

Normative Theories of Digital Journalism
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This chapter provides a survey of the normative arguments that underlie much scholarship on digital journalism published over the past two decades. We argue that four broad values are generally present throughout the literature and unique to theorizing about *digital* journalism. We also note that these normative claims are often contradicted by much of the empirical literature about how digital news is *actually* working (including by many of the findings discussed in this book.) But this contradiction makes the persistence of these norms more interesting, not less.

First, and most prevalent, scholars argue that journalism should be *participatory* given the affordances of digital and social media and the underlying norms, values, expectations, and knowledge of what scholars suggest are the formerly passive consumers of news. Second, and related, scholars argue that journalism should be *deinstitutionalized*, which entails breaking down professional jurisdiction, undermining the gatekeeping power of the legacy press, challenging organizational hierarchies and distinctions between producers and consumers, or disaggregating and decentralizing the process and products of journalism. Third, scholars argue that journalism should be *innovative* to keep pace with technological change, the evolving expectations and demands of networked publics, and the uncertain and highly precarious media business environment. Finally, scholars argue that journalists should be *entrepreneurial*, which entails being able to be self-starters, build their own audiences, raise their own funding, and brand themselves in the social media era. While scholars do not always make their underlying normative stances explicit and few embrace all four of these underlying values for digital journalism, these claims are widely found throughout the literature.

To demonstrate the rise and influence of a new set of normative claims in relation to digital journalism, we contrast this scholarship with a comparatively older body of work primarily articulated in the context of mass media. As we explore in the pages below, normative theorizing around digital

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journalism has not fully grappled with the ways that participation, deinstitutionalization, innovation, and entrepreneurialism may undermine other valued journalistic roles. These include the ideas that journalists should provide accurate and reliable information and a diverse set of viewpoints to the public, monitor the state and other powerful interests in society, represent the public to elites and serve as a proxy for public opinion, facilitate governance and serve as institutional conduits between elites and citizens and elites themselves, and provide forums for debate and discussion of public issues. Of course, here too, none of the normative roles discussed in this literature are empirical claims; the legacy press often fails to meet these idealized conceptions. But, as Nerone (2013: 456) points out, “the norms of western journalism can be inspirational, but not if treated with too much reverence.” At the very least, they provide a language for critique when journalism falls short of these ideals (the question of whether democratic ideals are appropriate for journalism is another matter that we do not address here; *see* Zelizer, 2013).

This chapter also argues that much of the digital journalism literature is oriented normatively towards the “citizen participation” (Christians et al., 2009) tradition of public communication, yet in ways that are largely shorn of its critical edges and deeply compatible with market logics. In the citizen participation tradition the basis of legitimacy is “the idea that the media belong to the people, with an emancipatory, expressive, and critical purpose” (2009: 25). Christians et al. argue that historically the citizen participation tradition has focused on citizen engagement, but with a specific emphasis on *groups* that have been marginalized with respect to public communication, such as the poor, women, immigrants, and people of color (see also Downing, 2000; Gans, 2003).

In the digital journalism literature, however, participation is understood in libertarian terms that emphasize individual freedom of expression and liberty from the state (Christians et al., 2009: 23). This tradition takes as its theoretical starting point the presumption that there are *only* individuals. In combining participation with libertarianism, the digital journalism literature generally holds up an “unmoored, de-raced, de-classed, and de-gendered” (Weis, 2008: 295) model journalistic citizen. In the process, the digital journalism literature tends to both implicitly and explicitly ignore the fact that there are groups that occupy different positions in social structures, and that this means unequal access to the material, social, and cultural resources necessary to participate in democratic life. This was precisely the concern of the critical scholarship on mass media that argued for positive forms of state subsidy to foster participatory equality.

Indeed, a previous generation of critical and cultural scholars contrasted a right to speak with a right to hear, articulated both the need for and value of a socially responsible and professionalized press, argued for the need for journalists to have autonomy from both the state and the market, and demonstrated that market and voluntaristic mechanisms do not provide for the inclusion and diversity democracy needs in its public communication.

