, 2005) and a myriad of emerging sub-branches like watchdog journalism (Waisbord, 2000), precision journalism (Meyer, 2002), solutions journalism (Benesch, 1998) etc. Journalists themselves have been the main participants in these disputes, but academics have made their contributions too. Either by dismissing the term investigative journalism completely – arguing that all journalism to some degree is investigative – or by defending it, juxtaposing it against «other» types of journalism, often explicating a link between methods, content and impact to highlights its distinctiveness (De Burgh, 2008; Protess et al., 1991). Still, there exists no scholarly consensus on a set definition of investigative journalism (Stetka & Örnebring, 2013), and empirical work is surprisingly rare.

The Epistemology of Investigative Journalism

One of the most cited contributions in the academic demarcation process surrounding investigative journalism, is Ettema and Glasser's seminal paper on the epistemology of investigative journalism (1985). Following Park (1940), their sociological approach to the epistemology of investigative journalism involves studying knowledge and knowledge production as a social phenomenon and not on philosophical grounds (Ekström & Westlund, 2019). Ettema & Glasser argue that the main difference between investigative journalism and running news coverage is not the characteristics of the practices per se, but rather the epistemological framework investigative journalists operate within (1985).

Epistemologies are interlinked with how journalists classify or typify their work (Örnebring, 2016; Tuchman, 1978). When journalists realize that they can turn a potential news story into a larger investigation, a particular process of justification is put into effect. The very basic principle of the investigative epistemology is that every knowledge claim about the world must be checked, verified and confirmed regardless of how it was obtained and who or what the sources are. Pieces are then reassembled into a new authoritative account and reevaluated with the aim of assessing the correspondence not with reality, but between each piece (Ettema & Glasser, 1985). This process entails creating conditions for justification where moral and epistemic claims are «interrelated and balanced» (Ekström & Westlund, 2019). The traditional way to verify knowledge claims in investigative journalism is to cross-verify information against multiple sources (De Burgh, 2008). This can be done manually or systematically in the form of timelines and network maps, and, today, even automatically through data analysis. In the last two instances the goal is to closely examine information that in itself has no particular significance, but in a contextual comparison reveals connections, contradictions or patterns of misconduct or injustice. In particular high-stake and controversial investigations, the verification procedures can involve additional and external outsourcing of epistemic responsibility, as lawyers and scientists sometimes are brought in to assess and vet the reporting before publication (MacFadyen, 2008; Protess et al., 1991).

This is different from the epistemology of daily news journalism where knowledge claims to a larger degree come pre-justified (Tuchman, 1978) and scheduled (Schlesinger, 1987) from sources that journalists deem to be credible. Because of severe time pressure, beat reporters strive for accuracy and speed and hardly engage in any verification procedures at all (Ettema & Glasser, 1985, p. 13). Information is therefore often accepted at face value and as trade-offs (Broersma et al., 2013; Berkowitz, 2009; Reich, 2009; Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979).

However, Godler and Reich (2017) have found that the perceived credibility of sources is unrelated to journalistic cross-verification and that it generally occurs when all other paths to evidence and knowledge have been exhausted. While investigative journalists were exempt from their study, Feldstein (2007) suggests that they too are dependent on bureaucratic sources and vulnerable to their manipulation. Both these studies complicate the distinction outlined by Ettema & Glasser.

