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Out of the shadows: The editor as a defining characteristic of journalism

Journalism

Andrew Duffy

Abstract

The editor has often been hidden in scholarship under the catch-all term of 'journalist'. Yet the roles of editor and reporter, while overlapping, are distinct. That distinction is essential to make because the editorial function is one of the defining characteristics of news journalism that separates it from 'interloper media' such as blogs, public relations (PR), government missives and citizen journalism. Editors are a marker of quality control which legitimises news journalism. This article scrutinises the editor as one who negotiates among four groups with distinct values: the audience, the organisation, journalism as practice, and society. Editor-centric analysis examines how individuals in editorial systems negotiate diverse elements of a fragmented phenomenon which is routinely unified under the banner of 'journalism'. Clearer assessment of the editor thus allows for richer assessment of what is – and what is not – journalism. It directs discourse rooted in experience and ideology to legitimate journalism as a cultural form, leading consideration of how editor-centric study can be applied empirically.

Keywords Audience participation, blogs, interloper media, journalism (profession), news values, reporter, the editor

A powerful force in the newsroom, the editor is a curiously indistinct figure in the academe. Journalism scholarship has widely considered three groups of people. It has studied the reporter in terms of changing values (e.g. Hunter, 2015; Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton, 2015) and professionalisation (e.g. Deuze, 2005; Schudson and Anderson, 2009), for example. It has looked intensively at managers as newsrooms become (or fail to become) converged (e.g. Singer, 2004; Robinson, 2011). And it has turned its attention to the audience both as contributors in the form of citizen journalism (e.g. Goode, 2009; Campbell, 2015) and as a source of information via metrics and web analytics (e.g. Tandoc, 2014; Tandoc and Thomas, 2015). But the editor is often subsumed under the general term of 'journalist', and rarely catches the spotlight as an individual or an incarnation of specific journalistic functions.

Yet the editor is connected to all three groups: they direct the reporters and assess their work; they manage the converged (or otherwise) newsroom; and they decide just how much influence the people formerly known as the audience will have. The main proposition of this paper is that disparate demands, requirements and expectations meet, merge and are negotiated by the editor who enacts and manifests ideals and practices of journalism on a daily basis. The editor occupies a pivotal place in journalism as a cultural product reflecting society: they make epistemological evaluations of the correspondence between events and the way they are reported, and the way this correspondence is created through journalistic process gives it a self-defined validity. Editors are therefore one of the key ingredients in the amalgam that constructs journalism as authoritative, credible and valued in society.

Yet the editor appears to dwell in the academic shadows—by that name, at least. The four-volume *Journalism* series (Tumber, 2008) has just two entries under 'editor', one of which dates from the time of Tocqueville. Other anthologies make more frequent but invariably passing references (e.g. Allan, 2005, 2010) and few journal articles focus on the role (e.g. Beam, 1998; Hollifield, Kosicki and Becker, 2001; Gade, 2002; Sylvie, Lewis and Xu, 2010). Instead, it has been common in scholarship to use the catch-all term of 'journalist' to refer to both reporters and editors, although Schudson and Anderson (2008) do differentiate between news reporting and news editing and Sumpter makes a distinction that "reporters harvest stories from a news net … editors, on the other hand, decide how frequently and how prominently these stories will be offered" (2000: 334–335). But by and large, scholarship has subsumed editors under the label of 'journalist'; as a result, their activities are obscured.

This is problematic as the two roles of journalist and editor are distinct—although they can overlap so that journalists may edit their own work and editors may sometimes report, particularly in newsrooms where personnel numbers have been reduced and individuals take on multiple roles. But these are not their core occupations. I argue that the editorial function—embodied in the person of the editor and therefore referred to as 'the editor' throughout this piece—is one of the most significant and defining characteristics of journalism that gives it legitimacy as a form of cultural production; and consequently call for the reinstatement of the editor as a person of scholarly interest. For this paper, I refer to editors of newspapers, magazines, broadcasts or websites, whose work places them at the forefront of news gathering and dissemination, as well as desk editors (sports, lifestyle, arts, health) who oversee what appears in print, on screen and online as legitimate journalism. They may have other titles and the term 'producer' is often preferred in television news, for

example, and as a consequence often carries over into multimedia online news output. Both terms refer to the individual who oversees news production.

