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New Media, Old Criticism: Bloggers' Press Criticism and the Journalistic Field

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Abstract

Bourdieu's field theory suggests that the rise of the Internet and blogs could generate a shift in the journalistic field – the realm where actors struggle for autonomy – as new agents gain access. This textual analysis of 282 items of media criticism appearing on highly-trafficked blogs reveals an emphasis on traditional journalistic norms, suggesting a stable field. Occasional criticisms of the practicability of traditional norms and calls for greater transparency, however, may suggest an emerging paradigm shift.

Key Words: Bourdieu, field theory, media criticism, bloggers, journalistic norms, paradigm shift

In December 2009, *The New York Times*' public editor, Clark Hoyt, addressed a number of concerns readers had raised about the paper's coverage of "Climategate" – a controversy surrounding hacked emails on the scientific consensus on climate change – and coverage of the climate summit then underway in Copenhagen by a reporter mentioned in those emails. Readers accused the reporter, Andrew Revkin, with having a conflict of interest in covering the subject, suggested the paper had underplayed the Climategate story, and questioned why the *Times* had not posted the controversial emails on its website. While Hoyt ultimately concluded the paper had handled the story appropriately, the critiques readers raised and Hoyt's response to them represent a common criterion for press performance: Journalists are supposed to be independent from those they cover.

Compare Hoyt's column to Jack Cashill's commentary on the WorldNetDaily site on the same topic. Cashill writes, "Revkin and the *Times* ... pick sides in a scientific controversy, cozy up to the side picked, champion its counterfeit data, and marginalize the opposition." In other words, Revkin and the *Times* were anything but independent in their coverage of the issue.

That Cashill disagrees with Hoyt's conclusions is somewhat beside the point (and not all that surprising given that Cashill is a conservative and the *New York Times* has a liberal reputation in conservative circles). That Cashill appears to employ the same criteria for evaluating the *Times* performance that Hoyt (and Hoyt's readers) did, however, is worth considering. Much has been made of the challenge to traditional journalism posed by the Internet – the unfettered media space where anyone can be a publisher, if not a journalist. At a minimum, competition from free media has undermined a large chunk of the news industry's business model. Much has also been said about all that is "new" about this new media space, beyond that open access and new business model. As Singer and others (Friend & Singer, 2007; Singer, 2010) have pointed out, for example, members of the blogosphere aren't just commenting on the stories emanating from traditional journalism outlets – though they are doing lots of that – they are taking journalism itself to task and positing their own set of values and expectations for media performance. Transparency is privileged over objectivity, connection over detachment (Elliot, 2008).

All of this points to what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu might have considered a disruption in the "journalistic field," a field of forces in which actors struggle for autonomy. This study considers the extent to which these new media participants and critics, and in particular any new values and expectations they bring to the field, constitute such a disruption. Are the critiques of traditional news media performance by members of the blogosphere "new"? How might we consider their impact on the journalistic field? We begin our pursuit of answers with an analysis of media criticism appearing in a variety of blogs unconnected to traditional news organizations.

Theory

In the last decade or so, scholars have begun to consider the theoretical and practical utility of field theory as conceived and advanced by Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1998, 2005), for the study of journalism as an institution (Benson, 2004; Benson & Neveu, 2005b; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Hove, 2007; Kunelius, 2006; Neveu, 2007). Bourdieu describes a field as a “structured social space” where “the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field” (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 40-41). Actors who struggle within the field, however, share presuppositions about the nature of the field. “In order to fight one another, people have to agree on the areas of disagreement” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 36). Members of the journalistic field share a specific doxa; i.e., “a system of presuppositions inherent in membership in a field” (p. 37). These shared presuppositions – a shared understanding of institutional roles, epistemologies, and ethical ideologies (Hanitzsch, 2007) – constitute the cultural capital of the field. This is what makes the field autonomous or distinct from other fields. This cultural capital is also “a powerful force of inertia” (p. 468). Bourdieu calls acceptance of the basic rules of the game, or the “belief that the game is worth playing” “illusio” (Benson & Neveu, 2005a, p. 3). Thus while fields are sites of struggle for transformation, forces of preservation are also strong.