First, beat reporters also engage in verification, even though it is as likely to occur as «the outcome of a coinflip» (Godler & Reich, 2017, p. 568). Second, although investigative reporters seem to engage in more rigorous verification procedures, there are nevertheless some knowledge claims they too seem to accept as pre-justified. Third, in their emphasis of how evidence is verified, Ettema and Glasser (1985) pay little attention to how it is obtained. They refer to collecting information as «journalistic legwork» without describing and discussing it in more detail. Others have framed the information gathering procedures of investigative journalism through the concept of *digging*, which entails a more time-consuming, broader and deeper scope of enquiry (De Burgh, 2008; Protess et al., 1991). Digging also presupposes that the information journalists seek to find is either deliberately withheld or buried so deeply in bureaucracy that more time and special skills are necessary to get to the bottom of the matter (Aucoin, 2005). It is evident that the techniques for collecting and retrieving information have implications for how knowledge claims are articulated and justified. Big data (Lewis & Westlund, 2015), self-constructed databases (Parasie, 2015), encrypted communication channels (Thorsen, 2019) and user-generated content (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015) represent artefacts and source types that create epistemological tensions that were unthinkable in the mid-80s.

Overall, there seems to be a need for more studies that can shed light on how the epistemology of investigative journalism is changing and how epistemic practices from other knowledge producing fields are being adopted, adjusted and utilized by investigative reporters. These processes of transformation must, however, be examined with a critical sensibility towards the actors involved and how acceptable knowledge standards are being negotiated at the borders between investigative journalism, «ordinary journalism» and other knowledge producing fields.

Data, Research Questions and Methods

The SKUP-competition provides a context where it is possible to observe the transformations of practices up-close. The organization was formed in 1990, inspired by *Investigative*

Reporters and Editors (IRE) in the US (Ottosen, 1996). SKUP adopted IRE's community-based structure, where sharing investigative methods and knowledge would become the core activity (Breivik, 2004). Since SKUP was established there has been a steady output of investigative journalism in Norway. The state subsidized media system, the high level of journalistic professionalism and the Freedom of Information Act make good prerequisites for conducting quality journalism. As of today, the online public SKUP-database (launched in 2012), consists of a total of 1351 method reports. The reports, however, vary greatly in both content and form since the competition criteria have changed multiple times over the years. The SKUP-prize has attracted some academic interest, but aside from Strømme (2020), who finds that technology and collaboration across newsrooms are dominant topics in the 2016 reports, researchers have been more concerned with the normative and symbolic nature of the competition (Lindholm, 2015; Hovden, 2008) than the actual content of the reports. An overview of SKUP-winners suggests that national legacy outlets like *Dagens Næringsliv* (7 wins), *Verdens Gang* (7 wins) and *NRK* (5 wins) seem to dominate the competition, while smaller and local outlets seldom manage to make their mark.

The dataset of this paper is drawn from the online database and consists of all reports submitted to the 2018 competition. The 44 reports make up a total of 758 pages and 294 990 words and were the most recent reports available when the data collection was conducted. Selecting data from one year only is in accordance with the principles for qualitative textual analysis since the aim of the study is not to generalize findings, nor to conduct a historical comparison, but rather to combine a meticulous reading with a contextualized interpretation to explain the specific strategic moment in a relevant body of texts (Fürsich, 2009).

In 2018 the competition criteria were that the reports must be written by the journalists who had carried out the investigation, and no more than 20 pages long. The guidelines regarding content were more ambiguous and open for interpretation:

> Tell us how the work got started, how it developed and was organized. Explain thoroughly the use of method; specific issues you may have encountered, source selection and source criticism (we do not require you to disclose any sources that are promised source protection!) (SKUP-organization, 2020)

The significance of the guidelines and how they may have affected the reports, should, however, not be overestimated. A preliminary skimming analysis suggested that participants were free to prepare the texts as they wished, and that the guidelines allowed for many original interpretations of the investigative method and its practices. Hence, it was paramount to read all reports to uncover the range of potential interpretations within a given year. A

random sampling would not capture these nuances. A review of the existing literature and a preliminary reading of reports resulted in the following two research questions:

RQ1: What are considered relevant epistemic practices at SKUP within a given year, and how are these practices distributed, discussed and narrated by submitters?

RQ2: How do submitters construct, reiterate and challenge the boundaries of relevant and acceptable epistemic practices, and what kind of identity markers emerge as most relevant in these negotiations?