The editor is of interest because, I argue, they are one key element that separates journalism from non-journalistic, para-journalistic and quasi-journalistic activities—referred hereafter as 'interloper media' (Eldridge, 2014, 2018). These include blogs, civic technologies that interface between state and citizen, NGOs and other interest groups, information delivered direct from commercial and political sources bypassing the mediating effect of the newsroom, user-generated content and citizen journalism either incorporated into the newsroom or distributed alongside it. Scrutiny of the editor may therefore contribute to a more clear-sighted assessment of what is—and what is not—journalism.

Broadly speaking, editorial supervision is one factor that separates traditional journalism from user-generated media contributions which have not been looked at, judged and approved by an independent second pair of eyes with a view to informing debate in the public sphere. Naturally, there are cases of interloper media which do perform this role; just as there are editors who barely glance at a reporter's copy; while individuals who oversee commercial content such as sponsored pages or native advertising may have the title of editor. Yet despite these anomalies, as a general principle, journalistic editorial oversight may be claimed as a primary function of the editor. It is a matter of the degree to which diverse editorial functions are performed; I therefore examine the *negotiations* that underpin the editorial functions which offer one means to journalism from interloper media which encroach on its field (Bourdieu, 1998). Such examination demands reflection on the roles editors have assumed and the way these evolve in an increasingly digitised media environment; and assessing the meanings attached to those roles. Underlying this endeavour is the premise that the editor, effectively interrogated, can serve as a guide to the quintessence of journalism.

This is to employ communications and management frameworks as well as sociological approaches, because the editor is simultaneously a communicator and a manager and interfaces with the society they inform. Editors mediate among these three spheres, and each sphere informs the others. This leads to the argument that appraisal of this mediation or negotiation offers an insight into journalism, which will drive future research into its place in communication scholarship, in management scholarship, and in sociology.

Editors are markers of quality control (Singer, 2010) which legitimises news. They are gatekeepers (White, 1950; Janowitz, 1975; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009) who decide what

passes through the gate and by that decision, legitimise the result. Journalism has worked hard to set its own parameters for what and where the gate is, as well as what passes through. The industry cleaves to specific values of accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and so on as norms which give credibility to their product, and which, ultimately, give it both social and economic worth.

Journalism's claim to legitimacy is challenged, however, by interloper media: bloggers (Singer, 2007), user-generated content (Singer and Ashman, 2009; Robinson, 2010) and even satire (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009). The concern is that "nothing is more threatening than the lookalike who dissolves your identity" (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 40) so the lines between what is and what is not journalism become more contested the finer the distinction is (Eldridge, 2018). A well-researched, well-written and well-argued blog shares many commonalities with a news item or an op-ed piece, for example. A distinguishing factor is often that the former has not been edited: overseen, assessed, critiqued and improved. A scholarly analogy is that of peer review: informed experts assess an article, it is strengthened through their critique, and the editor's decision to publish or not is based on their comments and the editor's judgment. The academic audience reading these papers ascribes some value to them in part *because* of this peer-review process.

This paper aims to synthesise into a coherent vision a rich body of conflicting elements previously explored in academic thought: journalism is at once normative and pragmatic, subjunctive and reactive, discourse and practice, fixed and fluid, autonomous and networked, independent and subsidised, credible and unreliable, civic and institutional, and simultaneously ideological and functional. Editor-centric thinking helps mediate these dichotomies by examining how individuals working within editorial systems negotiate these elements of the phenomenon routinely unified as 'journalism'. This article's contribution is to synthesise these into a single coherent identity—the editor—within whom journalism's multiplicity of often-conflicting forces coalesce, allowing a single point of reference for instructive analysis of what journalism *is*. This begins with a discussion of the functional and ideological place of the editor and how that is defined by relationships with those within and beyond journalism's field of endeavour.

What is an editor?

In scholarship, the editor has widely been viewed in managerial terms. Sylvie, Lewis and Xu (2010) write about 'newspaper managers' in the first paragraph of their article on editors; the

word 'editor' does not appear until the third page. Hollifield, Kosicki and Becker (2001) refer to news executives and newsroom managers. Neither paper defines the term, other than as people with 'editor' in their title. Gade (2002: 148) uses editors and newsroom managers interchangeably; his study of editors included "top newsroom managers at the rank of department head, section editor, team leader or above." The editor, then, has been exemplified primarily according to management rather than journalistic criteria.

