

## “Don’ t be stupid.” The role of social media policies in journalistic boundary-setting

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**“Don't be stupid.” The role of social media policies in journalistic boundary-setting.**

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**Abstract**

Social media are now firmly embedded in professional newsrooms, and policies and guidance within these newsrooms have evolved to include social media activities. These policies articulate and expose the underlying assumptions of the role of these new media within the traditional boundaries of the newsroom. Through thematic analysis of the policies of 17 news organisations, this research identifies and explicates the ways in which professional news organisations have moved and reinforced the boundaries of newswork to both include social media, and to bring social media under its control—to the extent of requiring newsworkers to subsume their personal online identities under their professional ones. The research identifies a number of areas of further research, including analysis of compliance with these policies and resistance to them on the part of newsworkers.

**Keywords:** social media policies, boundary-setting, journalism, newsrooms, normalisation

In October 2017, staff at the *New York Times* received an email from executive editor Dean Baquet, with updated guidelines on how to use social media in their work. Baquet informed them that

We believe that to remain the world's best news organization, we have to maintain a vibrant presence on social media. But we also need to make sure that we are engaging responsibly on social media, in line with the values of our newsroom. That's why we're issuing updated and expanded social media guidelines... Please read them closely and take them to heart. (*New York Times* 2017).

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The email combined enthusiasm for social media with a guarded concern at the dangers they bring, along with reminders of the essential values of the publication, and exhortations to maintain them. This is far from atypical. Many newsrooms have such social media policies (SMPs) to guide newswriters through the difficult intersection of traditional journalism and social media.

Studies of SMPs have revolved around how many news organisations have them (Adornato and Lysak 2017); reasons for having them (Leach, 2009); how they are applied (Bloom, Cleary and North 2016); and newsroom attitudes towards them (Ihlebak and Larsson 2016; Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014; Opgenhaffen and d'Haenens 2015; Sacco and Bossio 2016). Lee (2016) looked specifically at how SMPs frame social media. He found that they were seen as a risk to journalistic norms such as impartiality, accuracy, objectivity and neutrality; but also as an opportunity for journalistic promotion; to manage the relationship with an audience; as a source of stories; and for citizen reporters to report the news until professionals arrive on the scene. In each case, social media were seen as an opportunity where they coincided with existing newsroom values and norms rather than challenging them. Critical textual analyses of SMPs have also considered how they are used by management to describe what is and what is not permitted (Opgenhaffen and d'Haenens 2015).

Our paper takes these a step further, and analyses SMPs to see how they indicate willingness—or its absence—to change newsroom norms and journalism's boundaries to accommodate the logics of social media. What is fixed—an unshakeable principle of journalism; and what is flexible—open to negotiation? Thus we examine the underlying institutional ideologies that drive social media use, and which are revealed through analysis of the documents. This paper therefore turns to normalisation and boundary setting to analyse newsrooms' SMPs, to examine what is fixed and what is flexible.

Journalists use the guidelines “to articulate the boundaries of their work” (Belair-Gagnon 2015, 30), so these maps of journalism's changing terrain are needed for the task of boundary setting (Blaagaard 2013; Carlson 2015, 2016; Lewis 2012). Gieryn (1983) described this as “efforts to establish and enlarge the limits of one domain's institutional authority relative to outsiders, thus creating social boundaries that yield greater cultural and material resources for insiders” (Lewis 2013, 841). Theoretically, boundaries are akin to Bourdieu's fields, where ‘the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field’ (Bourdieu 1998, 40–41). Within the field, the inertia of socialisation into the field (the assumed norms and practices of the field) is challenged by disruptive forces from

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without, creating instability. This tension between inertia and instability offers an opportunity for innovation or for stagnation, for flexibility or fixity. Scholars have often framed attempted incursions by political and economic forces into journalism’s field in terms of combat (Benson and Neveu 2005; Tandoc, 2014). The rise of social media might be seen as a cultural incursion rather than political or economic, but it nonetheless impacts on what journalists and society conceive of as journalism. The role of SMPs in revealing attitudes towards the setting, maintenance and challenge of journalistic boundaries is thus the concern for this paper.

Alongside boundary-setting, the relationship between social media (blogs, user-generated content, social network services such as Facebook and Twitter, among many others) and traditional journalism can also be seen in terms of normalisation. In newsrooms, “normalizing refers to the process in which traditional practices and norms are being challenged, but instead of leading to a change (and improvement in a normative sense), the ‘new’ is being normalized, or adapted, to fit what already exists” (Hedman 2015, 281). This resolves itself in two ways: “journalists both adapt their use of social media to fit traditional professional norms and adapt those norms to fit the emergent practices of social media” (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013, 370).

This paper offers thematic content analysis of SMPs from 17 large news organisations to reveal the ideologies that drive journalistic policy to conform to or resist social media logics. We first review the literature on SMPs in newsrooms; next we consider the tense relationship between traditional journalism and social media; then review recent thought on boundaries—that is, how journalism delineates its ideology and practice as a means of self-validation—and normalisation—how organisations adopt some incursions into their working practice but resist others; and finally we assess SMPs to identify what boundary-defining ideologies underlie them, and what impact that might have on integration or rejection of social media into working practice.