Guided by the specifics of the two research questions, a two-step qualitative textual analysis was conducted using the software NVivo. The first step of the analysis sought to categorize and organize the content of the reports thematically. By mapping out and breaking down the coverage devoted specifically to investigative methods, the aim was to examine what submitters perceived as the most central epistemic practices of their work. Paragraphs and sentences were assigned to either one of two master nodes (*information gathering* or *verification*) and further broken down into child nodes where source types and techniques for retrieving and verifying information were mapped out. From the outset, the nodes were based on a deductive approach, but had to be revised numerous times making them increasingly more data-driven (Schreier, 2012).

The second step of the analysis sought to identify the characteristics of the justificatory context in the reports. By mapping out a narrative structure and paying attention to how contestants engage in *expansion*, *expulsion* and *protection of autonomy* (Gieryn, 1999), the aim was to explore how contestants articulate and justify their knowledge claims and how professional boundaries and identities are formed and maintained by these articulations (Robertson, 2017; Mottier, 2000; Lieblich et al., 1998). Since boundary maintenance and distinction making manifest themselves both explicitly and implicitly, a high degree of interpretation was oftentimes necessary in the coding process (Graneheim et al., 2017).

Textual qualitative analysis is selective and dependent on the researcher's own hermeneutic point of departure, meaning that other narratives, themes and readings will always be possible. The overall goal of combining two approaches, was to examine the empirical data on a manifest and on an interpretative level. This enables an analysis in which the two levels can be explored both separately and in relation to each other. The texts as

complex meaning-bearing units are thereby kept intact, thus strengthening the overall trustworthiness of the analysis (Boréus & Bergström, 2017; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Findings

Thematic Analysis: The epistemic Eractices of the Investigative Method

The study finds that 44 percent of the empirical data is either descriptions of – or reflections on – epistemic practices. The remaining 56 percent is justificatory context, i.e. text which main function is to create a coherent retrospective narrative necessary to understand and justify the findings of the reports. When further singled out, the thematic analysis shows that 76 percent is descriptions of various kinds of information gathering and 24 percent is descriptions of verification procedures. The most common ways to obtain information is requesting and reading public documents (33 percent), interviewing sources (18 percent) and conducting data-queries in self-constructed databases or using scripts and web-scrapers to download information (15 percent). Knowledge claims are verified manually, by cross-referencing it against other sources (77 percent), or systematically, by constructing timelines or network maps (12 percent). Computerized verification procedures (7 percent) and image verification (4 percent) are much rarer. It is also worth noting that five reports do not mention any verification procedures at all. A general comparison of all reports shows the following pattern in the distribution of coverage (Figure 1):

[Figure 1]

The general overview indicates that it is more important to elaborate on information gathering techniques than on verification procedures in the context of SKUP. It is clear that the most crucial factor when it comes to the distribution of coverage, seems to be the characteristics of the investigative project itself. To illustrate this, three random reports were drawn from the dataset and visualized. Verification procedures were exempt to optimize readability (Figure 2).

[Figure 2]

Project 2 utilizes large amounts of real estate data and computerized methods such as data-queries, scripts and web-scrapers (77 percent). Digitally collected information is reassembled into a self-constructed database before knowledge claims are extracted and then manually

cross-verified against other sources. Project 17 is about a cult-like organization which has specialized in addiction therapy. Sources of evidence are public documents (42 percent), interviews (33 percent) and leaked audio recordings, text messages and private documents (5 percent) obtained from former clients who describes the emotional and physical abuse the organization has subjected them to. Project 23 is about an environmental disaster where a local municipality has started a housing development project on top of an abandoned waste treatment plant. Knowledge claims are derived from interviews with politicians and local residents (30 percent), public documents found at city hall (27 percent), pictures (2 percent) and private documents (1 percent) provided by residents. The journalists also spent a substantial amount of time at the housing project looking and smelling for toxic spill (observation, field work; 13 percent). The ability to smell is obviously not exclusive to investigative journalists, but this detail highlights how epistemic practices varies across the dataset and how most reports combine a wide range of information gathering procedures.

