The ethics of local media across the globe

The International Journal of Communication Ethics
Vol.18 No.3/4 2021 ISSN 1742-0105

Special double issue

edited by Tom Bradshaw and Paul Wiltshire

ethical space

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Back issues
Back issues are available from the Publishers at the above editorial address.

ISSN 1742-0105
ISBN 978-1-84549-795-8

Aims and scope

The commitment of the academic quarterly, *Ethical Space*, is to examine significant historical and emerging ethical issues in communication. Its guiding principles are:

- internationalism,
- independent integrity,
- respect for difference and diversity,
- interdisciplinarity,
- theoretical rigour,
- practitioner focus.

In an editorial in Vol. 3, Nos 2 and 3 of 2006, the joint editor, Donald Matheson, of Canterbury University, New Zealand, stresses that ethics can be defined narrowly, as a matter of duty or responsibility, or ethics can be defined broadly 'blurring into areas such as politics and social criticism'. *Ethical Space* stands essentially at the blurred end of the definitional range. Dr Matheson observes: 'As many commentators have pointed out, a discussion of ethics that is divorced from politics is immediately unable to talk about some of the most important factors in shaping communication and media practices.'

The journal, then, aims to provide a meeting point for media experts, scholars and practitioners who come from different disciplines. Moreover, one of its major strands is to problematise professionalism (for instance, by focusing on alternative, progressive media) and highlight many of its underlying myths.

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Abramis Academic, ASK House, Northgate Avenue, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 6BB, UK.
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EDITORIAL

Challenges facing local media and its practitioners across the globe

A free press is one where media outlets, whatever their size, have the liberty to publish without hindrance by the chilling mechanisms of censorship – whether those mechanisms are explicit, or whether they are covert and more subtle. Freedom of speech campaigners will, therefore, have let out a cheer when this year's Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov, journalists who have defied threats and intimidation to defend freedom of expression in the Philippines and Russia respectively.

The Nobel committee praised Ressa, the co-founder of the news website *Rappler*, for fearlessly championing freedom of expression in order to 'expose abuse of power, use of violence and growing authoritarianism in her native country'. Muratov was commended for pursuing a similar free-speech agenda in Russia as editor of the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, despite an increasingly hostile environment for independent journalism. Muratov dedicated the prize to his newspaper colleagues who had been killed for their audacity to try to get to, and publish, the truth. Conferring the awards, the committee said: 'Free, independent and fact-based journalism serves to protect against abuse of power, lies and war propaganda.'

Those at the frontline of standing up for free, independent and fact-based journalism are the local media, who are – or at least should be – at the heart of their communities and the issues that matter to them. This special double issue of *Ethical Space* focuses on the many contemporary challenges facing local media and its practitioners across the globe.

In their agenda-setting paper for this issue that offers a wide-ranging survey of the literature on local journalism, David Baines and Agnes Gulyas tease out many of the ethical issues inherent in discussions about local media. Underlying their exploration is a recurring tension between types of local journalism which deliver benefit for the public, and those which deliver benefits to what

they term the elite – those having powerful commercial and political interests. The sustainability of community rather than the maximising of profitability should, they argue, be a guiding principle in strategies and policies around the future of local journalism: 'A journalism which serves public benefits, facilitates and is immersed in the practices and processes of community.'

If giving a voice to the once silenced and being a part of community are key facets of ethical journalism, then Kristy Hess, Kerry McCallum, Lisa Waller and Alanna Myers provide a powerful blueprint of how local journalists can play a central role in the community they serve following collective trauma. 'Local journalism and the ethics of inquiry' considers the local media's coverage of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia. Informed by interviews with editors and reporters from local media who covered the clergy sexual abuse scandal, they advocate an approach to journalism reminiscent of Martin Bell's 'journalism of attachment' (1998), in which the journalist acts as a sensitive yet professional witness to the survivors of injustice. They explore this in the context of journalists building trust within the communities they report on, and highlight the ways in which local journalists can take an active role in the recovery process following trauma and work with the community 'in the process of healing'.

Hess, McCallum, Waller and Myers point to a new understanding of the skills and attitudes that local journalists may need, both to report ethically and to gain their audience's trust. Ruth Stoker, in her paper 'Trust us, we are local journalists – how the desire to be trusted shapes early career practitioners' understanding of ethical journalism in the UK legacy press' makes an important contribution to this debate, too. Stoker highlights a tension in UK local journalists' training. On the one hand, there is the formally facilitated work-based training schemes which frame ethics through the lens of a code of practice. On the other, there is the informal learning that occurs through social interactions with colleagues and members of their local community. Through interviews with journalists from the British legacy press, Stoker concludes that the 'desire to be perceived as trusted by their community' – and to be accepted into that community – is a powerful influence in shaping trainee journalists' understanding of media ethics.

Community of another sort emerges in David Randles' exploration of football fan-based media and how it creates 'glocal' identities. Based on interviews with the people behind some of England's most prominent fan-based platforms, 'New "glocal" players: Exploring the emergence and position of fan-produced football digital media' investigates how legacy media companies and their traditional reporting practices are being challenged, and in some ways subverted, by the material that is being produced online by

fans. The ways in which this is disrupting the sports media ecosystem are explored, alongside the emergence of transnational glocal fan identities, in which 'behaviour previously only associated with local supporters is now being replicated globally'. The paper stimulates questions about the evolving professional identity of sports journalists and associated issues around how this growing supply of fan-produced content – disseminated by social media – may or may not be regulated.

A thread that runs through many of the contributions to this special issue is the extent to which local journalism is wilting and dying due to the size and number of news deserts – geographical areas whose communities are no longer served by a news organisation. Desertification arguably represents an existential crisis for local journalism, and its consequences arguably spread far wider than the local media industry itself, potentially undermining the broader fabric of community. Marcelo Fontoura and Sérgio Lüdtke explore the overlapping issues of media ethics and desertification in 'Ethics and journalism in Brazil: A study of local journalism through the Brazilian News Atlas', and suggest that the business model of many local media outlets will need to change if the drought is to be contained.