### **(Social) Media Policies**

It has long been a standard for news organisations to have editorial guidelines to establish and maintain integrity, ethical standards and everyday professional practice (Boeyink 1994; Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014). These include directives on reporters’ roles and responsibilities, ethical ways to gather information, not misleading audiences or giving offence, being impartial, not causing harm, having a breadth of opinions and viewpoints, not intimidating or coercing newsmakers, as well as legal reporting restrictions imposed from beyond the organisation (e.g., BBC 2016). More recently, these have been

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extended to include best practice using social media, which the BBC pithily sums up as 'Don't be stupid.'

Journalistic codes of ethics in the US started in the early 1970s and flourished in the mid-1980s. One intention was to enforce social responsibility in the newsroom, both as a 'good' and also as defence against governmental oversight. Nevertheless, it is not clear quite how much effect these documents have, and "within the newsroom, the role of official policy is often indirect at best" (Boeyink 1994, 894). Leach (2009) started the scholarship on SMPs, observing that "Some news organizations have drawn up policies regarding ethical reporting conduct when using social media sites such as Facebook and MySpace." Some, but not all, although a lack of an SMP does not mean that a newsroom does not consider them important; a study of Norwegian editors found that even those who did not have SMPs justified their absence by saying that they wanted reporters to experiment with social media, and that they would deal with any problems as they arose, rather than offering prescriptive or proscriptive guidelines (Ihlebaek and Larsson 2016).

Bringing research up to date, Adornato and Lysak (2017) surveyed TV news directors to identify where their SMPs originated from and how they were applied in newsrooms, to find that 95% of news managers say they have an SMP, and for 78% it is a written document. But not all newswriters appreciate SMPs. Other studies have found resistance to the restrictions they brought, on the grounds that "common sense should be sufficient to make proper use of social media" (Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014, 737). Particularly, journalists resisted directives that they should have only one account for both professional and personal use.

SMPs are often extensions of existing ethical policies (Bloom, Cleary and North 2016). This means they approach a new issue according to old norms, which tends to normalise novel practice to conform to traditional (Hermida 2010; Mitchelstein and Boczowski 2009). The following statement of why SMPs are deemed necessary hints at old ideologies of speed-to-press and 'scooping', of competition between outlets, and of verification of facts leading to a valuable (economically and socially) reputation:

a clearly communicated policy about how social media will be used to report and update breaking news would benefit any news operation. It would seem in the highly charged and competitive atmosphere of local television news, stations that neglect to have such a discussion with their news staff are running the risk of having hastily posted and unconfirmed, retweeted information sent out into cyberspace, bearing the

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station’s brand and also quite possibly compromising its hard-earned reputation (Lysak, Cremedas and Wolf 2012, 204)

This drove **RQ1**: what attitudes towards social media (and hence underlying ideologies and boundaries) are indicated in newsrooms’ SMPs?

### **Social media and journalistic values**

A recurrent theme in scholarship is that social media (specifically Twitter and to a lesser extent Facebook) have opened up opportunities for news organisations, broadening their reach in many ways (Bloom, Cleary and North 2016; Hermida 2010). First, reporters can use social media to gather information from a wider circle of newsmakers to include in their stories; second, news organisations can extend their reach to audiences via social media; and third, news organisations and individual newswriters can use social media to promote their brands and their stories (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013; Paulusson and Harder 2014). The first represents an extension to the traditional newswork of gathering information; the second augments existing physical and virtual distribution networks; while the third is a relative departure for newsrooms and is more akin to promotional work that newswriters have customarily disparaged. The positive impact of social media thus ranges from high-minded benefits such as a broader public sphere and a diversity of voices contributing to news’s democratic imperative, to the less principled but more practical issue of making money (Canter 2013).

Although the literature (and the policies under scrutiny) refer consistently to ‘social media’, in practice this favours Twitter. Within the newsrooms, Twitter is privileged above other social media because in many ways it is the original social network, and because its public nature makes it an obvious tool for journalists to use (Knight and Cook 2013). Facebook use by journalists is more limited and more complex. Its structure and mechanism of engagement mean that it has greater utility as a distribution platform than as a source, and as a result it is less considered in the policies. The largest concerns regarding Facebook are in the ethics of sourcing material from users accounts (Cooper, 2012; Newton and Duncan, 2012, Whitehouse, 2010).