Narrative Analysis: The Boundaries of the Investigative Epistemology
Having unpacked the distribution of the investigative method across the dataset, and which epistemic practices are perceived most relevant, we move on to how boundaries and identities are formed and maintained by contestants' retelling of their investigations. Naturally, the justificatory contexts of the SKUP-reports vary to some degree, as every project is different. But there are still some recurring and overarching textual strategies that come across as more prevalent than others. 32 of the reports follow a particular four-phase narrative structure in presenting their project. Seen through the prism of boundary work, the narrative structure of the investigative epistemology is the main site where the processes of expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy occur (Gieryn, 1999, 1983a). The structure is outlined below, keeping in mind the fact that it too is a narrative.

Inception Phase
Reporters set the stage for the investigation by going back to where it all started. A seed for conducting an investigation can be a tip, an idea, a whim, or emerge in the wake of a bigger breaking news story. Submitters usually start out by describing a topic or a problem, often by pointing towards other journalists' failure to recognize it as relevant or dealing with it only superficially, thereby justifying the need for investigating it themselves. While it is tempting to characterize such assessments as expulsions (Gieryn, 1999) of other journalists as second-rate, they are probably not meant as such. More often the submitters explicitly downgrade

themselves, as a recurring opener is to strategically portray oneself as an underdog about to embark onto great endeavors on behalf of the public: «Would it be possible to succeed where the Norwegian government had failed? To expose the spies that never had been caught, who still lived among us» (Thorenfeldt et al., 2018). Others start by portraying themselves as novices who are about to undergo a personal journey learning new skills and acquiring new knowledge: «We had to learn more about the systems and procedures for reporting of suicide in psychiatry, and about how notices of serious malpractice leaves a paper trail (Moland & Hjorten, 2018, p. 5). A third option is to cast oneself as an expert. Such submitters do not shy away from pointing out incompetence when necessary, albeit within other knowledge producing fields:

> Cases involving the hacking and illegal dissemination of private images are given low priority by the police (…) due to lack of digital competence. Police investigations are usually based on basic googling and interviews with the parties involved (...) Our digital hunt to expose Oscar [the hacker] became demanding and in many ways a digital war of skills between him and us (Lied et al., 2018, p. 4).

Most reports describe the tasks at hand as difficult, large-scale, neglected and of societal importance. These are examples of what Gieryn (1999) refers to as protection of autonomy, where journalists rhetorically create a need and legitimization for their own authority and knowledge producing activities. When it comes to the negotiation of epistemic practices, submitters use the inception phase briefly to present their methods:

> We used a number of different methods. We have inspected a number of official documents and made quantitative and qualitative analysis of large amounts of data. To fill information gaps, we have built our own datasets, where we have crossed-verified information from public documents with information we have found from open sources and through traditional source work. We have conducted accounting analysis, examined vouchers and calculated values of bonus points. Computerized methods have been important, but still manual reviews and journalistic assessment of thousands of trips, accounting entries - and details down to copies of curly receipts - have been absolutely crucial (Carr Ekroll & Dahl, 2018, p. 4).

Further, preliminary inquiries are described; phoning old sources, checking tips, reading up on relevant literature and conducting extensive web research – all with the purpose of gaining knowledge and developing hypotheses of the problem at hand. In this phase the epistemology described resembles that of daily news journalism, meaning that information gathering procedures are traditional, and knowledge claims rarely verified. This corresponds quite well

with what others have found about the different phases of journalistic investigations. In the initial phase journalists do not need to prove the truth content of the story they are facing. They only have to present circumstantial evidence that supports the notion that a tip or hypotheses *could* be real (Godler & Reich, 2017; Ettema & Glasser, 1985, p. 15).