Paul Wiltshire, a former local newspaper executive, now an academic who has helped guest-edit this issue, challenges the twin concepts of endemic news desertification and stagnation. He explores the evolving local media ecology in the United Kingdom, and through interviews with editors suggests that a process of revivification is occurring. Traditional news publishers are expanding into fresh areas by establishing new outlets and enlarging their editorial footprints. This is occurring alongside hyperlocal enterprises and the emergence of new players, with many of those involved welcoming the competition.

But what of the composition of the staff working on such titles? To what extent are they reflecting the communities they serve? Marcus Ryder, a media diversity campaigner with a range of media awards to his name, says they are currently failing abysmally. Ryder makes an impassioned plea for far-reaching changes to the UK media industry – both at local and national levels – in order to improve representation. The start of his piece is striking, and the call for action does not relent: 'For many journalists of colour the media profession can be a hostile environment to navigate. We have to give them the tools not only to survive but to thrive. Not doing so would not only be counterproductive in achieving greater media diversity but ethically irresponsible.'

The responsibilities of the freelance local sports reporter in France are of concern to Matthieu Lardeau, himself both a freelance and an

academic. Lardeau draws attention to the ethical and professional challenges confronting sports freelances and, in so doing, he highlights the complicated gradations of professional identity that shape practices on the sports desks of local news operations in France.

Elsewhere in this edition, there are plenty of other points to be made. Margaret Hughes finds Tony Harcup's *What's the point of news? A study in ethical journalism* to be particularly timely, while Sarah Drummond hails *What's the point of Ofcom?*, edited by John Mair, as a sage, accessible and engaging collection on the future of the UK's broadcast regulator. Also in our book reviews, Ian Case Punnett's monograph *Towards a theory of true crime narratives: A textual analysis* is appreciated by Barbara Henderson as a 'clear, entertaining and useful starting point in a little-theorised area of study'.

Rachel Matthews, meanwhile, praises *The Routledge companion to local media and journalism*, edited by Agnes Gulyas and David Baines, as a way of navigating the storm surrounding local journalism 'so that the mess and chaos is seen as an opportunity, rather than a threat'. And it is to Gulyas and Baines to whom we can return for the final reflections on this double issue. Local journalism, they state in this issue's opening paper, is at a key moment in its evolution, its future uncertain. 'Local media,' they write, 'are at a point of inflection: approaching the end of an epoch defined by corporate, profit-seeking approaches and entering another in which the sustainable delivery of a public benefit will be more central. But as we have seen, powerful commercial and political interests still seek to shape local media landscapes to their own advantage. On that point of inflection, the future of local media is finely balanced.' It is hoped this special double issue provides rich reflections from across the globe to further inform views at this key moment in the evolution of local media.

Tom Bradshaw,
The University of Gloucestershire,
Joint editor of this special issue

PAPER

David Baines and Agnes Gulyas

Ethical implications of key concepts and issues in current local media research

This paper reports on current issues in research into local media and journalism, and identifies ethical implications emerging from these investigations. It explores the key concepts of locality and community – and considers in turn six key issues: power relations, historical continuity/discontinuity, sustainability, local media gaps/deserts, a collaborative turn, regulatory intervention and subsidy systems. We find these explorations keep returning to the tensions between forms and models of local journalism which deliver benefit for the public and for the elites – powerful commercial, corporate or political interests. A journalism which serves public benefits, we suggest, facilitates and is immersed in the practices and processes of community. Research suggests that, in some regions, local media are at a point of transition from a predominantly profit-seeking approach towards one which focuses on sustainable delivery of public benefit. But we find that on that point of inflection, the future of local media and journalism is finely balanced.

Key words: ethical journalism, locality, community, sustainability, public benefit, local media research

Introduction

Local media are key pillars supporting communities across the world. At their best, they deliver trusted information and analysis pertaining to local public and political institutions, structures and processes, help build and maintain social connectivity, generate and reinforce representations of place, community and a sense of belonging. They create a communicative space of civic, social and cultural engagement, host advertising and generate economic activity (Baines 2014: 340). All of which give rise to, and invite scrutiny of, a range of ethical concerns and considerations. Yet for researchers, local media have until recently tended to lie in the

shadows of their national and global counterparts. The canon of work on local media is fragmented across disciplines, national and regional boundaries, and platforms – newspapers, broadcasting, online and social media. Each segment comes with its own investigators and theoretical approaches.

The fragmented nature of the field is reflected in the varied definitions and approaches that have emerged, and it is important to revisit key concepts and consider ethical implications which merit further consideration. The pandemic has refocused attention on the salience and significance of local media in their communities and this special edition of *Ethical Space* on local media and journalism is timely in responding to the recent surge of academic interest in the local. This opening paper of the special double edition first explores two key concepts of the field, local and community, then considers six key issues that emerge from our comprehensive survey of current research into local media and journalism, each of which raises concerns that invite interrogation from an ethical perspective: power relations, historical continuity/discontinuity, sustainability, local media gaps/deserts, the collaborative turn and regulatory intervention and subsidy systems (Gulyas and Baines 2020).

Key concepts: Local and community

The terms 'local' and 'community' are in everyday use, their meanings taken for granted; rhetorical, ideological, charges they carry pass under the radar. 'Local' is defined, at its most simple, in place-based terms – nearness, where we live our everyday lives. It carries positive connotations of familiarity. But it is to the symbolic category of localism that means 'different, often contradictory, things to different people at different times. … not a single, static site', to which Christopher Ali (2017: 5) draws our attention. He invites us to interrogate the concept by going 'beyond place to include elements of culture, identity, and language' (Ali 2015: 107). The local is also a mediatised social space, which Lefebvre (1991) conceptualises as a compound of interrelationships between perceived space (people's activities in a landscape), conceived space (spatial representations) and lived space (imagined through myths, symbols and ideologies).