As with much research into new phenomena, the early phases have tended to be descriptive rather than analytical, and anecdotal—looking at specific instances of the use of social media (Ahmad 2010; Lariscy, Avery, Sweetson and Howes 2009; Stassen 2010). Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton’s study (2012) was probably the first large-scale analysis of what

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journalists use Twitter for, and marked the point where the academy began to consider social media as part of the overall functioning of newsrooms and not as a startling new phenomenon out of context with traditional media. This was followed up by a number of studies that examined the nature of journalistic output on social media, especially Twitter (Knight 2011; Lasorsa 2012; Vis 2013). These studies are the basis of a growing taxonomy of journalistic approaches to social media: as news source (Knight 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton 2012) or as personal branding for journalists (Cook 2011; Lasorsa 2012; Zeller and Hermida 2015). The intersections between journalists' personal and professional lives on social media is highlighted in a number of ways within this corpus, and the uses of social media clearly extend beyond the purely professional uses of traditional media—a source of some tension within the studies (Gleason 2010; Schulte 2009).

These scholarly works are paralleled and supplemented by a body of material produced by practitioners and academics guiding journalists working with these new media (Nardelli 2011). The amplification of non-journalistic voices represents an inherent challenge to the professionalism and standards of journalism and much discourse, especially within this professional journalistic corpus, reflects this challenge. Concerns about accuracy and being misled are particularly highlighted, as are reinstatements of the importance of remaining objective and adhering to the traditional remove of professionalism (BBC College of Journalism 2010; Eltringham 2011; Lail 2011; Silverman 2011, 2012).

Hanging over the relationship between journalism and social media is a two-edged sword: hope that the latter can bring a new life to the former; alongside a fear that it represents an attack on time-worn, hard-earned journalistic values. Much of the early research into online journalism tended to look at the new medium as transformative, with a bias towards the idea that social media would level the playing field of access to the news media (Farhi 2009; Hermida 2010; Murthy 2011). Much early thinking about social media directly links to these ideas, and to studies of citizen journalism. Such studies tend to focus on the importance of non-journalistic voices and the ability of new technologies to amplify and distribute them (Allan and Thorsen 2009; Rosenberry and St John III 2010). However, the institutional strategic use of social media by news organisations rather than by individual journalists has been less examined. This is significant because while social media are increasingly normalised within newsrooms, there is still tension in newsroom as to how they are to be used.

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### **The boundaries of journalism**

These values specifically concern boundary work, which is a “project of demarcating, defending, expanding and contesting the limits of legitimate journalism in order to consolidate and protect authority and the economic, political and personal benefits it confers” (Fakazis 2006, 6). It is needed because journalism is flexible, dependent on context and its boundaries are ill-defined, possibly undefinable, and constantly shifting (Carlson 2015). Journalists do not enjoy the security of the legitimising expertise of doctors and lawyers, for example, which would offer fixed boundaries. Carlson (2016) points out that journalism is not defined by journalists alone, but by myriad actors. Bourdieu, too, sees journalism as one field of endeavour surrounded, encroached upon and overlapped by many other fields (2005). One function of a boundary is to protect autonomy (Gieryn 1999). Boundaries bring independence, certainty, status, respect and ultimately value for those within them. Significantly, professions often wish to set their own boundaries as a mark of self-determinations. Self-governance is a key characteristic of a profession; for example, much Western, Anglo-American journalism has consistently resisted attempts to control it from beyond its own self-set boundaries, such as government oversight (Lewis 2012).

Journalism's boundaries are clearly porous, flexible, open to incursions, or under attack. They have been criticised for basic journalistic shortcomings and errors (Carlson 2014), for the entertainment values seen in lifestyle journalism and increasingly beyond (Winch 1997), and for the emergence of news actors with a distinctive, subjective agenda (Coddington 2012). More recently, they have been challenged by non-newsroom actors such as citizen journalists. Coddington (2015) sees shifting boundaries between advertising and editorial which challenge independence but also bring in much-needed revenue. Some have suggested that the boundaries of traditional journalism have been eroded by the incursions of UGC such as blogs and podcasts, citizen journalism, para-journalists such as PRs, and the impact of globalisation (Deuze 2008). Loosen (2015), meanwhile, suggests the term 'de-boundedness' to describe the result of technology, advertising and PR, and entertainment all opening up journalism. She makes the point that de-boundedness is frequently seen as a threat—as dilution or contamination rather than increase or inclusion—and has negative connotations.

But there has also been defence of these boundaries. Journalists consistently “confront controversy or challenge through the creation of insider–outsider narratives intent on re-establishing the terrain of valid news practices” (Carlson 2016, 352). Singer (2015) notes that journalists use independence, verification and accountability as badges of professionalism



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that differentiate them from non-journalists, and identifies transparency as an emerging value in expanding the boundaries to include non-professional actors. This led to **RQ2**: What boundaries are common across SMPs, representing fixed values?

### **Normalising journalism**

'Normalisation' refers to "work that actors do as they engage with some ensemble of activities (that may include new or changed ways of thinking, acting, and organizing) and by which means it becomes routinely embedded in the matrices of already existing, socially patterned, knowledge and practices" (May and Finch 2009, 540). Normalisation theory concerns how norms are generated, preserved or erased. Norms are flexible rather than fixed. They can both change how people do things, and be changed by innovative practice.