The Development and Deployment Phase
This phase represents the center piece of the context of justification and the phase where the majority of the boundary work occurs. Given the aim of the SKUP-award, the dominating process here is expansion (Gieryn, 1999). By explaining in detail how methods are either developed from scratch or modified from already existing ones and then put to use, contestants expand and renegotiate epistemic practices. Traditional methods are usually only mentioned in passing, if at all – unless some kind of modification like systematization, time or scope of enquiry is involved.

Most expansions involve adopting epistemic practices from other knowledge producing fields, such as science. 22 reports make use of scientific methods to collect and analyze big amounts of data. This is often done in relation to public records as Norwegian journalists by request can inspect whole datasets from the authorities, following the Freedom of Information Act. If datasets are unavailable, they must build them themselves. Some employ regression analysis or run data-queries to extract knowledge claims from these datasets, while others process the information manually. Either way, the vast majority seems aware of the methodological implications involved and are careful to address the possibilities of contamination and the importance of verification.

While the use of epistemic practices from the field of science needs no justification because of the authority they embody, it is evidently more challenging to defend the need to employ creative and often radical new methods that can sometimes be characterized as ethically questionable. A common strategy used by submitters is to introduce distinct adversaries working against them. These adversaries can be hackers, fraudsters, criminals, government agencies or other people of power. The most common adversary, however, is information in itself, often in the guise of an overwhelming dataset. Contestants explain in great detail how they create automated applications, web-scrapers and custom scripts that are excellent tools for either gathering huge amounts of digital data or extracting information from self-constructed databases. Complex Excel-formulas and snippets of codes in JavaScript, Python or other programming languages are dropped casually in the reports as self-explanatory elements by just superficially addressing the arguments justifying their creation.

The notion that a customized computer program can be both an objective vessel for finding facts and a subjective invention that deserves recognition from peers, indicates that many SKUP-submitters ascribe great independency and agency to technology. This is perhaps not so strange, considering that technological determinism is common among journalists when reflecting upon which role technology plays in their profession (Örnebring, 2010).

The prevalent optimism regarding data driven methods are strengthened by how they are juxtaposed against basic journalistic methods like observation and meeting and phoning sources – methods that are characterized as «traditional» (Tommelstad & Berg, 2018), «old fashioned» (Holstad et al., 2018), «classic» (Andersen et al., 2018) and «not exactly spectacular» (Seglem et al., 2018). This illustrates what Gieryn refers to as tensions or conflicting attributes (1983a) within a knowledge producing activity. While investigative journalism today is evidently both legwork *and* computerized methods, these are nevertheless in ways opposing entities which sometimes suppress each other and have a hard time co-existing in a competitive context like SKUP.

Despite these tensions, many submitters, including the winning report, are careful to address that it is the *combination* of practices that makes their project successful:

> The manipulation of Tidal's streaming numbers was revealed through an enormous dataset and the programming language SQL, but that is only half the story. We have worked with data that is impossible to inspect or buy. The data was one of the best kept secrets of Tidal. Getting access to them was the result of the primordial method of journalism: building a source network. New technology does not eliminate the need for traditional journalistic legwork (Tobiassen & Sæter, 2018, p. 1).

The ability to master and alternate between traditional and innovative methods functions as a key boundary marker at SKUP in 2018, setting apart those possessing both specialized knowledge and the experience to know when and how to deploy the spectrum of epistemic practices they have at their disposal. It is the versatile inventive factfinder, with one foot firmly rooted in history and tradition of investigative reporting, and the other immersed in cutting edge technology, that emerges as the dominant identity position in these reports.

As this phase moves forward and new leads and tips emerge, methods need to be readjusted and new hypotheses generated. By merely describing how they are able to change their methods as the terrain alters, submitters can showcase their adaptability while simultaneously creating an impression that they are just «following the money» or going where the information leads them. This seemingly flexible approach enables submitters to

strategically downplay any possible agency or potential pre-understandings that may have influenced their interpretation of the uncovered facts.