When we speak of local media, definitions of local are also geographical. (This remains largely the case in respect of online and social media platforms, for example, neighbourhood WhatsApp and Facebook groups.) However, such spaces are also created by local media companies as part of an organisational strategy, a model based on an audience within a distribution area or transmission footprint. But here too, the local refers 'both to the merchandising strategy that sustains a newspaper and the editorial philosophy that defines its mission' (Pauly and Eckert 2002, cited in Lee 2020: 419). Irene Costera Meijer similarly argues that from the

media business's point of view, 'What counts as local, community or regional journalism may be clear. … From a consumer angle it depends on people's feelings of connection to a particular space, for some a neighbourhood, for others a province' (2020: 358).

However, the extent to which much of local media can claim to be 'local' is questionable. Bob Franklin (2006) has observed of largely corporate-owned organisations, 'local newspapers are local in name only; the town or city emblazoned on the newspaper's masthead may be one of the few remaining local features of the paper', a criticism equally valid of nominally local TV and radio in Britain and the USA (McDonald and Starkey 2016). Ultimate owners of titles or broadcasters may be national or multinational corporations, while reporters are often transient professionals, trainees, based in a central remote hub; editors and advertising staff are serving many titles and much content is shared across the chain. Yet local media content matters to their critical political function. Rasmus Nielsen's analysis of local newspapers in Denmark identified them as 'keystone media' within local media ecologies; the '*primary provider* of a distinct and important kind of information' (Nielsen 2015: 64 – original emphasis), highlighting their roles as both news producers and suppliers to other media, underpinning political communication and democratic processes.

'Community' is an equally complex concept, also favoured for its positive connotations. In the local media field, 'community' and 'local' are sometimes synonymous, reflecting the importance of social context in understanding the 'local'.[1] But conceptualisations of 'community' have had a critical influence on practices of local journalists; local media legislation, regulation and policy formation, as well as the business models on which local journalism draws. Journalists historically construct professional identities as community champions – delivering the 'glue holding communities together' and representing community interests in the democratic sphere (Robertson 2012: 96).

For commercial media, 'communities' become audiences and in an advertising-based business model 'it is the sale of audiences that is the crucial media operation' (Tebbutt 2006: 857-858). Rachel Matthews argues that public benefit has historically been, and remains, incidental to profit (2017: 4), while Meryl Aldridge highlights (2003: 492), referencing Anderson (1991 [1983]), that 'creating an "imagined community" is seen as a market imperative' by Britain's local press – for such communities can then be commodified. Processes of commodification entail the categorising of groups in a locality as either audiences or advertisers, each defined by revenue stream – but advertisers (businesses, professionals, social, cultural, charitable organisations) also play critical roles in communities. This advertising model entails further categorisation of 'audiences' by

income and class into those more or less attractive to advertisers, which means that local newspapers have typically been found to provide poor representation of minority groups and trade unions (Aldridge 2007: 27; Baines and Chambers 2012). The model in turn informs the practices and news values of local journalists: the bigger the audience a story attracts, the higher the sales, the greater the value to advertisers. This inevitably informs editorial approaches and journalists' news values (Harcup 2020a). Such categorisations become problematic as local media engagement with communities tends to lead to division and fragmentation, rather than cohesion – Robertson's 'glue' (2012: 96).

In the conceptualisations set out above, 'community' is defined as object: local residents, a group, an audience to be divided, subdivided, commodified. But alternative conceptions consider 'community' as process: 'action, activity, purpose' – 'face-to-face being-ness' realised through sociality and communal interactions (Studdert and Walkerdine 2016: xii). Community in this sense resists commodification and objectification and invites alternative approaches to journalism practices, regulation and media policy, and business models. It invites journalists to consider their practice as public benefit in processes of community cohesion rather than commodification. It invites policy-makers to consider local media's potential to enhance communities' sustainability, rather than as an economic sector. It invites the development of media businesses which approach communities holistically and offer benefits communities may consider worthy of support.

Key issues in local media research

Power relations

The analysis above of the concepts of locality and community demonstrates the importance of challenging taken-for-granted understandings of transformation in the field. Chris Anderson notes that the literature can be 'a rather presentist account of local journalism developments, one lacking a robust intellectual structure which allows it to be more easily integrated with other research in media sociology' (2020: 146). He points to the predominance of analyses which adopt the frames of innovation, business models and the fourth-estate role, but suggests that 'a perspective more indebted to a political economy analysis would argue that a discussion of innovation and so on is simply a mask for the continued consolidation of the ruling class, a class that uses the media to advance its class interests' (ibid). Power issues permeate local media scenes. Nielsen (2012) points to the purchase by political interests of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in the USA while Ilya Kiriya (2020) highlights the increasing control of Russia's local media by local oligarchs and Jingrong Tong (2020) identifies the erosion of journalistic autonomy by China's increasingly autocratic centrist state. The growing economic precarity of much of traditional

local journalism and technological advances that lower entry costs to local media ecologies leave these increasingly vulnerable to domination by political and economic elites as critical voices are silenced.

Historical perspectives

Local media have a long history, yet understandings of their development, continuities and discontinuities, and how these shape contemporary realities, are limited. Our attention is often on the present and the future, but understanding historical contexts also helps unpack the taken-for-granted. If we take a historical perspective we can identify, for example, similarities between the ways local media have been shaped by Norwegian social and cultural values (Skogerbø 2020) and those in Japan informed by concepts of 'care journalism' and tsunagaru journalism, a term capturing understandings of connectivity of local journalists with communities (Meissner and Tsukada 2020: 430). Local TV news today follows a global formula – two news anchors, weather person, sports person – and enjoys big audiences. But Madeleine Liseblad (2020: 74) traces the 'peopleization of news' to one local TV station in the 1960s USA, where innovation was inspired by media consultants applying sociological theory relating to class-determined preferences. Liseblad's findings invite a reappraisal of journalism practices and values. Does the 'peopleization of news' divert journalistic scrutiny from structural factors underlying issues of social justice? Yet in another example, Juliette Marie Storr demonstrates that understanding contemporary Caribbean media environments, power relations and journalistic practices is impossible without considering colonialism's legacies (2020: 66). Post-colonial and black studies perspectives offer promising insights into the manner in which systemic factors, which have become invisible over time, have informed local media. The Marxist historian C. L. R. James (1901-1989) argued: 'To talk to me of black studies as if it concerned [only] black people is utter denial. This is the history of Western civilization' ([1986 [1969]: 4]). Matthews observes that in a digital landscape we tend to a perspective in which 'rapid introduction of technologies and platforms means transience can be mistaken for innovation … mastery of the latest digital tool replaces contemplation of fundamental shifts. It truncates institutional memory and reinforces the obsession with the immediate that condemns our consideration of events to a "collective amnesia"' (2020: 26-27). The focus on the immediate and technical can serve to obscure the relevance of deeper values informing local media development.