Yet their work is both managerial and journalistic—they lead a team and also decide what goes onto the page, broadcast or newsfeed. Beam (1998) is unusual in that his survey of over 400 senior editors identifies them as both management and journalist: they are in supervisory positions, they are likely to be aware of organisational level goals and policies, and are also concerned with audience-centric content selection. This link to the audience is key: as Carey says, "the god term of journalism—the be-all and end-all, the term without which the entire enterprise fails to make sense—is the public" (1987: 5).

In his analysis of editors, Gans (1979) saw them concerned with three groups: the readers (although mistrusting feedback in the form of letters or audience surveys from 'unknown' readers, for example); their colleagues who gave guidance as to what they thought readers would think of a story; and their superiors in the organisation. Silvie and Huang studied mid-level editors and identified four values. In order of importance to editors, they were "journalistic, audience, organizational and social" (2008: 62). I propose that the significance of the editor as a legitimiser of journalism lies in how they negotiate within and among these four values.

This approach to scrutinising the editor as mediator of competing interests allows for analysis of each of these interests and the weight it is given in a journalistic (and interloper media) milieu. Harrison has described part of the picture: "The editor liaises between journalists and the top levels of the organization, and needs to maintain control in the newsroom and make sure that journalists adhere to and follow organizational news policy" (2006: 139). Soloski, meanwhile, identifies a variety of activities the editor does: "select[s] the stories … criticize[s] the work of the new staff …acts as the arbiter of disputes … controls the content of the newspaper … change[s] their stories … [and is] in a no-win situation, caught between management and the news department" (1989: 220–222). But both miss Carey's uniting 'god term' of journalism—the audience—which guides an editor's mediation and allows them a moral victory in this 'no-win situation'.

To bring coherency, this paper scrutinises the editor as he or she—and in news journalism it is more often he (Chambers and Steiner, 2005)—relates to Sylvie and Huang's four values. An analysis of these values that meet in and are moderated by the editor is necessary for a firm base for future study. To do so, this paper offers the following definition of the editor as

> An individual who oversees newsgathering and dissemination in order to benefit society by contributing to informed debate in the public sphere; who negotiates a balance among audience interests, organisational interests and journalistic principles in order to achieve this goal; who is an arbiter of what is distributed as journalism; and who in doing so helps to legitimise the place of journalism as a form of cultural production and a generalised social good.

The editor and journalistic practice

While editors cover a multiplicity of topics from lifestyle to business to sport, this paper primarily concerns news journalism which involves "facets of professional identity within a public service tradition … this categorisation invokes and evokes ideals and standards that revolve around tenets of social responsibility, speaking truth to power, and providing expert analysis" (Eldridge, 2014: 3). Questions of identity based on ideals and standards beg the question of who sets the terms by which journalism operates. Journalists try to set their own, in order to "retain definitional control of the field, its problems and potential solutions" (Dahlgren, 1992: 2). This strand of research into how news journalism legitimises itself goes back to Schudson (1978) and later Zelizer (1992). It involves boundary work, in which boundaries that define a profession are rhetorically contested, tested, negotiated, renewed and constantly rebuilt (Gieryn, 1983). Journalism's claims to professionalism are based on autonomy, self-consciously delinking their work from adjacent and intertwined fields (Schudson, 1978). Much metajournalistic discourse, primarily among journalists, is protective, jurisdictional and concerned with forming borders to "negotiate the cultural authority of journalists as legitimate chroniclers of events" (Carlson, 2016: 350). Even within journalism's larger boundaries there are other boundaries between tabloid and quality newspapers, photojournalists and paparazzi, and citizen- and consumer-oriented media, for example (Bishop, 1999).

Bourdieu's field theory has thus frequently been used as a framework for analysis of boundaries and the interplay between stasis and change in journalism. A field is a "microcosm, which has its own rules, which is constituted autonomously and which cannot

be understood from external factors" (Bourdieu, 1998: 44). Actors within the field share what Bourdieu calls a *doxa*, an understanding of the rules of engagement in the field, the boundaries that to some extent delineate it from other fields, as well as the received ethics and ideologies of the field. The editor may be seen as one of the leading figures who maintain and direct the *doxa*, socialising reporters into it and deciding what is journalistic best practice.