In the end, this chapter argues that the valuing of participation, deinstitutionalization, innovation, and entrepreneurialism might not be as democratic as many scholars both implicitly and explicitly suggest. And, our analysis suggests that there is marked convergence in thinking about journalism and democracy in states that have very different press systems. This comes even as there is a general lack of “Americanization” of the multinational press (*see* R. K. Nielsen, 2013) and significant differences in the fortunes of news organizations cross-nationally over the last decade (Levy and Nielsen, 2013). This suggests that there is a general animating set of ideals in scholarship that have powerfully become articulated around digital technologies and provide an overarching framework for normative evaluation, despite differing media systems and variations in practice across countries (Waisbord, 2013)

Participation

There are diverse origins to the idea of participatory journalism and it predates digital media. C.W. Anderson (2011: 530) argues that there have been ideal-typical transformations of journalists’ understanding of their profession and audiences over the last half century, including a movement away from a historically-dominant emphasis on professional values, autonomy, and ultimately responsibility *for* their audiences, to the public journalism movement that emerged in the mid-1990s and sought to place a more dialogic, yet still professionally convened, journalist-citizen relationship at the center of its normative model (*see* Glasser, 2000). By the 2000s, Anderson argues, the ideals and practices of public journalism migrated into digital journalism. When public journalism reformers such as Jay Rosen turned their attention to digital journalism, normative ideals became subtly reoriented towards the critiques of ‘top down’, ‘one-way,’ and hierarchical and industrial forms of communication then rampant in the technology press and business literature (Levine et. al, 2009; Turner, 2006). To overcome the industrial production of journalism and culture, reformers elevated participation as a primary democratic value.

For example, in their genealogical analysis of 119 digital journalism articles Borger et al. (2013) demonstrate how interest in normative ideas of participatory journalism began to rise after 2003, which suggests the degree to which scholars and public intellectuals were influenced by the techno-optimism and consumer empowerment rhetoric around Web 2.0, which fit well, if not exactly (see below), with many of the ideals of the public journalism movement. These authors reveal how a group of scholars and public intellectuals became what they call the “founding fathers” of participatory journalism, which subsequently became an object of analysis and a normative benchmark for scholars. Digital technologies not only gave rise to this new normative interest in participatory journalism, it was “formulated as the idea that digital technologies enable the audience to get involved in making and disseminating news” (2013:117). What Borger et al. (2013) call the “founding fathers” of participatory journalism that espoused “a strong faith in the democratic potential of digital technologies” include journalist Dan Gillmor, public intellectuals and journalism professors Jeff Jarvis and Jay Rosen, media theorist Clay Shirky, and media studies professors Axel Bruns and Henry Jenkins (2013:126).

Borger et al. (2013) identify four dimensions to the normative understanding of scholars that have colored both the questions they ask and their analyses of digital journalism. First, scholars have a broad enthusiasm about the democratizing potential of digital technologies. Second, scholars are generally frustrated with professional journalism’s resistance to change. Third, scholars are frustrated with professional journalists’ commercial, as opposed to democratic, motivations for facilitating participatory forms. Finally, there is disappointment in the lack of interest in forms of participatory journalism among citizens themselves.

The Borger et al. study reveals a striking consensus in the literature that new media technologies hold democratizing potential (for a comprehensive normative and empirical overview of ‘participatory journalism’ see also Lewis, 2012; Singer, et al., 2011). Peters and Witschge (2014) argue that this literature is marked by rather thin and loose conceptualizations of what ‘participation’ should be. These authors note that despite a lofty discourse of democracy, much of this literature actually has a very narrow object in view: “not so much on *citizen* engagement but rather *audience* or *user* interaction” (2014:1, emphases in the original). In their analysis, the focus in this literature “is placed more squarely on journalism/audience interaction as opposed to a broader dialectic surrounding journalism’s democratic function for citizens in

society” (2014). As these authors argue, scholars have conceptualized participation as an unproblematic good, without a clear delineation of what forms of participation matter and for what purposes. Even more, participation in the digital journalism literature is often framed in terms of the individual, not the collective that other strands of normative theorizing of the press offer. Peters and Witschge (2014) also ask whether participation should be the ultimate normative value for journalism in the first place. Indeed, Schudson (1998) suggests that the great strength of the legacy press from the audience’s perspective might be its lack of requiring participation, even as practitioners themselves have remained skeptical of participation from a quality standpoint (C.E. Nielsen, 2013; Singer, 2010).