Is the inertia created and sustained by individuals’ socialization into the field surmountable? That is, what, if anything, can produce instability in a field, given the forces that seem to favor stability? First, a field is also always in relation to other fields and forces, and these external forces are capable of changing the field. According to Bourdieu, the struggle for the field of journalism centers on the separation of the “economic” and “cultural” poles. The economic (and political) pole represents the “heteronomous” pole, which characterizes the forces external to the field that serve to dominate the field and its agents and to dictate the structure in which they must operate (Benson, 1999, p. 464). Thus, increasing heteronomy in the field bleeds agents of their cultural capital and autonomy. For example, Rohlinger (2007) found that mainstream outlets provided lower-quality discourse about abortion than political media outlets due, in large part, to economic pressures felt by journalists. However, Rohlinger also attributes the low-quality coverage to journalists’ conceptions of the public based on occupational norms and values – an illustration of the interplay between the economic and cultural poles of the field.

Second, Bourdieu also points to the role of agency in determining structure. Positions that agents take in the field can be “aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30). In other words, new entrants can take up positions that reorient the cultural capital of the field, essentially resisting complete socialization and opening up opportunities for alterations and, even, destabilization. Russell’s (2007) analysis of coverage of the 2005 French riots found just such a destabilization. She paid particular attention to criticism from readers and bloggers and the role of amateur journalists. She concludes these persons “constitute a significant number and variety of what Bourdieu calls new agents, who can pose challenges to the field and ultimately alter its presuppositions and purposes” (p. 296). The journalistic field is perhaps now more than ever subject to transformation because of the influx of new agents in the age of the Internet (Champagne & Marchetti, 2005).

Political bloggers represent an interesting area of study. On the one hand, they are new agents in the journalistic field; but given their location on the margins of the field are less socialized into the field’s institutional roles, epistemologies, and ethical ideologies and less subject to economic pressures than mainstream, commercial journalism. On the other hand, many also have a foot in the political field, a kind of heteronomous force. Political blogs are frequent sites of press criticism, demonstrating that bloggers are part of the struggle over the cultural capital of the journalistic field. It is unclear, however, whether the bloggers’ goals are transformation or preservation. In other words, it is unclear to what extents bloggers accept the illusio or the received doxa of mainstream journalism. That is what this study addresses.

Media criticism: A field in a field

Media criticism is an especially useful space for investigating notions of the journalistic field especially in light of dramatic changes new media have brought to the way journalism is produced, financed and distributed. However, while media criticism has a long history in the U.S. (Goldstein, 1989; Sinclair, 1936; Wyatt, 2007), it has been somewhat scattered and inconsistent. Well before the rise of the Internet, Carey (1974) pointed out that the U.S. lacks a tradition of “sustained, systematic and intellectually sound” press criticism, which he defines as “public

scrutiny of the methods by which journalists define and get what we call news and the conventions by which they deliver it to the public” (p. 249).

Scholars have suggested that journalists and audiences should strive to work together to increase the accountability, transparency and credibility of journalism (Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos, 2007; Lowrey, 2006; Singer, 2007) and that research should examine the role of media self-criticism in sustaining such a relationship with audiences (Haas, 2006). The number of venues devoted to media criticism has grown rapidly since the late 1990s, and reports on external threats to journalism are common. But little is known about whether and how journalists look inward to examine concerns arising from commercial pressure, organizational pressure and reporting conventions. “Since news media owners and advertisers stand to gain little, if at all, from such introspection, and the norm of objectivity serves to preclude it, it is likely that scholars will find little evidence of genuine news media self-criticism” (Haas, 2006, p. 350). Meta-coverage of journalism is likely to be aimed at appeasing the public, avoiding any external regulation, and examining “the gradual erosion of the cultural authority of mainstream journalism” (p. 351) in light of the rise of the Internet, citizen journalism and reporting scandals.