Every field—journalism included—attempts to maintain its identity while being assailed by the forces of change from adjacent fields; and, naturally, seeking to impose its own ideals on those adjacent fields when possible (Vos, Craft and Ashley, 2011). Champagne and Marchetti (2005) observe that with the number of new entrants into the digital information sphere—specifically bloggers—the field of journalism is open to many challenges. Eldridge (2014) refers to 'interloper media' which challenge the primacy and claims to legitimacy of journalism by claiming both its antagonistic role towards those in authority, and membership of its in-group. Fields are worth protecting because they bring rewards: "boundaries are powerful social constructions that affect the distribution of resources as well as the allotment of 'epistemic authority,' which … denotes knowledge practices accepted by others as legitimate" (Carlson, 2016: 360). The editor, and journalism as a field, benefit by defining it in such a way that conforms to their long-held working practice—although as the financial and cultural rewards become less certain, the boundaries of the field are being renegotiated.

Carlson (2016) mentions government-officials, letters to the editor, PRs, citizen reporters, audience metrics, news sources, programmers and foundations which all interact with journalists, and offers this as evidence that the lines between journalist and interloper media are blurring. This is to define boundaries by what they exclude, however. If defined by what they incorporate and what they allow to enter, a different interpretation emerges: that these examples of interloper media can actually *become* journalism. They leave their own fields and become incorporated within the boundaries of journalism. They have been filtered through the processes of journalism (fact-checking; selection/rejection; editing; framing) and given new meaning within the confines of news articles. A government official working with a PR practitioner will craft a message and send it to a journalist hoping for or even expecting coverage; the process of journalism—which can be weak or robust—lies in turning that message into journalism. Journalism is porous; much of what crosses its membrane becomes integrated into its mission. An analogy would be nutrients entering a system for its growth. Naturally, to continue the analogy, toxins can also enter the system: citizen reports may turn out to be false; news sources lie or are mistaken; and corporations and government officials

may sabotage the media from within for their own agendas. But once content from beyond the field is incorporated, it becomes journalism.

The editor and the audience

Journalism is essentially public facing—it is "truth-telling … directed in the public interest and for the public good" (Jacquette, 2010: 218). It plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion by contributing to debate in the public sphere (Habermas, 1999). As one editor says, "we fight for our readers in the newsroom" (Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc, 2018: 445). This public focus has been taken on board so closely that it has become subsumed into journalism itself as a *prima facie* principle. But, as is evidenced by the multiplicity of interloper media encroaching on journalism's territory intending to gain from its legitimacy while ignoring, bypassing or subverting this prime principle for personal, corporate or political gain, there is a need to disentangle journalism and its audience. As per Carey (1987), the audience is a god term for the editor and journalism's main purpose is to "provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007: 17). It legitimates certain points of view, amplifying some and diminishing others (Green, 1992; Schudson, 2003). As a result, most studies of journalist-audience interface have been normative, considering the media's responsibilities to educate and inform, mobilising citizens to engage with civic and political life (e.g. Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996). And yet it seems unlikely that such high-minded responsibilities are uppermost in the editor's mind on a day-to-day basis. Their concern is more likely 'will this interest the audience?' and 'what would the audience want to know about this?'

Understanding of the audience has historically been based more on instinct than on research, and this position nevertheless allowed the editor to declare their audience-focus as valid. Now, the understanding of the audience is based more on research than instinct, and this greater understanding should result in greater validation for editors' news selection. Yet this is far from evident and one of the ironies of modern news media, in the global north at least, is that unprecedented access to what audiences like has been accompanied by an equally unprecedented loss of those audiences.

Nonetheless, digitalisation has transformed how editors perceive their audience. They can no longer assume that it is passive; instead, it is 'generative', capable of active participation with individual needs and desires (Anderson, 2013). This has led to a democratisation of news presentation (Nah and Chung, 2009) where editors must accept that audience contributions

are becoming part of the new media environment. Newsrooms also turn to web analytics and metrics to guide editorial decisions (Anderson, 2013; Tandoc, 2014; Vu, 2014; Zamith, 2018). This grows in importance as editors are expected to engage the audience, pursuing the interactive logics of digital media creation and distribution. Where the audience once was imagined (Gans, 1979) metrics mean they have become an increasingly real force in newsrooms (Anderson, 2011). Popular stories move up a news site while unpopular ones move down or out (Usher, 2013; Tandoc, 2014; Vu, 2014).