Much of this scholarship embraces the marketplace model for speech, which an earlier generation of critical scholars argued was highly problematic on democratic grounds. For example, the central argument in much of the participatory journalism literature is that if only journalists would cede control, “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2006) will become empowered and the Internet will provide for an ideally democratic public sphere (see also Deuze et. al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2010). At yet, despite the seemingly radical promise of democratization promised by digital technologies, it is telling that the “founding *fathers*” (Borger et al., 2013) of digital journalism are, indeed, fathers, and white ones at that. There is a tendency throughout the participatory journalism literature to hold up ‘users’ and empowered ‘audiences’ as undifferentiated and previously disenfranchised masses in ways that ignore structural constraints in open markets for speech. As Matt Hindman (2008) has amply demonstrated, there is little empirical evidence that the Internet has shifted the balance of expressive power towards the formerly disenfranchised despite the lowered costs of producing and distributing digital journalism (see also Pew, 2012).

Indeed, there are historical and structural conditions that privilege well-organized social groups and interests in terms of both access to media and being heard (Baker, 2002; Fiss, 2009; Young, 2000). The ideas of ‘community’ with shared identity and ‘groups’ with a shared set of interests in the citizen participation literature have largely given way in the digital journalism literature to the language of individuals. To the extent that scholars of digital journalism discuss social structure, it is often conceptualized in terms of diffuse and decentralized forms of networked social ties that are individually-

realized and voluntaristic forms of identity-based and affiliational attachment (see Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2011).

While this has led many to valorize the ‘networked public sphere’ as a site for the pluralization of cultures and identities, the social locations of individual citizens participating (or failing to) have generally been absent from the normative discussion in the digital journalism literature. And yet, these concerns animate work that embraces a ‘communitarian’ ethic of social solidarity premised, ultimately, on equality fostered through ethical discursive practice. As Christians et. al (2009: 102-103) summarize a body of work on the normative role of the news media as active *facilitators* of debate to achieve democratic inclusion:

Journalism exhibits its interest in promoting and improving the quality of public life by being “thoughtfully discursive, not merely informative,” and “adequately inclusive and comprehensive” (Baker, 2002: 148-149). But inclusion does not mean pandering to uninformed and uninterested individuals who remain by choice at the periphery of participatory democracies. It means instead accommodating different voices, different points of view, and even different forms of expression.

Meanwhile, much of the digital journalism literature echoes the long-standing libertarian tradition of defining liberty in negative terms as freedom from the state, while equality is conceptualized in terms of individual opportunity (as opposed to the conditions that promote diversity) (see Balkin, 2004). Even more, in much of the digital journalism literature the state has a narrow role in promoting commercial competition, not necessarily remedying structural inequalities that privilege the ability of some groups to be heard.

In contrast, other scholars have argued for a positive reading of the First Amendment, placing the onus on the state to ensure that every argument has a chance to be heard, not that everyone has a chance to speak. For example, Napoli (2009) argues that a right of access to media, enshrined in policy such as the Fairness Doctrine and public access requirements, was designed as a positive freedom for individual speakers. In the context of digital journalism, Ananny (2014: 360-361) offers a view that cuts against the prevailing grain of normative theory in arguing that it is the right to hear, not the right to speak that should be the test of journalism’s normative value (*see also* Pickard, 2010). The key issue in our current era, a “right to be heard” (2010: 38), has been roundly ignored given a broad faith that access to digital media

entails democratization in terms of disseminating content.

Deinstitutionalization

A related value found in the digital journalism literature is deinstitutionalization. Following the organization studies literature, deinstitutionalization refers to the “erosion or discontinuity of an institutionalized organizational activity or practice” (Oliver, 1992). ‘Deinstitutionalization’ is a broad term that encompasses institutional delegitimation, the weakened capacity of an institution to fulfill taken-for-granted actions, and the erosion of social consensus around that institution (1992). Deinstitutionalization implies deprofessionalization, but the latter refers specifically to the erosion of a profession’s autonomy, jurisdiction, and public legitimacy. While the degree to which deinstitutionalization and deprofessionalization are occurring is a matter of debate (see Ryfe, this volume), there are strong veins of the digital journalism literature that celebrate both on normative democratic grounds.