Submitters' adaptability and perseverance are further strengthened by calling attention to the amount of work they have invested. Time is used rhetorically to increase the validity of the knowledge claims in the reports, but time also has real epistemological implications. Time makes it possible to go through every document in a casefile, to contact everyone with knowledge about an incident, to wait and see how a source responds to allegations, and to build strong relationships with sources so that they eventually provide evidence that initially seemed unthinkable to retrieve:

> Systematic contact with our sources was crucial when we one time in 2017 picked up on a detail that enabled us to access Tidal's [the streaming service] database. Exactly what transpired cannot be revealed here. But we can say that without regular contact with our sources, this may have seemed like a trivial episode, which may never had caught our attention (Tobiassen & Sæter, 2018, p. 9).

While this illuminates how time was crucial to get access to information, it says nothing about how, when and where this information was obtained. This approach is not uncommon. By focusing on the circumstances and the premises of the information gathering without going into specifics (due to source protection), many reports signal a kind of privileged knowledge that implicitly separates the submitters from their colleagues as more knowledgeable. Another strategy to strengthen credibility is to highlight how the totality of knowledge claims amassed always surpasses the knowledge claims published: «We have seen documents that have been crucial to understand the girl's journey through the system (...) if we could promise that we would not quote directly from them» (Kristensen & Bentzrud, 2018, p. 12). Time is unarguably an important building block within the justificatory context, but time also has a relational aspect.

Seen through the prism of boundary work, the emphasis of the days, months and even years spent working on a story, often outside office hours, can be a way to mark investigative journalism as more than a regular job and that the belief in the importance of a story is sometimes so strong that submitters are willing to sacrifice their spare time and other commitments. Simultaneously it can function as a subtle hint to editors that if journalism of a similar quality is wanted in the future, then more money has to be allocated. This highlight time as a question of resources and an expression of the material boundaries that exist between investigative journalism and running news coverage, and between legacy news

outlets and smaller local outlets. While the former have the resources to relieve reporters from their daily duties to work exclusively on their investigations, often with money to travel the world (Kingsrød, 2018), to buy exclusive datasets (Venli et al., 2018) or to hire external help (Tobiassen & Sæter, 2018), this is a luxury smaller outlets seldom can afford.

The Publication Phase

The requirements for controlling and checking the story naturally increases as the publishing date approaches. It is hard to keep track of every knowledge claim put forward in all reports and to assess whether they are verified or not, as many of the knowledge claims are only implied. However, the main knowledge claims of the investigations are always articulated, never pre-justified, and verified explicitly, often step-by-step. It is in this phase that verification practices are being negotiated. While the majority of reports reiterate and reconsolidate cross-verification as the most common way to justify knowledge claims, a few reports attempt to expand verification procedures to secure data reliability. This can entail juxtaposing self-constructed datasets with raw untouched data to retrace how cleaning, merging, and analysis may have influenced the findings:

> Raw files were placed in a separate folder and never touched (…) to organize data cleaning and analysis, we used the digital notebook Jupyter. It allows us to combine programming code, text and visualizations. This method is common among researchers, where the routines for traceability have been better than in journalism (Fredriksen et al., 2018, p. 9).

In addition to putting in motion their own in-house control routines, several submitters describe how outlets choose to contact external experts or lawyers to assess the quality of the reporting. One newspaper even hired two teams of computer scientists to verify their dataset and findings:

> NTNU [the university] should use its scientific approach and standards to investigate the material. The [scientists] were informed that we had a dataset from a streaming service and that we suspected that it was tampered with. The researchers were not told what we had found or what service it was. The [scientists] were divided into a blue team and a red team. The blue team should try to find everything that could confirm the hypothesis of manipulation. The red team was to challenge the blue team's findings (Tobiassen & Sæter, 2018, pp. 12-13).