Further, audiences' and editors' ideas of what constitutes news is likely to differ (van der Wurff and Schönbach, 2014). Boczkowski and Peer (2011) note a 'choice gap' between the audience which favours 'soft' news about crime, sports and technology, and journalists who favour 'hard' news about public affairs, politics and economics. Other research has consequently been more concerned with what the audience themselves expect from journalists. Nah and Chung (2012) surveyed news audiences in the US, but were limited by using Weaver and Wilhoit's typology, based on journalistic principles and ideals. Mellado and colleagues (2012) surveyed journalism students—who exist somewhere between the reporter and the audience and as McNair (2005: 42) says, "they, and their audiences, will define in the end what journalism is going to be in the twenty-first century"—to identify four dimensions of journalistic role: citizen-oriented, consumer-oriented, watchdog, and loyal (to state). The first three of these have a much clearer audience orientation rather than the public-sphere orientations of earlier typologies. Bro (2008), meanwhile, quotes a *Washington Post* journalist saying that the industry needs to move away from the people journalists write *about*, and towards the people who journalists write *for*.

Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc (2018: 437) consider audience-oriented editors who are guided by analytics, and conceptualise them as "primarily acting as an intermediary between audience data and the newsroom … both informing the newsroom about audience engagement with the news and providing insight to the editorial team about how to make decisions about content in ways that may be received more favorably by the audience." Yet maintaining a focus on audience metrics runs the risk of decoupling journalism from its civic duty by being more concerned with what the audience wants rather than what the audience needs (Ferrer-Conill and Tandoc, 2018). A conceptual and operational lacuna therefore exists between learning about the audience via metrics, and applying that knowledge to news selection and framing. That constitutes the art of the editor who selects and directs content based on the science of the engagement editor who provides insight.

The editor and the organisation

Studies often speak of 'journalists' and 'managers' as two discrete camps within news organisations. Editors have a foot in both camps, however, and may be allotted to one or the other depending on what they do. When they seek objective facts, they are clearly in the former camp; when they discipline a reporter for not doing so, they have a foot in each; and when they angle a story to conform to the news organisation's business or political agenda, they may be considered firmly in the second camp. Accordingly, management as an editorial function is routinely written about in more pragmatic and less idealistic terms than the journalism that is being managed (e.g. Bunce, 2017).

Even if they work ostensibly for an audience, the public may still not be the editor's primary focus. They may look closer to home; as Bell puts it, "mass communicators are interested in their peers, not their public. Fellow communicators and co-professionals are their salient audience" (1991: 90). Editors may thus look inwards as much as outwards—albeit inwards at professional values based on an appeal to 'the public'. They also consider the (usually profit-driven) news organisation which employs them. This requires negotiation and Bunce observes "a direct conflict between management's profit objectives and journalistic values" in one Reuters newsroom as it evolved to emphasise business news (2017: 2). Tension thus exists between the editor's will to represent the interests of the audience and that of the organisation (Breed, 1955; Bantz, 1985; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Balčytienė, Raymaeckers and Vartanova, 2015). In this struggle, studies have shown that journalistic principles are likelier to be abandoned than commercial activities (Altschull, 1996). During the 1980s, tensions increased as media organisations became more profit motivated (Underwood, 1995); and as revenue sources wither away, that conflict is repeated and amplified (Donsbach, 2010).

The traditional business models that media organisations have relied upon are changing, in the west or global north at least. Native advertising is just the latest in a line of quasi-journalistic offerings that blur the lines between news and commerce (Carlson, 2015) as news organisations facing environmental uncertainty adopt a more marketing-oriented strategy. The separation between editorial and business functions at a traditional newspaper, where the two were conceived as distinct entities, is being shaken. Nowadays, however, the growing phenomenon of the integrated newsroom has editorial and business departments collaborating to ensure the development and perhaps survival of their product.

A second organisational role of the editor is to socialise reporters. Workers conform to standards set by editors and management (White, 1950; Epstein, 1973; Rimestad and Gravengaard, 2016) and reporters are "socialized quickly into the values and routines in the daily rituals of journalism" (Schudson, 1989: 273). Over time, policies and attitudes are institutionalised into norms and routines, practised almost unconsciously in the pursuit of efficiency (Gans, 1979) and because it makes reporters and reporting easier to manage (Soloski, 1989). Socialised reporters pursue particular agendas and frame stories in a certain way because it will find favour with their editor. They self-impose certain professional boundaries which will benefit their career, following a path carved by their predecessors who now have risen to editorial positions.