As noted above, the public journalism movement believed that normatively desirable democratic dialogue could be secured through an institutional press and professionals who served as conveners and facilitators of publics. Scholars called for more resources, secured through non-market means, for *institutions* to support professional journalists’ work with the public (*see* Glasser, 1999). In contrast, even when digital journalism scholars and public intellectuals avoid or only imply critiques of journalistic institutions and professionalism, or embrace more hybrid forms of professional-amateur collaborations, they generally emphasize the democratic virtues of deinstitutionalized amateur and non-professional forms of “produsage” and “participatory cultures” (Bruns, 2008), “citizen journalism” (Allan and Thorsen, 2008), “we media” (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2006), “ambient journalism” (Hermida, 2010), and media of “public communication” (Raetzsch, 2014).

Particularly among those scholars who embrace participation as the primary democratic value, extant institutions of journalism and professionalism are often cast as obstacles to citizen empowerment through expressive engagement. There is, in much of the literature, an implicit or explicit undercurrent of thinking that posits digital media itself as *inherently* democratic, interactive, two-way, and open. Scholars often posit the perceived qualities of digital technologies, meanwhile, against the institution of journalism’s seemingly static, one-way, and closed system of knowledge production. As Flew (2009) has demonstrated, the reality is, of course, more complicated than these simple binaries and the literature is more textured

with varying arguments. That said, many scholars of digital journalism have embraced the erosion of the institution of journalism's legitimacy and control over the processes and products of news, in particular the traditional gatekeeping and agenda-setting and framing functions of the press, on democratic grounds (Pavlik, 2001; Russell, 2001). More complex theoretical models suggest that deinstitutionalization is as much an issue now of dissemination as it is of publicity, with scholars normatively embracing "second order gatekeeping," or public control over the visibility of content through sharing on social media (Singer, 2014), and accountability over professional journalism through the public critique of bloggers and citizens (Singer, 2007). Meanwhile, the literature on "network gatekeeping" suggests more subtle forms of control and authority exercised by institutional authorities in new media environments (for a recent review of this literature, see Coddington and Holton, 2014).

To many scholars, the deinstitutionalization of journalism is ultimately more democratic than the alternative, whether it means the opening up of professional control, challenges to jurisdiction and autonomy, the proliferation of new news genres, norms, and audience expectations, and more fluid boundaries to the field and new entrants (for a review, see Ryfe, 2013). The valuing of deinstitutionalization is evident in the extensive literature on 'normalization,' which scholars have analyzed in domains as diverse as hyperlinking (Coddington, 2014) and Twitter (Lasora et al., 2012). These works contrast the seemingly 'open' values of the Internet with a closed journalism institution, critiquing how professionals reassert control over digital media, even as hybrids proliferate.

Other scholars, however, have looked more skeptically at deinstitutionalization. In a comparatively early piece, Williams and Delli Carpini (2000) emphasized that the disintegration of elite gatekeeping provided new opportunities for citizens to challenge elites, and that it enabled well organized groups with political power to strategically work to shape public debate, even as journalists were finding it harder to focus the public's attention on matters of consequence. Williams and Delli Carpini argue that the deinstitutionalization of journalism does not necessarily entail the weakening of the power of other social groups. Indeed, it is likely that well organized social and political groups will become more powerful vis-à-vis deinstitutionalized journalism, something digital journalism scholars have not addressed in drawing on models of the public as made up of unattached, uncommitted, and general interest citizens, instead of individuals who are already part of organized groups such as movement organizations and political parties.

Following Williams and Delli Carpini's insight, while many digital journalism scholars normatively value deinstitutionalization, it is worth considering the relative resources and power of journalism vis-à-vis the state and commercial institutions. Fico et. al (2013) analyze how citizen journalism largely fails to provide adequate coverage of local governments to make up for the loss of professional reporting. Julian Assange's WikiLeaks was a case study in the evanescence of deinstitutionalized forms of information gathering and provision. Benkler (2011) was moved to consider the degree to which "networked individuals and cooperative associations" were largely powerless in the face of the state and its leverage over the commercial providers of the infrastructure of the Internet. As Beckett and Ball (2012) argue, WikiLeaks was not only an unstable organizational form ill-equipped to command the resources, audiences, and legitimacy that professional news organizations still cling to, the organization actively sought out the legacy press for precisely these reasons. The Snowden affair, meanwhile, reveals the massive infrastructure that the news media as an institution still commands – from legal resources and legitimacy in the courts to the reporters and technical resources that secured Snowden's leaks.