Media criticism has typically taken place in forums connected with traditional media, such as ombudsman columns and journalism reviews, but is increasingly the purview of “bloggers” who are not tied to traditional media outlets. Blogging and journalism, in theory, should complement each other; indeed, studies often call for reciprocity between “bloggers” and “journalists” (Hayes, et al., 2007; Singer, 2007). Oversight of the professional norms of journalism is increased in the new media environment, where bloggers who are free of the organizational and economic constraints faced by traditional journalism can operate as self-appointed “watchdogs of the watchdogs” (Hayes, et al., 2007). Journalists have the opportunity to embrace this attention to norms as a means to furthering traditional goals and values. Singer suggests that it might be useful to think of blogging as the “public’s journalism.” “As the forms intertwine, notions of professional autonomy may become increasingly problematic, but the goals of truth and transparency are both advanced” (Singer, 2007, p. 91).

The relationship that has emerged, however, is one of rivalry, not reciprocity. Singer (2005) and Lowrey (2006) note that the blogosphere’s role in exposing the flaws and vulnerabilities of traditional journalism – vulnerabilities compounded by increased stress on traditional journalism’s revenue model – prevents reconciliation. In some sense, the relentlessness of the blogosphere’s pursuit is matched only by journalism’s defensiveness about it. Whatever the nature of the journalism-blog relationship, it is suggested that blogs—in all their manifestations—are poised to change the way news works (Robinson, 2006).

Would these changes in the way news “works” constitute a shift in the journalistic field? Previous research certainly suggests that possibility. This study seeks evidence in an analysis of media criticism appearing in blogs unaffiliated with traditional media outlets – essentially “new” forums for media criticism, which have the freedom to create and employ any number of standards or criteria in their critiques of journalistic performance. Our specific questions are, first, what kinds of critiques of traditional journalism are bloggers offering? And, second, to what extent are these critiques consistent or inconsistent with traditional forms of press criticism? Answers can help us consider whether these new entrants seem to be doing more to preserve or to transform the structure of relations in the journalistic field.

Method

To say that blogs contain criticism of traditional news media – much less say anything about whether those critiques are consistent or inconsistent with traditional forms of media criticism – is to raise a host of definitional issues. What is a blog? What counts as criticism? Our definitions are for the most part purposely broad, because our aim was to capture what might be “new” about criticism in the new media space.

Blogs

A blog serves as a form of networked expression, offering individuals a virtually unlimited forum to provide daily communication. Traditionally blogs contain both entries and links to other material. For the purposes of this study, we limited our focus to blogs that address politics in some way. Our rationale was that, given journalism’s primary democratic function to monitor and comment upon matters in the public sphere, most criticism would relate to journalism’s performance in covering government and politics. Political blogs were defined as blogs that appear on

Web sites where a majority of the coverage, links, discussion, and postings revolve around the political arena. To select blogs, we generated a list of the most visited political blogs, using the rankings from three different sources – Alexa.com, Quantcast.com and Compete.com. Each site’s metrics for determining popularity have their own strengths and weaknesses, but largely overlapped when it came to the sites appearing in the top-20 ranking.

Domingo and Heinonen’s (2008) look at the variety of conceptions of blogs “as a sign of an emerging new category of news and current affairs communication that challenges the conventional understanding of journalism” (p. 4) also informed the selection of blogs included in this study. Of particular note are the citizen blogs produced by the public outside of media companies. Domingo and Heinonen conclude that media commentary is commonly found on these “citizen” blogs and is one of the most popular activities found there. These “watchblogs” can be said to “monitor the work of professional media online and offline to highlight under-covered stories, expose errors or bias in reporting, and to criticize poor arguments in editorials and columns” (p. 7). Because our interest was to discover how participants outside traditional media discourse – new players, so to speak, in that discourse – comment on the work of journalism, we limited our sample of blogs to these “citizen” blogs, unconnected to legacy media. It is possible that contributors to these blogs might be former journalists or have another connection to legacy media; but the blog sites, more so than individual contributors, have the power to disrupt the field and, therefore, are the appropriate site for analysis.