Organisational cultures also influence newsroom decisions (Breed, 1955; Hanusch, 2017); at the same time, a generalised 'journalistic culture' transcends diverse newsrooms (Tuchman, 1973; Zelizer, 1997). Yet such overarching professional routines may conflict with the demands of the organisation (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) and once again, as with the contest between principles and commerce, organisational culture often wins out over journalism (Breed, 1955; Gieber, 1964). The odds may be stacked in favour of the organisation, and senior editors "are in part chosen because they have demonstrated their similarity to (or their willingness to comply with) their publisher's policy preferences" (Reisner, 1992: 971). Much of the literature, Eliasoph (1997) notes, indicates that organisational, social, professional, cultural and personal ideologies all direct journalism towards maintaining dominant ideas. This raises the question of how within the organisation an editor negotiates innovation against continuity, and whether they maintain the status quo more often than challenging it. Editors must concern themselves with expectations of both audience and organisation, which may conflict or be ambiguous (Jackson and Schuler, 1985). Inconsistency is also an opportunity for negotiation between the individual journalist and the perceptions of society (e.g. Thoits, 1991).

The editor and society

One of the more fundamental truths in journalism is that "the professional journalist is the one who determines what publics see, hear and read about the world" (Deuze, 2005: 451). Gatekeeping theory therefore proposes the editor (or more commonly 'journalist') as one who is able to discard certain news items while sending others on to the audience (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). Editors are gatekeepers (Janowitz, 1975; Löffelholz, 2008; Wahl-Jorgensen and

Hanitzsch, 2009) deciding what goes into the news feed and what does not. Gatekeepers present a picture of the world for an audience to view. That may involve generating original news items or curating from other news organisations, selecting stories based on both whether they are 'in the public interest' and whether they are 'of interest to the public'. The choice of news often transcends the everyday interests of the audience to connect with something greater, a broader social, economic or political significance. Equally, it can be argued that the importance is less to the audience than to the news organisation itself which benefits from association with 'serious' news stories that attract advertisers wanting to reach wealthy audiences who they associate with such articles, rather than those associated with more trivial or tabloid fodder.

This, however, presents a dated view of the editor-as-gatekeeper, harking back to a time when news rested in the domain of print. As the news industry changes, established normative rules of journalism are also changing and current scholarship, based on old models, provides an inadequate understanding of the rapidly evolving news ecosystem. For example, scholars have argued that audiences now play an equal if not more influential role to journalists in traditional media gatekeeping (Tandoc, 2014; Vu, 2014). Instead of a one-way flow of information, two-way communication is now more common. This in turn raises epistemological questions of the editor's role in societal terms. What qualifies an editor to sit in judgment over what constitutes news? Do they simply reiterate existing hegemonies, or do they challenge and transform them? Schudson (2003) certainly saw it as the former, but the changes wrought by digitisation re-open the question. Old epistemologies based on objectivity are being challenged by a constructivist approach based on multiple subjectivities, synthesised with a realist, empirical, fact-based approach (Ward, 2018). This in turn alters the relationship between news media and society—once again, negotiated by the editor—so that the former no longer claims to deliver the 'first draft of history' but instead offers a flow of information into which the audience dips a metaphorical cup. This new paradigm is accompanied by renegotiation of justification for taking a gatekeeper role which can be based either on an idealistic view of a social, public-sphere role for news; or on a pragmatic view of what sells; or on a constructivist attitude that news is an accretion of ideals, evidence and subjective opinions that combine into a phenomenon that fits a broad consensus of 'news'.

Conclusion

The final step is to discuss how editorial functions, incarnated in the editor as a 'person of interest' can shape ways in which journalism is understood, performed and consumed. The analytical value of scrutinising editorial negotiations derives from the ability to connect the performance of journalism to more ideological perspectives. As Carlson (2016) observes, journalism is socially embedded and institutionalised, defined and redefined by the discourses that surround it. Scrutiny of the editor directs discourse rooted in experience and ideology to legitimate journalism as a cultural form, leading consideration of how a clearer understanding of the editor's functions can be applied empirically and in what loci it might be of use.