There is, of course, a simple question of the resources available for the routine and reliable provision of public information that haunts much of the literature around digital journalism. At times, scholars hold up deinstitutionalization as a corrective to this problem of resources, a new model of the collective peer production of news and information that can happen entirely outside of formal market systems and make up for the dwindling resources of formal journalism organizations (e.g.: Benkler, 2006). Still, at the end, we are left with what Dean Starkman (2013), in a widely commented on and shared trenchant critique of the anti-institutionalism of what he labels the "Future of News Gurus" including Jeff Jarvis and Clay Shirky, argues is: "the cruel truth of the emerging networked news environment is that reporters are as disempowered as they have ever been, writing more often, under more pressure, with less autonomy, about more trivial things than under the previous monopolistic regime."

In the end, it may be the very bureaucratic and institutionalized forms of public discourse and journalism that secure many conditions for democratic life. As Schudson (1994) argued in a prescient essay, it is precisely the institutional forms of calling the public and its spheres into being that is the grounding of democratic life. The state not only fulfills many of these functions, it often creates the conditions for institutional journalism to do so. For example, scholars working outside of the normative

consensus around digital journalism have explicitly embraced the idea that deinstitutionalization is not necessarily more democratic than the legacy press system, and even more that the state has a positive role to play in ensuring the robustness of the public sphere. Napoli (2009), for instance, draws attention to the underlying economic contexts that support democratically desirable journalistic practices (while bracketing specific mediums or extant organizations) such as training, sourcing, news values, and investigative reporting. As Napoli suggests, deinstitutionalization and disaggregation of the news products, audiences, and advertising are undermining these practices of legacy institutions that are democratically desirable (for a related argument, see Ananny and Kreiss, 2012).

Meanwhile, digital journalism scholars often target journalism professionalism as being anti-democratic. Journalistic autonomy, jurisdiction, and legitimacy are continually defined through relational work and cultural practices that shape how the institution is entangled with other domains of activity (see Schudson and Anderson, 2009). Surprisingly, scholars of digital journalism have generally not considered how aspects of deprofessionalization affect the practices of actors in other, adjacent fields (see Benson and Neveu, 2005; Cook, 1998). This raises significant questions regarding the democratic value of the deprofessionalization processes scholars often celebrate. Considering professionalism relationally directs attention to how new entrants in the journalism field, unsettled economic models, and symbolic delegitimation have reshaped institutional democratic processes given that elected officials, civil society organizations, the judicial branch, executive agencies, etc. have all developed in relation to institutional and professional press norms and routines (Cook, 1998; see Mancini, 2013 for a discussion of the complex dynamics of media fragmentation; see Welch, 2013 for a consideration of hyperdemocracy and normative democratic theory).

For example, there are many ways in which the loss of a coherent professional ideology that helps journalists imagine their work as a public service, see journalism as objective and credible, and value autonomy, immediacy, and ethics (Deuze, 2005) may not be democratically desirable. Professional values, such as a commitment to public service, objectivity, and ethics, provide the standards through which the public, actors in other fields, and actors within the journalistic field and its deeply porous and fuzzy borders, evaluate and hold one another to account, sometimes strategically for gain (see Schudson and Anderson, 2009: 98). It is unlikely that deinstitutionalized information producers have similar orientations

to public rather than private interests, and there is no culturally legitimate way of holding them accountable. Of course, historians have documented how journalistic objectivity (Schudson, 1981) and public service (Kaplan, 2002) are historically contingent and realized through the struggle of different actors and fields. However, these values provide starting points for evaluating good journalistic practice for the public and journalists alike and debate over what is legitimate or illegitimate on normative grounds, and these values are in turn shaped by those debates.