Also, an emerging journalistic outlet that is not tied to a traditional news organization seems to be missing from Domingo and Heinonen’s typology. These outlets, such as the Huffington Post, which exist online only, are thought of as “blogs” despite their resemblance to traditional outlets in terms of occasional original reporting. We did not exclude sites that engage in activity beyond commentary.

Finally, in an effort to obtain ideological balance, we eliminated blogs, starting with the least popular on the list, until we had roughly the same number of left- and right-leaning blogs (based largely on the blogs’ self-description). A few “neutral” blogs also were included. In the end, 10 blogs made the list; see the Appendix for names and full citations.

Criticism

We chose a recent month – December 2009 – that featured a variety of news events that might generate commentary on media performance. In addition to news of national and international importance such as the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a Detroit-bound flight and the Copenhagen climate conference, the month also featured news specific to journalism, such as the expansion of the White House press pool to include The Huffington Post and TalkingPointsMemo.com. We selected from each blog every item appearing in December containing any evaluative reference, whether positive or negative, to the news media. Items did not need to be primarily media criticism; any item that included a characterization of news media performance was included. The definition of “criticism” was kept intentionally broad to increase the likelihood of including not just those things that might be recognizable to us as criticism based on experience with traditional forms, but whatever new, emergent forms or topics of criticism might be present. This process yielded 282 items for analysis. To be sure, there is variation in the length of blog entries, the number of items culled from each blog and the number of different contributors represented, but the collection as a whole offers a good overall picture of the kinds of media criticism a blog reader might encounter.

Analysis

Once the blog entries were collected, each researcher conducted a close reading of the entire set to start to get a sense of the kinds of journalism performance being critiqued. In a subsequent meeting, we compared notes on the kinds of critiques we were finding and discussed the kind of standards or criteria the critiques seemed to imply. We then read the blog items a second time with this refined and shared sense of critiques and standards and with an eye toward discovering the extent to which the critiques seemed to cover traditional domains of press criticism identified by Wyatt (2007): Content, such as sensationalism, infotainment and excess or deficient coverage of a topic; philosophical approaches, referring to journalistic norms such as objectivity; structure, including issues such as ownership concentration; power, addressing the news media’s overall influence and authority; and press and democracy, which connects and overarches the other four domains, given that in a democratic society “criticism is always, at least implicitly, examining how the press is doing in fulfilling that role” (p. 15).

Findings and Discussion

Our analysis of the media criticism offered by these blogs reveals, in short, that most, but not all, of the discourse – whether brief or elaborate – resonates with traditional media criticism based on traditional assumptions about normative standards, roles, and practices. Much of the criticism implies criteria similar to Wyatt’s and little different from the Society of Professional Journalists’ code of ethics, the Hutchins Commission report (Commission on Freedom of the Press., 1947), and *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, 1956). Since these historically rooted criteria constitute, in no small part, the cultural capital of the journalistic field, this blogger-situated media criticism accepts the received journalistic doxa and speaks strongly to the stability in the journalistic field. The critics simply seem to say to journalists: “You’re not doing your job.” The most common form of criticism was from what Wyatt called the “philosophical approaches” domain—bloggers remain fixated on traditional standards of objectivity, professionalism, and the like. The least common type of criticism was from the “structure” domain—the dearth of attention to economic pressures is curious given the salience of the bottom line to struggling news media. Bloggers’ criticized traditional news media for failing to be accurate, impartial, and independent. Bloggers also found fault with journalists’ news judgment, reliance on sensationalism, and unprofessionalism. Whether these critics inhabited the right, left, or center of the blogosphere, their critique was largely the same. Simply put, news media were biased and untruthful.

The very ways in which bloggers referred to the news media is instructive. They sometimes used innocuous terms, such as legacy media, traditional media, or major press. However, they also referred to their subjects as the conventional national press, big media, mainstream media, dinosaur media, the media establishment, media elites, elite journalists, high priests of journalism, and cynical beltway journalists. The labels speak to the press’s perceived moribund autonomy, but also to the exclusion bloggers may feel from the journalistic field. This is the clearest sign that bloggers perceive themselves as a heteronomous force.