Sustainability

Running through the increasing scholarly – and political – interest in local media is a growing concern with sustainability. In considering the need for richer theorisations, comparative analyses and

historical perspectives, the necessity emerges of widening the lens from individual organisations to local media ecosystems *in toto*, the roles communities play in sustaining them and media ecosystems' contributions to sustaining processes and practices of community. Nielsen (2015) points to the complexities of local media ecologies and the critical roles local newspapers play in them. Marco van Kerkhoven and Piet Bakker (2014) have challenged the idea that new media formats move in to fill a vacuum. They discovered new actors more likely to emerge in healthy ecologies rather than in depleted ones. Financial sustainability of local media is an issue in many regions, but patterns are more varied than dominant discourses of decline suggest. Bill Reader and John Hatcher find that: 'Globally, the appetite for quality local journalism appears healthy' (2020: 205). And while alternative revenue streams such as sponsored community events, voluntary memberships, premium content and monetised archives are gaining traction, 'subscriptions and advertising remain viable where residents (including advertisers) happily support local media' (ibid). This community focus of sustainability, and in many contexts a turn towards direct audience funding through memberships, sponsorships and crowd-funded projects, is highlighted by Elizabeth Hansen et al. (2018). It seems self-evident that sustainability depends on 'the willingness and ability of a community to support local media and the strength of the wider local media ecosystem' (Gulyas and Baines 2020: 11).

Reader and Hatcher conclude that local news organisations 'which prioritize community service may be the most sustainable … [C]itizens reject media for whom "community service" is empty rhetoric and support media for which "community service" is an observable practice' (2020: 210). But a community may be reluctant to support a for-profit organisation, especially if that enterprise cuts local staff and coverage to maximise profits.

Many scholars, journalists and policy-makers assess the quality of local news narrowly, in terms of investigative journalism (Hallock 2010). But equally important are local media roles facilitating, sustaining and maintaining processes and practices of community, connectedness and belonging – a journalism that is a service to the community, 'caring about your community, highlighting interesting people and groups, understanding local community, and offering solutions' (Heider et al. 2005: 961). Irene Costera Meijer's decade-long inquiry into what Dutch communities valued in local journalism revealed different perspectives to those of many journalists' news values: an emphasis on history, nature and the natural environment. Alongside serious reporting 'people love so-called talker news items … Not because they are important, but because they facilitate (brief) conversations between relative strangers, thus strengthening people's feeling of belonging and connection'

(Meijer 2020: 362) – processes and practices of community. This suggests a richer understanding of sustainability in local media ecologies demands a concern with community sustainability as a whole. André Jansson framed this as: 'The enduring potential of a particular community to maintain the social and cultural interests of its inhabitants, including equal access to various services, good opportunities for political and cultural participation, expression and integration and an enduring sense of community' (Jansson 2010: 180). Local media ecologies are integral to these wider indicators of authentic community engagement.

Local media gaps

We have explored some of the factors that foster a willingness to support local media but note too that an ability to do so is also required. Poor communities most in need of community-service journalism are least likely to be able to sustain it. Those areas with no local media have been termed 'news deserts' (Abernathy 2016). Philip Napoli and Matthew Weber (2020) report on a study of USA news deserts and at-risk communities that found 20 per cent of sample communities completely lacked local journalism. Consequences included less efficient, more costly, unscrutinised local government, and deficiencies in citizens' knowledge and participation in civic life. They have confirmed the trend for large local media markets in the USA to have 'negative effects on the journalistic output in nearby local communities', with Hispanic and Latino communities within those localities particularly ill-served (2020: 375-376).

But apart from communities which have no local or community media, or media with little or no local content, there are others where the media in place serve particular interests, rather than provide a wider public benefit. Ilya Kiriya (2020: 173) describes local newspapers in Russia aligned with political power: a transition towards irrelevance in which 'our paper' became 'their paper', which became 'what paper?' In China, Jingrong Tong (2020) reports on local news media again obliged to follow central political direction as party propagandists, rather than providing content which serves a community's information needs. Lest we think of this as a blight only on undemocratic regions, we have referred above to Nielsen (2012) documenting political interests in the USA taking over local news platforms. The absence or irrelevance of local media to support and sustain processes of community raises concerns beyond the risk of democratic deficits. So rather than conceptualising a dearth in terms of 'news deserts', we suggest the term 'local media gaps' allows us to consider the depletion of media eco-systems in a more holistic sense – a diminution of opportunities to 'do community', an erosion of community sustainability.