Singer (2005, 174) launched this line of scholarly enquiry and concluded that j-bloggers (journalists who also blog) mostly normalise how they use this novel form of media to conform to traditional practice: "journalists are molding this distinctive online format to fit – and in some ways augment – traditional professional norms and practices. Blogs, in other words, are being 'normalized' by journalists." For example, she found that j-bloggers preferred to remain as gatekeepers, despite Web 2.0's potential for opening the gates to a plurality of voices. When j-bloggers did link (metaphorically opening the gates) it was to other mainstream news organisations—keeping it in the family, as it were. Hermida (2009), too, observed how journalists maintain authority by normalising blogs into old forms of practice. He stated the problem as being the clash when "long-standing editorial values of accuracy, impartiality and fairness appear at odds with the notion of blogs as immediate, uncensored and unmediated" (2009, 268). Rather than adapting old forms to accommodate new norms, they tended to resist change.

These were the early days of j-blogging, however, when the normalisation process was decidedly one-way. That has changed. More recently it has become clear that normalisation is a two-way process, and social media have become "a new arena for journalists to display their professional identities, norms and ideals, but possibly also present a challenge to those norms" (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013, 369-370). Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton (2012, 13) observed how journalists "appear to be normalizing micro-blogs to fit into their existing norms and practices but, at the same time, they appear to be adjusting these professional norms and practices to the evolving norms and practices of Twitter." Hermida (2010), just a year after his earlier paper, also noted evidence that journalism was bending to accommodate the new social media logics suggested by Twitter. This duality led to **RQ3**: In

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what way do SMPs guide newswriters to adopt social media by making them conform to journalistic norms (denoting fixity)? and **RQ4**: In what ways do SMPs guide newswriters to adapt social media norms and logics into their journalistic practice (implying flexibility)?

### **Method**

The overarching question for this paper is to what extent are journalistic norms, routines and identities either maintained or developed through SMPs? To seek answers to our four questions, we analysed the SMPs of 17 news organisations in the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia. Some were available online; for others, we asked the organisations to share their documents. Previous studies tend to be limited to single countries (Ihlebaeck and Larsson 2006; Sacco and Bossio 2016), while this study takes a broader look at newsrooms for diverse countries, similar to Opgenhaffen and d'Haenens (2015). The choice of countries was driven by linguistic expediency (neither of the researchers has sufficient fluency to extend the study beyond English-language media), and by an awareness that the Anglosphere broadly shares ideological and economic structures, and that the media systems within those countries share enough commonalities to be compared meaningfully (Couldry and Hepp 2012).

Following Krippendorff's six questions (1980), the data analysed are SMPs from leading news organisations. They are defined as either official documents or memos issued to staff to guide them in the best and most ethical practice when engaging with social media in the course of their work, drawn from a wider population of news organisations worldwide. The data are analysed in the context of the disputed intersection of professionally created journalistic content, and content generated by non-professional media actors. The analysis extends to newsrooms working in the Anglo-American journalistic tradition, and the target of the inference is to assess the boundaries and the potential for normalising social media and journalism that the SMPs have been written to address. Often reporters are socialised into 'how we do things here' without reading any official document.

Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" in order to present a qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of that data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). Such analysis is useful for preliminary investigations into common issues observed in data (Green and Thorogood 2004). Two researchers initially gave each SMP close reading for thorough immersion in the data to gain a complete overview (Polit and Beck 2003) and to look for consistent themes. We followed protocols of emergent coding (Haney, Russell, Gulek and Fierros 1998) so that two researchers reviewed the SMPs for examples of these themes and consolidated their observations to include in this paper only

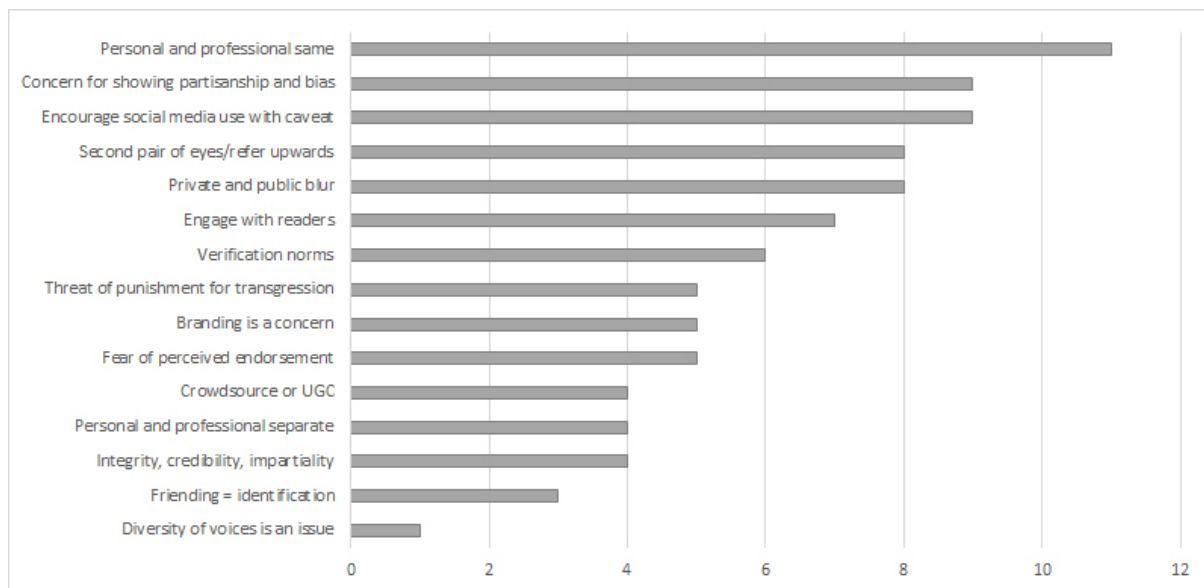
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where their opinions converged; these observations were then related to the four research questions. The first research question was measured through statements in the SMPs about social media, which were interpreted to indicate an ideology. To answer the second, we looked for claims of journalistic norms—such as objectivity, accuracy and autonomy—repeated in many SMPs. This consistency among newsrooms led us to consider these norms as points where the boundary was fixed. The third question combined these journalistic norms with references to social media, and we looked for examples of whether the relationship between the two was in favour of journalistic norms; or, to answer the fourth question, whether that relationship allowed flexibility for social media norms to influence journalistic practice.