Much of the media criticism offered by bloggers consisted of brief evaluative statements rather than elaborate critical discourse. Given the design of the study and the sites of investigation, this was not unexpected. Hence media criticism frequently appeared as an aside within blog posts on public policy debates or noteworthy events. For example, in praising perceived public dissatisfaction with healthcare insurance reform, blogger Robert Ringer of WorldNetDaily parenthetically lauded the watchdog work of Fox News, Glenn Beck, talk radio, and conservative bloggers (Ringer, 2009). But bloggers also engaged in full-throated media criticism – using an entire blog entry to critique press performance. For example, Jackson Williams of the Huffington Post argued that newspapers published by the A.H. Belo corporation had violated a “cardinal rule” of journalism by discarding the wall separating the business and editorial sides of their papers (J. Williams, 2009). Thus, this criticism sought to preserve the received cultural capital of the journalistic field.

Criticism of norms and roles

Bloggers’ criticism frequently centered on the most traditional of journalistic jobs – accurate reporting. According to bloggers, journalists got key facts wrong (Kurtz, 2009a), falsely characterized events (Johnson, 2009), obscured reality (Shakir, 2009), distorted reality (Goldfarb, 2009), repeated lies and half-truths (Lux, 2009), or simply made “no sense at all” (Morrissey, 2009c). Inaccuracy was attributed to “simple carelessness” (Calderone, 2009b), to seeing falsely (Farah, 2009c), and to willful indifference to the truth (Amato, 2009a). This kind of criticism extended to news media that failed to be complete in their reporting. For example, a blogger challenged the *New York Times* to do a better job of reporting on the nuanced and diverse views of Pakistanis (Ahmed, 2009). Inaccuracy came in for some of the bloggers’ boldest criticism, for example, equating inaccuracy with the “breakdown of the press” (Calderone, 2009a). If it was the job of journalists to seek the truth and report it, bloggers found the traditional news media derelict in their duties.

Bloggers also identified other sources of untruthfulness. Much of the media criticism that emerged here focused on the perceived bias or the lack of impartiality and objectivity of traditional news media. Bloggers saw traditional journalists less as impartial witnesses than as purposeful, partisan agents. Likewise, news organizations were seen as one-sided in their commentary rather than balanced in their forums for debate. The resulting content, according to the bloggers’ criticism, skewed audiences’ sense of reality. The news media were biased for excluding relevant information from their stories (Yglesias, 2009c), for picking sides (Cashill, 2009), for tilting coverage and discussion (Sunday, 2009), for being ideological (Neiwert, 2009b), for trying to persuade instead of inform (Farah,

2009a), and for a host of other sins. Bloggers found news outlets to be biased in favor of the status quo (Yglesias, 2009f) and against conservatives (Morrissey, 2009a), liberals (Amato, 2009d), women (Amato, 2009f), and minorities and immigrants (Nill, 2009). Journalists demonstrated their bias, according to bloggers, by leading a “search-and-destroy mission” on a “popular” politician (Quigley, 2009b), by excoriating, questioning, and mocking the president (A. Williams, 2009b), by producing propaganda (Amato, 2009c), by fostering caricatures (Farah, 2009d), by deceitful editing (Fiderer, 2009), and so on.

The bloggers occasionally invoked ‘objectivity’ by name as a journalistic standard (Morrissey, 2009e). When they did it was almost always associated with a substantive media critique rather than with a passing evaluative statement (Greenwald, 2009e). To deploy the objectivity norm was to bring out the big guns. One news item in particular, a decision to include online news sites in the White House press pool, generated much of the blogger attention to objectivity in December 2009. Much of the debate hinged on the perceived partisan nature of the online news organizations (Linkins, 2009), which might “not be bound by the same professed standards of objectivity” that traditional print publications held (Calderone, 2009d).