The collaborative turn

Journalism, particularly in the West, has long been considered a competitive field. But recent research points to the emergence of collaborative approaches which contribute to resilience. There has been collaboration between journalists and communities (Rausch 2020; Rao 2020; Harcup 2020b, 2021) and between journalists and institutional actors such as charities, non-profit organisations and civic technologists (Boyles 2020). Further interrogation of this collaborative turn suggests new understandings of reciprocal benefits such ecologies and resilient communities might deliver. For example, a hurdle to emerging media enterprises is the necessity of access to backroom skills and services provided by different departments in a corporation. Such services are often beyond the reach of community media. In an investigation into four successful local and community news projects in Britain, David Baines (2022, forthcoming) found these resources sourced from community networks, often voluntarily – confirmation of Reader and Hatcher's observation that the delivery of authentic 'community service' is more likely to find support (2020: 210). A local history group voluntarily archived approximately 66,000 pages of the family-owned north-east England weekly newspaper, the *Teesdale Mercury*.[2] They regarded the newspaper as a cultural asset and record of community life over almost two centuries. This importance of local media's capacity 'to construct and maintain community memory and a sense of shared identity' was identified in accessible, participatory local community radio projects in post-war El Salvador (Agosta 2001: 243). The collaborative turn at the level of local media is significant in respect of media ecologies, but also prompts reflection on ethical practice. Tony Harcup, on alternative journalism, notes that 'local audiences are more likely to recognise themselves and to feel themselves represented in media output that is closer to the community not simply in terms of content but also in terms of accessibility' (2020a: 481). Collaborative approaches indicate a journalism embodying social responsibility, and Harcup references Chris Atton's observation that any form of journalism considered by its producers 'as a social responsibility requires ethics to be at its centre' (2013: xii).

Regulatory intervention and subsidy

Regulation and policy formation profoundly determine the nature, even existence, of local media. Christopher Ali analyses how once-prized localism values were written out of broadcasting policy in the USA (Ali 2020). Federal Communications Commission regulations that encouraged diverse voices, plurality, local presence, community dialogue and accountability have gone. In the USA, 'Broadcast localism, from a policy perspective, is dead. … Broadcast localism is a market failure – the market cannot or will not produce this public good because of a lack of return on investment' (ibid: 90). In Spain, vibrant analogue community TV was wiped out by digital terrestrial

TV regulation (Muntsant 2020). Media policies around the world reflect the balance of power between elite, often corporate, and public interests. Ethical dimensions of this are self-evident.

In Britain, the government-commissioned *Cairncross review* proposed an Institute for Public Interest News for 'channelling a combination of public and private finance into those parts of the industry it deemed most worthy of support' (Cairncross 2019: 11). Local media in Britain already enjoys subsidies – tax concessions, national and local government advertising, and 'local democracy reporters' on corporate-owned local newspapers funded by the BBC licence fee (Baines 2014). Shailendra Singh (2020) argues for subsidies for local journalism in the Pacific Islands, echoing Cairncross's plea for public funding for a public good. But Eli Skogerbø (2020) and Gunnar Nygren (2020) point to marginal benefits from public subsidy fostering start-ups and increasing diversity and plurality in, respectively, Norway and Sweden. And in France, Matthieu Lardeau (2020) finds extensive subsidies have fostered monopoly rather than the diversity and plurality intended, and a local media tied to – rather than scrutinising – local political power. This mixed picture of rationale and experiences highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of regulatory interventions in local media and particularly subsidy systems.

Conclusions

We have brought forward critical concerns and interrogated key conceptual debates relating to local media and journalism and pointed to ethical implications which demand further attention. We have challenged taken-for-granted conceptualisations of 'locality' and 'community'. We have concentrated on the complexities in relationships between local media and local communities and the ways local media ecologies – together with the processes and practices which maintain and sustain them – are shaped by and in turn inform the sustainability of communities themselves. Throughout, we have found these explorations keep returning to the tensions between forms and models of local journalism which deliver benefit for the public and for the elites – powerful commercial, corporate or political interests. A journalism which serves public benefits, we suggest, facilitates and is immersed in the practices and processes of community. Factors which enable this include those we have considered above: an awareness of its historical context, the importance of sustainability rather than maximum profitability, collaborative approaches across communities with which it is involved and a concern to be involved with all the communities in its locality. Jane B. Singer highlights the ethical implications of considering the journalist not as central agent in a linear process of information delivery but as 'one part of an interactive and iterative network' (2012: 67). Ethical components central to that role, she suggests, are 'authenticity, which loosely correlates with the idea

of credibility, accountability, which is related to responsibility, and autonomy, or independence' (ibid).

We find this to be a useful prism for delineating the divisions between models of journalism which offer a public benefit and those which do not. But the manner in which local journalists' 'autonomy or independence' are negotiated in relation to their community role invites further interrogation. Reader and Hatcher's conclusion, that local news organisations 'which prioritize community service may be the most sustainable' (2020: 210) resonates with Matthews's view (2020: 31-32) that suggests that in some regions, local media are at a point of inflection: approaching the end of an epoch defined by corporate, profit-seeking approaches and entering another in which the sustainable delivery of a public benefit will be more central. But as we have seen, powerful commercial and political interests still seek to shape local media landscapes to their own advantage. On that point of inflection, the future of local media is finely balanced.

Notes

[1] Professionally-produced publications referred to in Britain as local newspapers are known in the United States as community newspapers. In Britain, the term community media generally refers to non-professional, non-commercial enterprises such as community radio stations, heavily reliant on voluntary endeavour

[2] http://teesdalemercuryarchive.org.uk/

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Conflict of interest

No funding was received for the research presented in the paper.

PAPER

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Lisa Waller and Alanna Myers

Local journalism and the ethics of inquiry

Much of the public and scholarly attention on the role of journalism in public discussion of historical clergy sexual abuse has focused on investigative reporters and the national impact of their coverage, which is widely understood as the impetus for the highly significant Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017). This paper looks beyond the national role of interventionist journalism in creating political pressure for the Royal Commission to consider the importance of media witnessing in the context of local journalism, virtue ethics and the 'response ability' model for reporting sensitive issues. It draws on interviews with editors and reporters who covered the issue of clergy sexual abuse and the Royal Commission for news audiences in the Ballarat region, which was positioned as a key site of church-based crimes and cover-ups through the inquiry process. The aim here is to understand how news-makers' perceived moral and ethical responsibilities shaped their reporting.