### **Findings and Discussion**

**RQ1** asked what attitudes towards social media (and hence underlying ideologies and boundaries) are indicated in the SMPs? Are social media to be embraced or are they an area for caution (see Lee 2016)? The answer is both (*Table 1*). Nine documents stated that social media were encouraged, but with a caveat—they could be risky, they could expose a reporter or a source, or that sources needed to be verified. Reuters for example, starts its SMP stating “We want to encourage you to use social media approaches in your journalism but we also need to make sure that you are fully aware of the risks — especially those that threaten our hard-earned reputation for independence and freedom from bias or our brand.” Overall, only two organisations expressed no fear of negative consequences, and several SMPs contained multiple caveats, including the fear of been seen to be partisan or biased, and of inaccuracy.

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*Table 1: Frequency of markers of journalistic boundaries and newsroom norms raised in SMPs*

This ambivalence in turn showed underlying, unshifting ideologies: reputation, credibility, and above all concern that their integrity, independence and impartiality might be called into question. As the BBC puts it, “the simplest misstep could lead you to undermine the credibility of yourself, your colleagues, and BBC News as a whole.” Credibility and impartiality appear to be distinct border markers, so the issues of reporters liking or following someone implied partisanship, for example, which in turn could impact on audience perceptions of impartiality. The Associated Press (AP) expressed concerns that they might appear to endorse someone or something—which would affect their reputation for independence. Reuters, the *Washington Post*, the BBC and ABC similarly all feared that their reputation would be affected negatively by intemperate postings on social media by staff. Some (the *Globe and Mail*, Scripps, Reuters, Fairfax and AP) expressed it in terms of impact on their brand, offering a reminder that these are businesses, and think in marketing terms as well as journalistic values—and the two are linked.

**RQ2** asked what boundaries are common across SMPs, representing fixed values. Commonly, an SMP would make the point that social media might be new but the attitudes and values of journalism remained the same. The *Wall Street Journal* was among several to state something to the effect that their social media policy is intended as a “reaffirmation of enduring values and practices”. For instance, the expectation that reporters would verify

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(implicitly unreliable) stories, images, people and content found via social media was noted in six documents. Four, similarly, referred to journalistic values such as integrity, accuracy, speed, impartiality and credibility (*Table 2*).

The most common journalistic norm, however, mentioned nine times, was that of not appearing to take sides. The media companies recognised that it was important for reporters to contact newsmakers or external organisations via social media, such as signing up to their newsfeed or liking them; but to do so one-sidedly might expose the reporter to accusations of bias. Bloomberg is uncategorical: "Do not join groups on social networks dedicated to a particular political opinion or cause." Others take a more nuanced view, and the *Los Angeles Times* states:

If you 'friend' a source or join a group on one side of a debate, do so with the other side as well. Also understand that readers may view your participation in a group as your acceptance of its views; be clear that you're looking for story ideas or simply collecting information.

So while reporters were encouraged to follow political parties, for example, as part of their newsbeat routines, they were also advised to make comparable contact with parties on the other side of the political spectrum. Friending opened up another area for concern, too—it could inadvertently reveal someone as a source which might put them at risk. As the *Wall Street Journal* put it: "Openly 'friending' sources is akin to publicly publishing your Rolodex." The implication here is both that the publicity might be cause for concern for the source; and also that other reporters might subsequently turn to the same source, scooping the reporter who is so free with his virtual Rolodex.