Bloggers often see themselves as watchdogs of the watchdogs, and hence they regularly monitored whether journalists acted independently and served as adversaries of the powerful. Bloggers praised journalists for their pugnacity (Burns, 2009), for their digging for information (Budowsky, 2009a), for giving the lie to deceitfulness (Greenwald, 2009c), for well-prepared interrogation, and for indifference to approval from sources (Greenwald, 2009f). Meanwhile, blogs criticized the American news media for being sycophants (Cashill, 2009) and lapdogs, rather than watchdogs (Murphy, 2009). They critiqued traditional media for being compliant, dutiful, and mindless, thereby printing stories without “challenge or skepticism” (Greenwald, 2009d). News media were also criticized for their coziness with lobbyists and lawmakers (Calderone, 2009b) and for their dependence on secret government sources when they should have been skeptical of those same sources (Ahmed, 2009). The news media not only failed to be watchdogs, they fawned over leaders and posed unchallenging questions (Feehery, 2009). Meanwhile, bloggers’ faint praise could be just as damning, such as the observation that “Meet the Press” host David Gregory was acting tougher with his guests, even if it was mostly a matter of scowling more in between questions (Felsenthal, 2009). In brief, bloggers found the news media largely unwilling or unable to independently and aggressively challenge those in power. Again, criticism sought to preserve rather than transform the received cultural capital of the journalistic field.

Criticism of standards and practices

One of the most enduring criticisms of journalists questions their news judgment. Bloggers faulted today’s traditional journalists for the same shortcoming. The criticism focused on the media’s obsession with stories with little real news value. On rare occasions bloggers praised the news media getting a story just right (Budowsky, 2009b). However, the chief concern was that the news media give audiences inconsequential stories while the significant news of the day goes under- or unreported. Bloggers criticized news outlets for ignoring or downplaying: the U.S. imprisonment of Al Jazeera journalists (Greenwald, 2009e), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Geller, 2009), the Iranian Green Revolution (Sigger, 2009), the death of civilians from U.S. airstrikes (Greenwald, 2009b), the administration’s security failures (Jacobus, 2009), U.S. complicity in failed Afghan elections (Quigley, 2009a), and so on. The news media were criticized for overplaying: Sarah Palin’s Facebook posts (Calderone, 2009e), the global warming controversy (Neiwert, 2009d), and a controversy surrounding the White House social secretary (Friday, 2009). Similarly, the White House press corps was mocked for its attention to the Salahis, the couple who crashed a White House party (Linkins, 2009), golfer Tiger Woods’ extramarital affairs (Press, 2009), and its subsequent inattention to doing real journalism (Budowsky, 2009c).

Perhaps bloggers’ chief criticism of media content was that traditional media opted for sensationalism over more evenhanded journalism. We get “yellow journalism on steroids” and “eye candy” in lieu of reality (Ferraro, 2009). TV newscasts give us “visual carnage” in the place of real news (Curtis, 2009). The problem, according to blogger criticism, was that serious life-and-death issues lose their import when sensational, giddy American media discourse envelops a story (Greenwald, 2009a). As one blogger lamented, “It’s a shame when sensationalism drowns out good journalism” (Tavakoli, 2009). Other bloggers saw even more serious consequences; they see fear mongering as a kind of sensationalism that distorts public debate (Wednesday, 2009a). Simply put, bloggers saw no shortage of ‘hype’ passing for news.

Much of bloggers' criticism singled out the unprofessionalism of traditional news media. Whether journalists are incompetent (Marshall, 2009), egotistical (Kurtz, 2009b), lazy (Walsh, 2009b), or do not have the time (A. Williams, 2009a), they were not doing their job or they were not doing it well. Criticism questioned the seriousness of some journalists (Quigley, 2009a), their willingness to stoop to the "lowest reporting methods possible" (Neiwert, 2009b), their lack of preparation (Farah, 2009d), or simply not doing their homework (Morrissey, 2009d). What's more, the news media continue to repeat the same mistakes time and again (Conason, 2009). The lack of professionalism produces a variety of problems; e.g., as one blogger concluded, each act of ignorance and irresponsibility makes all mainstream media a little less trustworthy (Stickings, 2009). In the end, another blogger simply concluded, "our media are so screwed up" (Amato, 2009b). Of course, bloggers praised professionalism when they saw it (Morrissey, 2009b), even if it read more like a wistful sentimentality for an earlier, more professional age than a statement about contemporary journalism (Bunch, 2009).