Such outsourcing of epistemic responsibility is not very common. These contestants, however, are well aware of the pitfalls involved and discuss the epistemological and ethical implications of leaving confidential source material with a third party. This perhaps highlights why the expansion of acceptable practices is more common in relation to information gathering than to verification procedures. Deviating from cross-verification (double or triple), which is accepted within and outside the field of journalism to substantiate knowledge claims, is redundant, unless the context absolutely demands it.

Aftermath Phase

Whereas the first three phases were about justifying and substantiating knowledge claims in a seemingly chronological order, the last phase takes on a more explicitly articulated retrospective approach, defending those claims. This phase contains implicit expulsions of deviant practices (Gieryn, 1999), as many reports discuss the limitations of what they were allowed to do and where they personally draw the line. Hacking or stealing information is off the table (Lied et al., 2018), while it is okay to utilize documents from the Snowden-files (Skille et al., 2018). It is problematic to use fake identities, but okay if it is the only option available (Lundgaard & Strøm, 2018). A middle road can be listening in on an arranged phone conversation between sources without one of the parties' knowing (Kingsrød, 2018), borrowing a source's Facebook account for a longer period (Furuly et al., 2018), or to provoke an investigatory target to confirm their misdeed by persuading one of their alleged victims to send the target a letter (Gjernes et al., 2018). While the limits of these negotiations are rooted partly in normative assumptions, the ethical and legal considerations pertaining to the context in question seem equally important. The boundaries between deviant and acceptable practices as to how knowledge can be obtained, is therefore neither clear cut nor decided in advance.

It is important to remember that the SKUP-reports are written after the projects have been published. And even though they are meant for a jury of peers and mostly read by other journalists, the reports are available for anyone to access at the SKUP-website. This means that sources who have been targets of investigations can also read the reports. Many of the projects are controversial and have resulted in complaints to the Norwegian Press Associations' Ethics Board, PFU. While news outlets are required to respond instantly in the form of a formal letter when such a complaint is made, the SKUP-reports enable journalists to readdress accusations of misbehavior and to explain and justify why their practices should be deemed acceptable. In this sense, the SKUP-reports become a way of re-writing history, either

by repeating how the investigations were initially intended, or by reframing them as they were perceived and judged post-publication. This underlines that the negotiations of acceptable and deviant practices playing out in the SKUP-reports do not happen in a journalistic-centric vacuum. The negotiations are affected by surrounding legal and ethical contexts and the response and acceptance by actors from both within and outside the field of journalism.

The aftermath phase ends with submitters listing the impact of the reporting. As this is in accordance with the competition criteria, it is difficult to argue that the investigative results are included only to justify the means. Nevertheless, assessing impact serves as a way to protect investigative journalism's autonomy and jurisdictional control (Abbott, 1988). By documenting how exposures of moral and legal transgressions have actually led to societal change, submitters implicitly legitimize their authority as knowledge producers. What qualifies as impact, seems to be relative, however, as everything from reader response to proposals for legislation are collected under this headline.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the boundaries of investigative journalism by examining how journalists compete to reiterate, challenge and negotiate practices that are deemed central to the epistemology of investigative journalism. While the thematic analysis uncovered that epistemic practices varies and are context dependent, the narrative analysis showed that is the characteristics of the justificatory context that guide how boundaries and identities are formed and maintained. Since SKUP is a competition, one might argue that the boundary maintenance and negotiations of epistemic practices uncovered by the analysis are constructed, as the competitive context creates circumstances which amplify the desire to stand out. However, simply brushing the findings aside as just talk among investigative journalists trying to win a price, would be a great fallacy. While SKUP is probably seen by stakeholders as a competition awarding exemplary and inventive methods, where journalists can participate in a collaborative culture, scholars have suggested that the award is also ideological, aimed to consolidate the power of a journalistic elite. Lindholm (2015) calls the prize «an unmatched marker for journalistic professionalism», and Hovden (2008) claims that set-up of the competition favors news outlets with financial resources to conduct big and expensive investigations.