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	Encourage social media use with caveat	Integrity, credibility, impartiality	Fear of perceived endorsement	Branding is a concern	Verification norms	Concern for showing partisanship and bias	Friending = identification	Personal and professional same	Personal and professional separate	Private and public blur	Engage with readers	Crowdsourc or UGC	Diversity of voices is an issue	Second pair of eyes/refer upwards	Threat of punishment for transgression
ABC	✓							✓			✓				✓
AP	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
BBC	✓	✓			✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	
BLOOMBERG	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				
FAIRFAX			✓	✓					✓						
GLOBE and MAIL		✓		✓						✓					
GUARDIAN											✓				
LA TIMES		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					
NEWS UK	✓														
NPR	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓				✓	
NYT	✓		✓			✓		✓	✓					✓	
PBS											✓		✓		
REUTERS	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
SCRIPPS	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓				✓
WASH POST					✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
WSJ						✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
YAHOO								✓						✓	✓

Table 2: news organisations' citation of markers of journalistic boundaries and newsroom norms in SMPs

RQ3 asked in what way do SMPs invite newsroom workers to adopt social media by making them conform to journalistic norms (denoting fixity). Professional use of social media overrode personal. This was the most common theme observed among the documents, in 11 cases. Sometimes that was a literal merging of the two, as in this example:

All AP journalists are encouraged to have accounts on social networks. They have become an essential tool for AP reporters to gather news and share links to our

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published work. We recommend having one account per network that you use both personally and professionally

Here, the expectation is for the reporter to have a presence on multiple networks, but to run their professional and personal online presences simultaneously. The effect is to consider the social to be subsumed into the professional. This much is made explicit in one document:

When using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc., for reporting or for our personal lives, we must protect our professional integrity and remember:

*Washington Post* journalists are always *Washington Post* journalists

The strength of the professional identity is such that it supersedes the personal or domestic identity; in journalistic terms, however, this is not new, and reporters have always 'lived and breathed' their work. What is novel is that the identity now extends into their online presence as well. By contrast, however, four (*NYT*, Scripps, Yahoo and Fairfax) made a point of referring to a separation of the two, even as they intimated that they were connected. So the *New York Times* states that

If a staff member publishes a personal Web page or blog on a site outside our company's control, the staff member has a duty to make sure that the content is purely that: personal. Staff members who write blogs should generally avoid topics they cover professionally; failure to do so would invite a confusion of roles in which the two are separated, while also blurring that separation:

The *Los Angeles Times* more explicitly acknowledged that social media had a basis in friendships and non-professional contacts, but still maintained the moral high ground that the organisation's integrity came first:

Attempts, for instance, to distinguish your high school friends from your professional associates are fine, but in all spaces one should adhere to the principle that as an editorial employee you are responsible for maintaining The Times' credibility

For reporters' personal life to leach into the professional sphere was—and is still—considered bad form as it can lead to accusations of vested interest; whereas these policy documents suggest that if professional attitudes and behaviours leach into the personal sphere, that is to be encouraged.

Further, the boundaries between private and public were blurred by social media, according to eight SMPs. They stated that even something posted privately could become public, and reflect badly on the individual or (more often) on the organisation. Issues of private and public assumed significance because a private posting could become public and have negative repercussions for the reputation of the organisation of which the reporter would

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be seen as a representative. One can almost hear AP sigh as it says “as multitudes of people have learned all too well, virtually nothing is truly private on the Internet.”

**RQ4** concerned boundaries that are more flexible, asking in what ways do SMPs guide newswriters to adapt social media norms and logics into their journalistic practice. Seven of the SMPs acknowledged that a benefit of social media was to engage the audience, rather than keeping them at a professional distance—the rules of engagement have been altered with the arrival of social media. Greater audience participation could become the ‘new normal’ for newswork. Yet, engagement with audiences was often accompanied by a caveat—not to get drawn into online fights, to ignore trolls, and to avoid a “shrill” tone of voice (*New York Times*). While the BBC saw the value in user-generated content, this was hedged with legal provisos about fair dealing, whether something was in the public domain, and how to give credit where it was due. Concern was also extended to vulnerable or distressed newsmakers, and the risks of putting them in danger on behalf of a news story. The perceived risks outweighed the benefit of reader participation, and as a result the logics of social media are unlikely to be normalised into newswork practice.

At the same time, the audience was still seen primarily as recipients of media rather than contributors. Their place was to comment on stories, and the reporters could then reply to them. But the idea that news stories could be sourced from social media, or crowdsources, or that user-generated content would be an ingredient in newsgathering, was rare—mentioned just four times. So the *Guardian*, for example, asks its reporters to “encourage readers to contribute perspective, additional knowledge and expertise. Acknowledge their additions.” Even less prominent was the suggestion that the interactivity of social media would open the door to a greater diversity of voices. This was spoken of only once, by PBS, for whom it is a core principle. Social media, then, were not to be trusted, whether content was sent in by the audience, or created by the newsworker.

Indeed, risk was a constant concern, as has been observed in earlier studies (Lee 2016, Opgenhaffen and d’Haenens 2015, Sacco and Bossio 2016). The documents showed frequent (eight) requests for reporters to refer upwards to senior editors or to human resources, or to have a second pair of eyes looking at what they post: “All postings on Dow Jones sites that may be controversial or that deal with sensitive subjects need to be cleared with your editor before posting” (*Wall Street Journal*). This applies professional journalism norms to social media, albeit specifically in a professional milieu. The implication is, however, that the individual reporter may not rely on their own instincts—and this applies to verifying a



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source, posting a comment or engaging with a reader—but should rely on the expertise of someone senior in the corporate hierarchy.