Structural and systematic criticism

Although these criticisms referred to a failure to adhere to traditional journalistic values, these critics still seemed to hold up the traditional or elite or mainstream media as the central journalistic authority responsible for living up to these traditional principles and values. These observations seem to suggest stability in the field of journalism. But what would a disruption in the field look like? Rather than legitimizing the traditional values and practices of mainstream media, instability might be characterized by a preference for a decentralized network with diffuse control over the dissemination of information. We would expect references to the structure of the media system overall, including ownership issues and economic pressures. We would anticipate references to transparency and other overt meta-criticism of the traditional values and practices of journalists (see Karlsson, 2008). Although this was generally scarce in the blogs we examined, we did observe a number of threads of criticism that seemed to address these paradigmatic concerns.

Bloggers did make reference to structural and systematic problems with traditional journalism. Bloggers saw technology as a constraint on good journalism—television formats were not conducive to critically questioning guests (Amato, 2009e) and sped up news cycles made for inaccurate and unprofessional news (Walsh, 2009a). Bloggers also saw the economic structure as a burden on good journalism—truth is lost when journalism is controlled to secure advertising revenue (Gordon, 2009; Norris de Montaigu, 2009). Owners, managers, and advertisers have a different set of priorities than the typical audience member, but the elites' priorities dictate the news (Yglesias, 2009a). Meanwhile, media mergers lead to even more power in the hands of even fewer people. The market power the mergers create threaten an open media infrastructure, limiting independent voices and efforts to "reinvent journalism" (Silver, 2009). What we are left with, according to blogger criticism, is a huge factory that produces as much self-importance as it does news (Carberry, 2009; Warner, 2009). Ultimately bloggers criticized journalism's capitulation to the economic pole.

Bloggers also saw systematic contradictions in journalistic practice. They questioned whether new media really functioned as a marketplace of ideas when journalists are actually a clubby bunch (Calderone, 2009c) rather than mutual critics of each other's work (Neiwert, 2009c). Bloggers questioned how the Washington press corps could be watchdogs by day, but trip over themselves for a ticket to the White House holiday party by night (Calderone, 2009f); or how reporters could be fair and accurate when the quest for ratings invited journalists to create fake scandals (Neiwert, 2009a). Bloggers also suggested a contradiction between two enduring journalistic values—impartiality and independence. Journalists who were impartial without being watchdogs were criticized for being stenographers (Tuesday, 2009).

Some bloggers also saw systematic problems in how journalists hung news on the hook of personality. Thus we do not get reportage on actual legislation, only what an interested individual has to say about it (Yglesias, 2009b). The American journalistic tradition of treating elected officials as inherently reasonable and newsworthy looked silly in comparison to the practices of the European press, where preposterous ideas were dismissed as such (Murphy, 2009). Here bloggers criticized journalism's deference to the political pole.

A handful of blog posts called specifically for increased transparency or praised media outlets who displayed greater transparency by helping the news audience to better understand the news-making process (Calderone, 2009c). Given the economic motives of the news media, bloggers saw the need for even greater media transparency (Sirota, 2009). And to the extent government transparency takes hold, journalists take on a greater responsibility "to help

discover, gather, compare, contextualize, and share the new information becoming available” (Shane, 2009). Bloggers also criticized those media outlets that were not transparent; e.g., those that hid the identity of sources even when those sources’ information turned out to be false (Greenwald, 2009d). This is one of the few examples of bloggers pushing for transformation of journalism’s cultural capital.

Meta-criticism

Even more significantly, some of the criticisms questioned the efficacy of journalism’s received occupational norms and practices. For example, balance was reinterpreted as ‘false balance,’ the idea that presenting two truth claims as equivalent can just as easily distort as reflect the truth (Yglesias, 2009e). Bloggers complained that journalists gave lip service to an idea only to immediately dismiss it by raising its alternative (Elder, 2009). More critically, a blogger decried the press for creating “a balance between outright falsehoods and ignorance, on one side, and scientific knowledge and honest discourse on the other” (Amato, 2009a). Thus, journalists maintain a “veneer of objectivity” but fail the public by never determining “who’s right and who’s wrong” (Yglesias, 2009d). Bloggers argued that balance and objectivity are not a means to truth but a means of obfuscation whereby journalists use “soothing euphemisms” and accord “equal deference” to falsehoods (Greenwald, 2009e).