Key words: local journalism, civic custodians, virtue ethics, clergy sexual abuse, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Introduction

In this paper we explore the moral and ethical decision-making practices of local journalists who reported on clergy sexual abuse linked to Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017) (RCIRCSA or Child Abuse Royal Commission). Until recently, both public and scholarly attention to the role of journalism in relation to this sensitive and complex issue has mostly focused on the interventionist role of investigative journalists who are largely credited for bringing the issue into the national spotlight. Some research has been conducted on the ethical dimensions of journalism's part in truth and reconciliation commissions responding to revelations of child sexual abuse across the world (see McCallum and Waller 2021; Mitchell 2020). This

research has identified the common factors in making public past crimes and the limitations of journalism to challenge dominant power and racialised structures underpinning the need for inquiry in the first place. However, as these crimes always occur in local communities, there is a need to address how media coverage plays out in place-based news settings, particularly where the town is the focus of national reporting (Myers, Waller and McCallum 2021). We contend that such scholarly inquiry can go some way to addressing Callison and Young's provocation about journalism's own reckoning, when they say: 'Questions are increasing about journalism's epistemological foundations ... and what role they should (and do) play in society' (2020: 2).

The diverse and geographically extensive Catholic Diocese of Ballarat has 43 parishes and covers the western third of the state of Victoria, extending from the Murray River in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south. Its headquarters are in the regional city of Ballarat, which became known as an epicentre of clergy sexual abuse through national and international news coverage of the Child Abuse Royal Commission. Two of the most high-profile investigations of Australia's longest, most complex and expensive royal commission were Cases 28 and 35 that pertained to clergy sexual abuse in the Ballarat Catholic diocese (Wright, Swain and McPhillips 2017; Wright and Swain 2018). Over the five years of unprecedented coverage of the RCIRCSA (Waller et al. 2020), public commentaries represented the region as 'one of the most dangerous places to be a child' in the 1970s when paedophile priests and Christian Brothers were enabled in their crimes through inaction and cover-ups by the Catholic Church (Marr 2013: 9). During this period, reporting of clergy sexual abuse and its devastating effects on individuals and families became central to the news agendas of the city's regional daily newspaper, *The Courier*, other regional newspapers such as Warrnambool's *The Standard*, and ABC Ballarat, the largest Australian Broadcasting Corporation regional newsroom in Victoria, which also broadcasts into the south-west of the state.

While diverse in purpose and practice, national inquiries can provide spaces for investigating complex social systems and problems and can also function as 'truth-telling' missions informed by a liberal politics of recognition (McCallum and Waller 2021). The act of 'making public' previously silenced voices is a widely recognised feature of major inquiries and integral to the act of transitional justice, and overwhelmingly scholars emphasise their national importance (Borsa 2017; Laplante and Phenicie 2010; Salter 2019). This national gaze is understandable when the subject of inquiry is of high relevance to the whole society, but it has arguably created a scholarly blind-spot when it comes to the local significance of major inquiries and their relationship with place-based journalism.

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The aim of this paper is to move beyond the national gaze and, instead, explore the moral and ethical practices of local journalists who bear witness to the suffering of victims of child sexual abuse within the communities they serve. In media studies witnessing refers to the role of the journalist as an agent who experiences an event on behalf of the audience. While research on witnessing typically focuses on how journalists bring distant suffering to local audiences (Peters 2001), here we are concerned with witnessing by local journalists who are integrally connected with the people and the place-based institutions on which they are reporting. Through interviews with journalists and editors from the Ballarat region we consider the transformative dimensions of 'proximal witnessing', whereby local media defines, confronts and owns past crimes and trauma in its midst (Myers, Waller and McCallum 2021).

The following sections provide an overview of scholarship that positions local journalists as having a uniquely close relationship with audiences and who serve as a powerful moral compass in shaping the way a community understands itself. We then discuss the importance of bearing witness and the concept of 'proximal witnessing', before outlining our research approach which was to gain first-hand histories and insights from journalists reporting on the Child Abuse Royal Commission. The findings sections present our analysis of in-depth interviews with editors and reporters. We extrapolate the ethical and moral implications and imperatives highlighted by journalists as part of their 'response ability' in relation to 'responsible, accurate and sensitive representation' (Skehan, Sheridan Burns and Hazell 2009) of clergy sexual abuse.

Local journalism: Morality, ethics and community

Historically, local journalists had a close relationship with their communities and occupied a central position in local communication networks. Local journalists, for example, have been positioned as advocates (Hatcher 2012), champions (Bowd 2017), civic custodians (Hess 2016) and community caretakers (Mathews 2020). Of note here is literature that focuses on how local reporters reinforce, denounce and shape perceptions of acceptable codes of conduct and how a community should view itself. Silverstone (2007) highlights that morality and ethics are not one and the same. To him morality refers to the 'generality of principles and to the possibility of their justification' (Silverstone 2007: 6), whereas ethics is the application of those principles in particular social or historical or professional contexts. Our focus on the local reporting of clergy sexual abuse overlaps two areas of moral and ethical inquiry: virtue ethics in terms of how local journalists as individuals conduct (and reflect upon) themselves and their character traits such as integrity, honesty and commitment to justice (see e.g. Couldry 2012; Quinn 2018); and a more morally universalist position that examines how journalists influence how we ought to behave as 'communities',

what is morally right or wrong, and what it means to live a good life (for full discussion see Hess and Richards 2021). Communitarians and public journalism scholars who emphasise the value of local journalism have long argued that we must look beyond morally minimalist approaches of journalism that stem from the Fourth Estate and social responsibility models of the press (Borden 2014; Christians 2011). Christians' view that the focus should be on the moral life as a whole is valuable here because, as he has argued, 'how the moral order works itself out in community formation is the issue, not first of all what practitioners consider virtuous in their own codes of ethics' (Christians 2011: 410).