Failure to follow guidelines could lead to penalty, and four news organisations implicitly or explicitly threaten punishment for misuse of social media which brought the organisation into disrepute. The *Wall Street Journal*'s threat is veiled, that the appearance of partisanship “could open us to criticism that we have biases and could make a reporter ineligible to cover topics in the future”. Reuters reserves the right to “change your beat or responsibilities if there are problems in this area” and “in the case of serious breaches, we may use our established disciplinary procedures.” ABC states that breaches of its policy “may lead to disciplinary action including possible termination of employment,” while Scripps is gentler, and says that the “possibility of disciplinary action is not intended to limit your use of social media, but to clarify the company’s position regarding egregious behavior.” The suggestion was that involving social media values into news reporting was such a concern that through their SMPs the management threatened punishment for misuse of social media. Far from being a benefit, to be normalised into newswork, it was framed as a problem with accompanying punishment for transgression.

## **Conclusion**

This paper aimed to identify which ideologies of journalism are fixed—that is, they lie firmly within its boundaries—and which are flexible—that is, they are open to adaptation to the incursion of social media logics. The question for this paper is to what extent journalistic norms, routines and identities are either maintained or developed through SMPs as “we (as society, journalists, audience members, journalism researchers) seem to be in the middle of a process of figuring out what we regard as ‘journalism’—and its function for society” (Loosen 2015, 79).

### *A fixed boundary*

This study casts a fresh light on journalistic boundary-setting. Objectivity is often seen as the distinguishing factor that separates journalism from related activities which are seen as partisan, biased, subjective and subsequently not credible (e.g. Blaagaard 2013; Hampton 2008; Schudson and Anderson 2009; Tuchman 1972). In this analysis, however, objectivity is relatively flexible, and journalism’s boundaries are open to the subjective nature of social media. Others have similarly foreseen a move away from objectivity: “What we may be witnessing is a paradigmatic shift which unsettles even further the public/journalist

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distinction from detachment to involvement, from verification to assertion, from objectivity to subjectivity" (Tumber and Prentoulis 2003, 228).

Instead, impartiality and independence emerge as the bedrock of the profession. This concurs with earlier studies such as Sambrook (2012, 3) who observed that ideas of impartiality and objectivity—at the heart of serious news journalism for most of the last century—are now under pressure and even attack in the digital age. They emerged as journalistic norms to describe a professional editorial discipline that sought to avoid personal and political biases and to encourage trust in newspaper journalism.

Impartiality has dual benefits: it both brings credibility and supports self-determination. Similarly, Lewis (2012) divides thought on journalism's boundaries into two streams: ideologies of the representation of reality (typified by the objectivity norm) and ideologies of professional practice (typified by the independence/impartiality norm). This second is based around autonomy, protecting the profession from external influences (McDevitt, Gassaway and Perez 2002). The SMPs imply impartiality as a norm that demarcates journalism's boundaries. Inevitably, this is a matter of self-interest that also guides behaviour in newsrooms; to validate its own impartiality, journalism needs to demonise partisanship and partiality because "The commercial viability of most media businesses involves providing those solutions; so preservation of the original problems became an economic imperative" (Shirky 2008, 59).

### *Commercial consequences*

This study also has commercial implications for newsrooms. "Contests over journalism's boundaries are symbolic contests in which different actors vie for definitional control to apply or remove the label of journalism. Yet this symbolic struggle has tangible consequences as well. Gains in symbolic resources translate into material rewards" (Carlson 2015, 2). This commercial impact underlies the use of social media:

It is no surprise that there is concern among news organizations about the use of Twitter by journalists. On the one hand, they encourage their journalists to become active on Twitter and to promote the news medium and the articles that are published in order to generate traffic to the site; on the other hand, they are afraid that journalists will break news too early or tweet ill-thought-out things, bringing their objectivity (and that of the medium) into discredit (Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014, 729).

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That new technologies face resistance is nothing new. Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck identify the concerns that accompany them: “there is a fear that the use of new technologies will diminish the quality of journalism ... with the rise of blogs there was a fear that these personal platforms would have a negative influence on journalistic standards and practices” as well as worrying about “the potential influence of Twitter on the fundamental principles of journalism, such as objectivity and gatekeeping” (2014, 728). Nevertheless, boundaries are fluid, and normalisation opens the door for novelty—technological, cultural, economic, personal, and social—to be accommodated or rejected.