In a similar fashion, bloggers saw the news media’s efforts to be professional and trustworthy as an impediment rather than as a means to truth-telling. Journalists were portrayed as “eager to position themselves as ‘mainstream’ rather than pursue the truth” (Farah, 2009b). Journalists sometimes don false-professionalism and seriousness at the cost of entertaining ideas from the political and social margins. Professionalism has become divorced from what journalists do, and is instead ascribed to journalists based on how mainstream their organization is perceived to be (Walsh, 2009a).

Although meta-criticism is limited, what we have found here is nevertheless significant. Indeed, an alternative reading of much of the media criticism identified here is possible. It might be that the unstated assumption of much of this criticism is simply, “the charade is over.” In other words, bloggers may be disillusioned with the ‘illusio’—the game may not be worth playing. Media performance is just that, a drama in which actors play roles. As one blogger noted, political actors recite their lines and “the media is happy to play along” (Wednesday, 2009b). Bloggers may criticize the news media for failing to be balanced or independent, but their deeper concern appears to be that balance and independence are relics of a simpler time. However, bloggers are without a rhetorical toolkit to formulate a more elaborate response (see Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009, p. 225). Press critics can be trapped by the doxa of the journalistic field.

Conclusion

Bloggers may yet be a disruptive force in the journalistic field, but little of their current effort is explicitly aimed at transforming the cultural capital of the field. This analysis suggests that the journalistic field mainly continues to be dominated and organized by the same agents that have traditionally led in the production of news content and discourse. Bloggers tend to criticize these agents on their own turf, thereby holding up and legitimizing traditional news media outlets as the dominant authorities in the field. While it is possible that some individual bloggers who affirm these traditional media standards, roles, and practices might have been legacy journalists, we took efforts to remove them from the sample and hence our conclusions are unlikely to be skewed by the presence of a few such bloggers here.

Paradigm shifts do not happen overnight, so we are not surprised to see that much of the media criticism has accepted the doxa of the journalistic field. But as Internet culture continues to evolve and forums for analysis expand, we might expect to see an increase in concerns about the occupational norms of the news media. The handful of meta-criticisms we have observed suggests that this type of disruptive shift may be coming. Skeptics, on the other hand, argue that as bloggers become more popular, they will increasingly be subject to political and economic forces (Christians, et al., 2009). For now, despite the economic woes that already serve to weaken traditional news media outlets’ position in the field, the norms and goals they espouse continue to dominate.

More broadly, this analysis has attempted to further develop Bourdieu’s field theory as applied to journalism and media studies. Rather than seeking to define a static relationship between new and old media, journalistic field theory expressly allows for shifts in status quo power, making it useful for examining the evolving role of the

Internet and its influence on journalism. Our study highlights the inertia of the journalistic field and suggests that even with an influx of new agents, the field is resistant to disruptions—bloggers do seem to have accepted the journalistic doxa. In this sense, bloggers appear as new agents in the journalistic field, rather than as a heteronomous force. Benson and Neveu (2005b) interpret Bourdieu as suggesting that conflict within a field is more likely to produce conservation rather than transformation, unless there is a confluence of heteronomous pressures—that observation finds support here. This study and others have shown field theory to be a useful theoretical framework for examining the new media environment; future research should continue to build on this approach and should explore new empirical methods for doing so.

Appendix

List of sites used in the study

Name	Number of items	Number of contributors
Crooks and Liars	46	9
Hot Air	56	3
Huffington Post	52	43
NewsMax	2	1
Politico	16	1
Salon	22	3
Talking Points Memo	16	2
The Hill's pundit blog	24	9
Think Progress	32	9
World Net Daily	16	6
TOTAL	282	86

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