Innovation

The digital journalism literature echoes a much broader trend that Vinsel (2014) identifies across disciplines over the last half century: a focus on “innovation” as a path to social salvation. In journalism, what Vinsel (2014) calls “innovation speak” is ubiquitous. The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities (2009) began its recommendations with the call to: “Direct media policy toward innovation, competition, and support for business models that provide marketplace incentives for quality journalism.” While the Knight Commission states that the tenets of media policy should be “innovation and competition” (2014), marketplace mechanisms are not the only means of promoting the value of innovation. The Downie and Schudson (2009) report cites journalistic innovation as opening new avenues for reporting and partnerships between blogs and professional news outlets. In their normative prescriptions, the authors cite that universities, comparatively insulated from economic forces, should be “laboratories for digital innovation in the gathering and sharing of news and information” (2009).

Innovation, like entrepreneurialism discussed below, is routinely deployed as a catch-all term that spans the development of novel business models, collaborations, technologies, practices, and content. ‘Innovation’ is generally left undefined in the digital journalism literature, and as such scholars use it expansively. Our concern here is not a concept explication of ‘innovation’ (see Lowry, 2012 and Boczkowski, 2005 on innovation, institutional orientation, mimicry, and legitimacy seeking), but the ways that scholars and public intellectuals embrace innovation as a normative value. Innovation is not bad in and of itself. However, as Vinsel (2014) argues, too often the issue with the narrow scholarly embrace of ‘innovation’ is that the concept is ill-defined, called upon to do too much work, and uncritically celebrated, even as calls for innovation often stand to benefit those already privileged in social life and may undermine many valuable institutions. Vinsel also argues that “innovation speak” shapes the very questions

scholars ask of phenomena, focusing attention on failures to innovate rather than structural economic conditions. As Vinsel (2014) argues:

If in the grand scope of social science, asking what factors encourage innovation is incredibly narrow, in the context of our society's problems, it's myopic. As a society, we have come to talk as if innovation is a core value, like love, fraternity, courage, beauty, dignity, responsibility, you name it...Innovation speak worships at the altar of change, but it too rarely asks who those changes are benefitting. It acts as if change is a good in itself. Too often, when it does take perspective into account, it proceeds either from the viewpoint of the manager or the shareholder, that is, from the perspective of people who are interested in profits, or from the viewpoint of the consumer interested in cheap goods. Other social roles largely drop out of the analysis.

As a concept and a value, scholars and public intellectuals routinely invoke 'innovation' in the digital journalism literature to encourage changes in practice, justify and promote new business models, and loosen the grip of professional control over news and information. The most developed line of work in journalism has been in the domain of what Lewis and Usher (2013: 603) call a "technology-focused approach to journalism innovation." Lewis and Usher argue that there is the increasing transfer of the practices, values, and tools of technologists, specifically from open source communities, to journalism. In the work of these scholars, innovation entails creating new forms of journalism reoriented around the normative values that animate models of open source technical production, such as thinking about the practice of journalism in terms of collaboratively writing code and decentralized knowledge-management. Lewis and Usher observe and normatively celebrate how these values are being carried into traditional journalism through the hiring of workers from the technology industry (see also Agarwal and Barthel, 2013; Ananny and Crawford, 2014), the work of funding agencies such as the Knight Foundation (see also Lewis, 2011: 1623), the migration of normative practices from the open source movement to journalism, and the broader cultural work of "meta-journalistic" (see Carlson, 2006) discourse about the profession's future.

In this and much of the literature, innovation often works in multiple registers as a simultaneously normative ideal, set of experimental practices, and competitive economic strategy. Scholars often link innovation to the normative ideals of participation and deinstitutionalization. On a technical level, things such as Open APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) in the news industry invite outside developers to innovate around news products, which scholars argue in turn opens up news organizations and undermines a broader ideology of professional control. As Aitamurto and Lewis (2013: 327-328) argue: "news