### *No diversity of voices*

With the single exception of NPR, these SMPs showed little interest in a diversity of voices which has been touted as a force for good in journalism; this suggests that such plurality falls outside the boundaries. The relationship between traditional journalism and social media sources is therefore more fixed than flexible. SMPs concern was frequently with branding more than with multiple voices, which indicates the true boundary battles that preoccupy the management, if not the individual reporters. If journalism closes its boundaries to social media, the impact is felt on the diversity of voices that can be heard in journalism, as resistance to social media as a source (as evidenced by the preoccupation that social media is a potential problem) will continue to reduce the breadth of voices that could be accessed, but are not (Broersma and Graham 2013; Paulussen and Harder 2014). This further suggests that the ideologies and boundaries of the personal are different from the ideologies and boundaries of the institutional, which suggests a dual track for future research, while studies so far have taken the institutional turn.

### *Dilution or augmentation?*

Further, this analysis raises the question of whether the relationship between social media and journalism should be most usefully seen as one of dilution or augmentation; do the former diminish or develop the latter? If we consider blogs as journalism, do we expand the boundaries of journalism by including blogs, or diminish its boundaries by demeaning characteristics such as objectivity and verification? On one hand, control on information is central to journalism's ideology. The SMPs show that news organisations draw social media within their boundaries when it suits them to do so; but excludes them when it is problematic or might lead to loss of brand identity or commercial value. Their concern in boundary setting is control rather than incorporation or exclusion: the boundary is seen in terms of a choice to

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be made, rather than a line to be drawn. The real value of any boundary, then, is to have the power to set it, rather than where it lies. Deuze calls it “one of the most fundamental ‘truths’ in journalism, namely: the professional journalist is the one who determines what publics see, hear and read about the world” (2005, 451). This control is directly related to key newsroom norms of independence and impartiality. “The underlying question is rarely stated but certainly implied: *How much control over content should we give up, and why?*” (Lewis 2016, 849).

This has implications for boundary studies which have thus far erred on the conservative, even reactionary side, and seen the change implicit in boundaries as a problem. Boundary work is seen in terms of hostility rather than hospitality, and as a matter of control rather than liberation; lines are to be patrolled and identities maintained, rather than each being opened up. While this may reflect a natural human resistance to change, it is a limitation on boundary theorising. Newswriters have a long history of blurring the lines between social and professional and dealing with the dilemmas such behaviour throws up; yet adapting that to a new context appears to be challenging, such that SMPs tend to have to instruct them to do it. It may be that, consistent with Ellen, Bearden and Sharma’s study (1991), once an individual is satisfied with one behaviour (using social media for social purposes) they are reluctant to change it for another (using social media for professional purposes).

### *Renegotiating boundaries*

Finally, the new generation of reporters entering newsrooms (if there will still be such a place to admit them) also play a part in renegotiating boundaries. Agarwal and Barthel (2015) suggested that new arrivals show different attitudes from traditional newswriters, such as the ‘new normal’ of transparency, individualism and risk-taking in newsroom practice. They depart from Deuze’s (2007) proposal that the internet will render journalism obsolete, and prefer instead a relationship suggested by Allan (2006) that the two sides will shape each other, leading to the kind of hybrid media system suggested by Chadwick (2013) where traditional and new are interdependent. New arrivals in online newsrooms, therefore, “are not ‘normless’, but rather are embracing a new set of norms while adapting and redefining traditional norms to their workplace routines and practices” (Agarwal and Barthel 2015, 387).

On a related point, historical contexts also set the terms of enquiry. Others have noted an issue associated with normalisation: when two forces compete for dominance, what terms

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of reference should be used to frame any discussion? Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009) saw the tensions that occur when journalists and scholars alike judge Twitter according to traditional journalistic norm.—first between old ways of practice and new possibilities; and second, from a research perspective, using old ways to look at new phenomena or creating new ways of enquiry. Similarly, Hermida (2010, 300) observes that “the professional and cultural attitudes surrounding Twitter have their roots in the working routines and entrenched traditional values of a journalistic culture which defines the role of the journalist as providing a critical account of daily events, gathered, selected, edited and disseminated by a professional organization.” In other words, it is helpful to assess the extent to which new normal is being viewed, assessed, critiqued and judged according to old norms.

#### *Limitations and future studies*

The small sample size is a limitation of this study; although it is not clear what different results might be returned by a larger sample. A dissimilar picture might be drawn if the sample included news organisations outside the Anglo-American group here, and included policy documents from the emerging economies of Asia, for example. The SMPs studied here are concerned with setting a boundary based on impartiality and independence from government intervention—which would be a radical idea indeed in China, for instance. This also demands that the results be seen in a historical context, as SMPs represent the culmination of journalistic boundaries and newsroom norms which have evolved—from a specific starting point—over a century, give or take. As a result, the gene-pool of the original organisations, launched under specific historical, economic, cultural and political circumstances, has engendered the SMPs of today. The attitudes seen in the documents studied owe as much to the newsroom attitudes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as they do to the new media logics of the early 21<sup>st</sup>. This invites research into why so much academic thought concerns the transformative power of new media (e.g. Deuze 2005; Farhi 2009; Hermida 2010; Murthy 2011) which is so at odds with the reality of newsroom practice. But, as Hedman (2015, 281) wearily says, “History shows that transforming journalism is not easy.”

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