First, a clear-sighted assessment of the editor has application in studies of journalistic roles. A common starting point has been ideological—considering the role of journalists in society and asking what function they play in the public sphere—rather than practical or professional (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Hanitzsch, 2011). To date, typologies of journalistic roles have based on ideals of what a journalist should be doing to contribute to debate in the public sphere in support of liberal democracy. They are essentially normative and Mellado and Van Dalen (2013: 861) say that roles are "journalists' own formulation of how they ought to do their work." Equally, however, it is imperative to examine what journalists actually *do* do their work, and from that extrapolate their defining characteristics. It is in this vein that this paper proposes that one characteristic of journalism is embodied in the editor negotiating the demands of the audience, the organisation, the profession and society.

The central proposition offered here is that different interests meet, merge and are negotiated by the editor, and can be observed as they are made manifest in practice. These interests may also be witnessed outside journalism and the editor's persona, and may be embodied in interloper media content as well (Eldridge, 2014, 2018). This proposition may be tested, for example, by analysis of textual output assessing whose interests are served and how are they balanced; or through ethnographies of newsroom and non-newsroom activities among those creating and subsequently directing those texts. Each of these would give an opportunity to refine the central proposition through exposure to real-world situations. A starting point would be qualitative research comprising interviews with editors to examine how they negotiate their complex roles and how digitisation changes those negotiations. Naturally, such self-reports must be approached with caution (Tracy, 2013), and as with all interpretive qualitative studies, reflexivity on the part of the researchers is key (Babbie, 2011) as is an acknowledgment that the results from any one newsroom are not generalisable to others. Further empirical studies can include surveys of newsmakers (of all kinds) and interloper

media content generators as well as audiences. Case studies of editorial careers would offer a longitudinal framework showing change over time. But rather than the unitary focus on, say, management, an editorial career could be analysed with reference to the variety of stakeholders whose interests are negotiated and amalgamated within the editor, to observe mutating priorities and impacts of external stimuli, with a view to how it impacts on the final product of journalism. Finally, how an algorithm chooses which stories to add, move up, move down and remove from a news feed (Tandoc, 2014) would drive study into how much it embodies the functions of the editor, and how that situation came about.

The experience of journalism and the environment within which editors work vary across the world; studies in the declining markets of the global north might be placed alongside studies in the emerging media economies of the global south, for example. Studies have consistently shown national differences in journalism (e.g. Hanitzsch et al 2011; Lee, 2005; Örnebring and Mellado, 2016; Yin, 2008). The relationship between editor and state will be different in, for instance, China, India and Venezuela; while that with the audience will vary between Russia, South Africa and Vietnam. Cross-cultural comparisons would further illuminate the proposition put forward here.

Similarly, emerging curatorial newsroom paradigms such as Yahoo, newswires such as the Associated Press, public-service newsrooms such as the BBC, and new online-only newsrooms such as BuzzFeed or the Huffington Post all offer diverse systems to study journalism's relationship with audience, society, and management structure as negotiated by and embodied in the editor. For instance, one study of online-only journalists showed that editorial meetings are a thing of the past and they rarely engage with an editor (Agarwal and Barthel, 2015). Finally, whether the news is free to the audience or paid-for will inevitably inform negotiations among stakeholders, manifested in the activities of the editor. For example, an editor would oversee an advertorial, sponsored content or native advertising which are increasingly features of news offerings (Carlson, 2015), yet whether this editorial oversight would qualify this content as journalism is debatable. While the editor plays a role on defining what is and is not journalism, the mutability of the field will continue to throw up cases where definitions become problematic.

Identifying the editor as one of the defining characteristics of journalism also gives a framework for when interloper media activity might be brought under the umbrella of journalism. When a fact-based blog, for example, is edited by a third-person so that it no

longer represents the interests and opinions of just one person or organisation, and is created in order to help the audience rather than promoting a narrow agenda or commercial purpose, then it might be considered journalism. It does not matter whether its creators consider it as such or not. Looking at the obverse—non-journalism appearing in newspapers—Carlson (2016: 357) urges against assuming "an exact correspondence between actors and sites" – i.e. not everything a journalist does is journalism, and not everything that appears in a newspaper is news. For sure. When a journalist gives a speech or writes a tweet, it is not journalism; and when a minister's letter appears in a newspaper, it is also not journalism. Yet the uniting factor here is that neither has been significantly edited; they are valued because they represent a subjective opinion rather than an objective, collective report. Thus, if non-journalism can appear in journalistic sites, then journalism can also be discerned among non-journalistic sites. One differentiating factor is the editor because, as Robinson (2007: 311) was memorably told by one "someone's gotta be in control here."

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