organizations have come to understand that specialized knowledge alone – whether in journalism, business or web development – is not sufficient to succeed in the news value ecosystem.” Meanwhile, some scholars see innovation being held back by professional cultures that simply dictate that journalists take up new technologies to do “their (traditional) jobs better instead of moving on to the next stage built around a stronger commitment to capitalize on the growing sociotechnical potential” of digital media (Spyridou et al, 2013: 77). These normative calls for innovation are often implicitly articulated against the backdrop of older critiques of professional journalism. The professional routines for producing news, for instance, were long seen to be reinforcing the power of elites, the authority of journalists, and the workings of the status quo, while blocking alternative voices or sources of authority (see Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Meanwhile, scholars often declare that what is good from a journalistic perspective is also good from an economic perspective. The cultural challenge, scholars of digital journalism argue, is getting news organizations beyond ‘closed’ business models to embrace an innovative ‘openness’ (which, as Aitamurto and Lewis, 2013 note, can also be a strategic tool of control). It is a failure to innovate that is ultimately placed at the doors of news organizations and in the laps of journalists. Indeed, scholars of digital journalism often posit professional culture, values, practices, and nostalgia as a key source of journalism’s economic woes and failure to innovate. As Usher (2010: 924) concludes her analysis of the final goodbyes of laid off and bought-out journalists:

Further, these texts showcase journalists who lack the self-reflexivity to consider their work and ideals in light of a new media world. They fail to see the opportunities for expanding on how their ideals of public service, objectivity and educating the public might be adapted for a new media world. Similarly, their discomfort with the new patterns of production and what new technology means suggests that professional journalism has important cultural work to do to transition journalists to working in new media newsroom. New media does not mean an end to professional journalism, but professional journalists must be more inclusive of community participation and production in ways that reverse the one-to-many vision of news production that has existed.

Usher ties together the normative ideals present in much of the digital journalism literature, premised on a critique of professionalism, celebration of participation, and a call to open up professional strictures and innovate in the new, digital world for both the viability of business and the health of democracy.

Again, this is not to say that innovation is bad, only that the concept is called upon to do too much work and frames scholarly analysis in particularly narrow ways. The failure to innovate in a new media world cannot explain the deeply complex economic reasons that journalists are being laid off, including news industry consolidations, growing competition for attention in a digital media ecosystem, the comparatively low rates of digital advertising and the emergence of new intermediaries that purvey news, and development of free classifieds (*see* McChesney and Pickard, 2011). Even the most innovative digital newsroom that embraces new technologies, crafts new production practices, and invites collaboration faces the same economic context, proliferation of outlets, and rise of new intermediaries that have all shaped the fortunes of the journalism industry.

Entrepreneurialism

Finally, and relatedly, the fourth normative value underlying journalism scholarship is entrepreneurialism. While scholars are concerned with innovation in terms of journalistic practice, technical experimentation, and commercial markets, entrepreneurialism entails the normative embrace of a particular state of mind, a willingness to work under precarious conditions, and a new mode of flexible work. As Anderson (2014) argues, drawing on the research interviews of Caitlin Petre and Max Besbris with journalism school professionals, the concept of ‘entrepreneurial journalism’ entails three distinct claims: a) a sense of journalists inventing their own jobs through entrepreneurial practices like starting their own companies, b) self-promotion and branding for success in the market, and c) a disposition to work flexibly and in precarious conditions (for a review of what journalism educators think, see Ferrier, 2013). Even more, entrepreneurialism is, ultimately, held up in much of the digital journalism literature as what will save journalism. If journalists are willing to experiment with new economic models enough in a perpetual state of technological disruption, something will work and journalism will be saved. As the City University of New York’s (2014a) description of its M.A. in Entrepreneurial Journalism program states:

Our goal is to help create a sustainable future for quality journalism. We believe that future will be shaped by entrepreneurs who develop new business models and innovative projects – either working on their own, with startups, or within traditional media companies.

At its core, entrepreneurial journalism refers to the honing of a mindset and a set of business skills to help journalists not only weather the ‘disruption’ of the media industry, but ultimately as the CUNY program states, create a “sustainable future for quality journalism” based on the workings of the market, not state support (for a discussion of the latter see McChesney and Pickard, 2011). In CUNY’s (2014b) MA curriculum, entrepreneurial journalists should have both knowledge of business models and management skills, in addition to the understandings of both “the disruptors and the disrupted.” In turn, entrepreneurial journalists should learn the “craft” and ethics of journalism, gain real world experience, and know how to collaborate across the technological and business-side of their businesses. In these formulations, while journalists are expected to think about ethics, the normative value lies in collapsing the hard distinctions between journalism and its business side, and disruption of extant industries is held out as a normative good. As Jeff Jarvis’s (2014) “New Business Models for News” syllabus as part of the CUNY program makes clear, disruption is not only a technological inevitability given the Internet, the good entrepreneurial journalist seeks out potentials for it. The normative values at play here are both that disruption is ultimately a good thing (it will create better journalism on the order that Jarvis claims Gutenberg created a better society) and cultivating entrepreneurial habits of mind and skills will create better journalists. It is telling, for instance, that on Jarvis’s syllabus are selections from the early Silicon Valley business call to arms *The Clue Train Manifesto* that entwined similar logics of entrepreneurship, democracy, and technological utopianism – ‘journalism’ is similar to every other industry in the ideology of entrepreneurialism.