In a global context, this raises a range of issues, from questions as to which community's moral order and formation should take precedence, to the fate of community-based ethical decision-making when confronted with global or national debates and issues (Hess and Richards 2021) – such as a royal commission with a national focus on abuse that most often took place at a local level. In positioning local journalists as 'civic custodians', for example, Hess (2016) contends this requires acute attention to issues of media power. There are always certain institutions and individuals in society to whom we turn to help shape our understandings or reinforce certain values and virtues. Importantly, it is in the interests of such institutions or individuals to perpetuate how we ought to behave and shape understanding of a shared (albeit contextually specific) common good for their own legitimacy (ibid). This is significant in the context of witnessing theory, which we shall next discuss. Local journalists not only play a role in bringing past atrocities to light, but the audience is presented with and expected to help make sense of these experiences as guided by these powerful media witnesses who keep and confer common values and shared virtues.

Local journalism and proximal witnessing

The concept of proximal witnessing draws on extensive literature around media witnessing that typically concerns the mediation of distant suffering, whereby journalists take responsibility for bringing physically or historically distant atrocities or traumas to public consciousness and situating the audience as a witness to the depicted events (Chouliaraki 2010; Frosh and Pinchevski 2009). In his landmark essay on media witnessing, Peters (2001) argues it is an explicitly moral practice, usually linked to events that involve mass death, suffering and grief. Chouliaraki writes: 'In this capacity, journalism turns evidence of human suffering into moral discourse, so as to invite our judgement and action upon it' (2013: 271), a view that resonates with the communitarian approach to local journalism, morality and ethics outlined above. Journalists are considered dominant actors in the witnessing field, and to 'bear witness' is a key tenet of journalism's legitimation (Andén-Papadopoulos 2013:

758). The act of 'bearing witness' (as distinguished from simply witnessing or eye-witnessing) entails specific practices of recording traumatic events so that (distant) audiences and communities are enabled to take some responsibility for them (Peters 2001; Tait 2011). To this end, Zelizer argues that bearing witness through journalism 'moves individuals from the personal act of "seeing" to the adoption of a public stance by which they become part of a collective working through trauma together' (2002: 698).

Despite local journalism's widely documented 'closeness to community', there is a surprising lack of scholarship that understands witnessing at the local level (Myers, Waller and McCallum 2021). We argue local journalists have a particular ethical responsibility as they work through the trauma *in situ* with the audience who are also the subjects of the trauma. Rather than 'second-hand' witnessing (Peters 2001), 'proximal witnessing' accounts for how local journalists, in their role as civic custodians, act as agents who reveal and provide testimony about past traumatic events to the community, about the community, on behalf of the community. We have identified elsewhere this can take place through three overlapping phases: revelation, where journalists through their reporting expose previously hidden events or traumas; reckoning, where local media confronts past traumas on behalf of the community; and recovery, whereby local media works with the community to come to terms with its past (Myers, Waller and McCallum 2021). In this paper, we unpack how journalists use their professional education and authority to practise 'proximal witnessing' in ways that are understood as 'response ability' (Skehan, Sheridan Burns and Hazell 2009: 196), which means not avoiding the issue or stigmatising victims but rather 'responding appropriately' through 'responsible, accurate and sensitive representation'. Here local news media provide testimony about historical trauma and suffering that was, and continues to be, part of the lived experience of the communities they serve.

Research approach

We captured and recorded the spoken word of journalists who had lived in and reported on child sexual abuse in the Ballarat region, to extend our understanding of the ethical phenomenon of 'response ability' (Skehan, Sheridan Burns and Hazell 2009) in local journalism. Interviews are the central method, drawing on social constructionist, oral history and expert interviewing perspectives. The approach draws on Couldry's (2004, 2012) 'media as practice' approach that emphasises participants' practices rather than analysing their responses to survey questions, discourses or narratives. Gamson (1992) argued politics is socially constructed and best understood through interviews and 'peer conversations' in localised social settings. We have, therefore, involved participants from the early stages of the project and conducted the research locally where possible.

Journalists are often considered challenging interview participants for social researchers, as 'both interviews and framing are core competencies in the everyday work of academic researchers and journalists' (Nikunen et al. 2019: 490; see also Bowd 2004).

Our interviews were, therefore, carefully prepared to ensure maximum contribution to our project aims, but also to respect the commitment and expertise of the journalists who told this story. We drew on the tradition of 'elite' or expert interviewing that has been developed in the social sciences to elicit and synthesise the practices of those highly knowledgeable about their chosen subject (Döringer 2021; Herbst 1998). Semi-structured depth interviews were designed to access the lived experiences and professional practices of nine journalists who reported on the RCIRCSA and related issues for the Ballarat *Courier*, ABC Ballarat and the Warrnambool *Standard*. Potential participants were identified according to their experience and their role in the organisation, based on our earlier examination of media coverage of child sexual abuse in the region (Myers, Waller and McCallum 2021). The researchers directly approached selected journalists, who then recommended others who had been involved in reporting the story.

Angela Carey	Former reporter, editor and general manager, *The Courier*
Andrew Eales	Former reporter and editor, *The Courier*
Eugene Duffy	Current editor, *The Courier*
Fiona Henderson	Former senior journalist, *The Courier*
Tom McIlroy	Former reporter, *The Courier*
Melissa Cunningham	Former reporter, *The Courier*
Monique Patterson	Reporter, *The Standard*
Danny Tran	Former reporter, ABC Ballarat
Charlotte King	Reporter, ABC Ballarat

Table 1 - Interview participants

Interviews were conducted in homes, cafés or via the Teams online platform. The interviews were wide-ranging and allowed the interviewee to focus on their story, while enabling them to address the project research questions. Oral history interviewing techniques are particularly useful for locating the interviewee at the centre of the interview and allowing them to explain their experiences (Janesick 2014; McCallum 2010). All the journalists we approached willingly engaged in the research and gave fully informed consent to be named in accordance with the approved University of Canberra institutional ethics process. Nevertheless, the topic of child sexual abuse is highly sensitive, and some interviews were emotionally charged. We shared research findings with participants as the research progressed and encouraged participants to be consistently

reflexive about their media practices (Couldry 2004, 2012). The interviews were recorded and transcribed, then thematically analysed to identify and theorise the journalists' ethical and moral insights as part of their witnessing practices.