The findings from the analysis suggest how these dynamics can manifest themselves on a textual level. In order to win SKUP and generate symbolic capital in the form of recognition and prestige, expansions of epistemic practices seem to be a necessity. A

prerequisite for expansion, however, is epistemic resources like time, expertise or state of the art technology usually not obtainable by smaller and local news outlets. By continuously raising the bar, incorporating and adapting epistemologies from other knowledge producing fields like data programming and social science, legacy outlets with their financial resources and diversity of manpower are repeatedly able to conduct groundbreaking investigations. In this way, they are transforming economic capital into symbolic capital, thereby consolidating and maintaining their position within the journalistic field (Hovden, 2008, p. 192).

The scholarly tendency to document knowledge standards of investigative journalists without evaluating them has been criticized by Godler et al. (2020). Although this article adheres to this, perhaps, evasive approach, and does not bring forward a coherent epistemological framework that can be applied to study all investigations, it sheds light on how such a framework is constructed and how knowledge standards are being developed, negotiated and maintained among practitioners, thereby contributing to two strands of scholarship.

The first is the research body on how journalists construct the nature of themselves as a profession (Anderson & Schudson, 2020; Anderson, 2008; Zelizer, 1992). The paper demonstrates that distinction making, and demarcation processes are also happening *within* the field of journalism. Yet in the case of investigative journalism this boundary maintenance involves not so much concrete disputes with other groups as a continuous effort to stand out, pull ahead and demarcate their knowledge producing activities as more all-encompassing, fact-based, ethically bulletproof and impactful than other forms of journalism. Paying attention to how the epistemology of investigative journalism is transforming in the digital age and which actors are pushing and pulling in these negotiations, will probably become increasingly important as the epistemic authority of journalism is continuously being challenged (Carlson, 2017). While the digital tool kit continues to grow and provide investigative journalists with new ways to collect, verify and communicate knowledge claims, there is little doubt that new epistemic resources also create tensions and challenges that need scholarly attention.

The paper also contributes to the research discipline of investigative journalism. By reassessing the epistemology of investigative journalism (Ettema & Glasser, 1985) as an object of ongoing negotiations, the paper argues that the investigative method can be conceptualized as a continuum of intertwining epistemic practices that is context dependent in a double sense. First, the context of the investigation and the knowledge journalists seek to uncover, determine which epistemic practices are necessary and how these should be

combined. Second, the context in which the investigation is retold determines what is emphasized, given significance and placed in order, and what is downplayed and overlooked. In other words, the epistemology of investigative journalism retold by journalists as a role performance (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017), will always contain this double dependency on context.

As dominant epistemic practices and identity markers uncovered by the analysis is pertaining to the 2018 dataset only, they do not necessarily represent submitters' view of themselves and their practices in real life. In fact, if one were to interview these journalists about their work, they might refuse to admit that there exist any boundaries at all between investigative journalism and other forms of journalism. This highlights that it is impossible to analyze boundary work without acknowledging the researcher as an active participant within the very boundaries he is describing. It is therefore with complete awareness and realization of the existence of other facts and interpretations that this paper reconstructs and reconsolidates the boundaries of investigative journalism, arguing that it is a distinct sub-discipline within the greater field of journalism.

While textual analysis makes it possible to critically explore the investigative method as a form of self-representation and identity marker – thereby aptly serving the purpose of this paper – the analysis contributes little in the overall quest to gain more accurate knowledge about how the epistemology of investigative journalists plays out in real life. In order to evaluate knowledge claims on independent grounds, further empirical investigations with a mixed method approach, preferably including ethnographical enquiries, are mandatory. Only by being present in real time and observing and analyzing an investigation as it is happening, is it possible to shed light on investigative journalism's real practices and to understand what investigative reporters really do.

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