As Anderson (2014) argues, the uptake of entrepreneurial values in journalism is, ultimately, a response to the broader crisis in the news industry (for a review, see Levy and Nielsen, 2012; Siles and Boczkowski, 2012), not the cause of disruption itself. Even more, Anderson (2014) argues that:

Both responses of journalism school educators and administrators—the idea of the teaching hospital and the adoption of the entrepreneurial mindset—run the risk of simply

adjusting journalism school to the new and exploitative realities that now dominate the journalism industry.

Of course, perceptions of ‘crisis’ proceed from a normative model and particular economic standpoint. To an entrepreneur, ‘crisis’ is ‘opportunity.’ In much of the digital journalism literature, scholars celebrate a labor force that is entrepreneurial, embraces risk, and continually reinvents itself (just as scholars tend to normatively celebrate unpaid and amateur peer-produced journalism that occurs entirely outside of market relations). As Deuze (2007) notes, speaking of the creative industries more broadly, “the dominant theme in the literature is a notion of media workers as free agents, constantly searching for new challenges and better guarantees for their creative autonomy.” However, what is missing from much of the digital journalism literature is precisely Deuze’s point that the upshot of entrepreneurialism is that a majority of workers experience more unstable, unpredictable, and precarious labor and tenuous project-based employment, even as large industrial organizations still structure much of the industry (see also Deuze’s 2011 edited collection, *Managing Media Work*.) For example, a number of scholars note the pressures that entrepreneurialism works upon media workers. As Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) suggest, tools for “audience participation and dialogue” (see also Hermida, 2009; Sheffer and Schultz, 2009) pressure journalists to be “active social media users” (371) who blend corporate and personal branding. Outside the newsroom, journalists must tackle the blurring lines between employment and private life and on-work and off-work, which is driven by social media’s almost continuous mix of informational updates (Boczkowski, 2005, 2010; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2011). At the same time, scholarship that explicitly calls for journalism to be conceptualized in terms other than the market or non-profit media have been comparatively marginalized (see Clark and Aufderheide, 2009; Goodman, 2008; Pickard and Williams, 2013).

Conclusion

The embrace of entrepreneurialism is particularly ironic given that much of the digital journalism literature is produced from within the confines of that comparatively market-protected sanctuary: the university. Indeed, universities offer protection from the disruptive economic forces that have wracked journalism and subsidize the production of knowledge, which journalists do not enjoy. Even more,

universities grant scholars institutional and symbolic power, and ready access to the foundations that wield their own symbolic and political capital (Lewis, 2011) versus the increasingly deinstitutionalized field of professional journalism.

To-date, the normative discussion around digital journalism has been too one-sided. The generally uncritical embrace of participation, deinstitutionalization, innovation, and entrepreneurialism has resulted in a conversation about the future of journalism that has failed to consider how these things may undermine other values for and roles of the press. This includes an institutional press that can work to ensure participatory equality and has the resources and the symbolic power to hold the powerful to account, as well as a profession that can be held to standards of public service, not returns on investment.

Indeed, scholars making normative claims for digital journalism and considering the institutional and regulatory contexts that promote democratically desirable practices have unceremoniously recast the key terms of normative debate from an earlier tradition of scholarship, blunting the critical edges of the “citizen participation” (Christians et al., 2009) tradition in espousing the belief that there are only individuals, not groups that are differently positioned with respect to the resources necessary to participate in journalism and democratic life more generally. And, contemporary normative theorizing of digital journalism has evacuated any role for, or responsibility of, the state, profession, or institution of journalism to create a robust public sphere, in the process failing to consider the value of a right to be heard, a socially responsible and institutionally powerful press, and inclusive and diverse public communication.

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