Bearing witness 'proximally': Personal and professional responsibilities

As discussed earlier, local journalists are highlighted for their 'closeness' to community – they have a deep understanding and personal investment within the places, people and relationships that often shape news coverage. From a normative framework of 'objectivity', proximity to a 'community' has been at times questioned and positioned as unethical, especially regarding individuals and sources of news (see, for instance, Stephens et al. 2020). While such scrutiny may be warranted, it is necessary to consider how journalists work through and understand their ethical obligations in instances of dealing with trauma in local contexts.

Frosh and Pinchevski (2009) suggest that the ability of journalists to bear witness to traumatic events of the past can be a way for the press to atone for its past silence and reinforce its legitimacy. In the context of reporting on the Child Abuse Royal Commission, *The Courier* editor Eugene Duffy acknowledged that powerful institutions in Ballarat, including police who are key sources for local media, failed to acknowledge or take action to address clergy sexual abuse for decades: 'There was just this code of silence around – we don't talk about that. Did it extend to the newspaper? I can't prove it. I hope not, but…'

He recounted historical instances where he felt *The Courier* had downplayed the issue through practices such as placing relevant court reports at the bottom on inside-facing pages and not mentioning that a convicted pedophile priest was from Ballarat.

For some journalists, there was a personal moral responsibility to move from a position of silence because of their deep sense of connection to the Ballarat region and being a 'local', while others felt this moral responsibility despite being 'new' to the town. *Courier* journalist and long-time Ballarat local Fiona Henderson wrote more than 100 reports on clergy sexual abuse, including coverage of the first public hearing of Case Study 28, 'Catholic Church authorities in Ballarat', that was held in Ballarat in 2015. She said she was driven by a deep compulsion to provide reports of the highest standard for the city of Ballarat and felt a special responsibility to do a good job on behalf of the survivors and families of victims with whom she had close personal and professional ties. She described the experience of covering Part 1 of Case Study 28 in the Ballarat Magistrates' Court, where she had reported for years, as the 'best and worst' two weeks in her career, working alongside leading

journalists from major media outlets from around the country who attended the hearings. Henderson said: 'I knew I led the coverage … but I should. [It's] my home ground. My people.'

Some reporters who were 'new' to the area, and in some cases had limited experience working as journalists, said they were particularly reliant on colleagues with a history and knowledge of the area for offering professional and moral guidance. Tom McIlroy said he was able to offset his lack of reporting experience and knowledge of the issue to some extent by 'learning a lot' from editors and senior editorial staff about the role he should play. He described Eugene Duffy, Angela Carey and Fiona Henderson as 'people in those kinds of positions who have been in [Ballarat] for a long time, and who have the kind of scar tissue of what has happened'. For others, this moral responsibility was triggered primarily by cultural (religious) proximity to the Church and their lived personal experiences of being practising Catholics in regional Australia. Monique Patterson, who grew up a Catholic in a rural town near Ballarat, felt compelled to use her journalistic authority to 'make up' for wrongdoing of the past.

> I think, as a community, we had the Church on this slight pedestal ... I was brought up Catholic. I went to a Catholic primary school … the priest, you do what he says. Like, he's this all-powerful messenger of God. And some people may wonder why these paedophile priests were able to get away with it. I don't think that the media reflected how big of an issue it was for the Church.

In the section that follows we will highlight how this moral quest to address past injustices and silences led to transformations in what reporters understood as 'ethical' journalism practice itself.

'Response ability' revisited: Responsible, accurate and sensitive representation

The concept of 'response ability' is discussed by Tait (2011) in the context of media witnessing, where it is used in a general sense to refer to reporting that positions the audience to respond empathetically and actively to the depicted injustice or abuse. However, the concept of 'response ability' as we use it here first emerged through an Australian collaboration between mental health professionals and journalism educators over the decade 1997 to 2007. It was funded by the Mindframe National Media Initiative and is taken up here to think through the role of powerful local institutions and storytellers in bringing the trauma of clergy sexual abuse into public discourse. The 'response ability' project sought to influence the professional education of journalists so they can respond appropriately to issues related to suicide and mental illness through 'responsible, accurate and sensitive representation'

(Skehan, Sheridan Burns and Hazell 2009: 196). It advocated 'not for the avoidance of these important issues in the news media, but rather some attention to ensuring accuracy and examining the framing of such reports' (ibid: 193). Research findings from the project suggested that 'mindful' reporting, which is the hallmark of the 'response ability' approach, reduced the stigma associated with mental health problems and encouraged help-seeking behaviours among distressed individuals. The model has been adopted and adapted for other important controversial issues in Australian journalism, including reporting on cultural diversity, and is a most appropriate concept for understanding the moral and ethical dimensions of the survivor and victim-centred approach of the journalists and editors who participated in this study.

The Royal Commission not only developed as a forum to provide safe spaces for survivors and victims' families to express their voice, it also recognised, attended and was responsive to the experiences of the vulnerable. We, therefore, argue that within the institutional space of the inquiry, journalists and news media organisations had a duty to seek out, listen to and amplify the voices of the previously silenced (McCallum and Waller 2021). The local news organisations at the centre of this study did not shy away from this normative responsibility. Many of the journalists and editors who were interviewed discussed the importance of changes to editorial policy that put the focus on survivors, reflecting the truth-telling mission of the Royal Commission. All the journalists we spoke to with experience of the issue reflected on the fact it was a transformative approach. Without exception, interviewees paid tribute to survivors, victims and their supporters for leading the campaign for truth-telling and changing the media's approach and city's response to the issue. *The Courier*'s Angela Carey said the newspaper's victim-centred approach did not compromise its ethical commitment to 'maintain the balance' but enabled it to 'call out unfairness and give the victims the voice that they had never had previously'. Former *Courier* editor Andrew Eales discussed how this approach shifted media representation of survivors:

> [T]hey went from being anonymous, you know … can we believe them? Should we believe them? To being real humans, and I think that the bravery of some of those individuals … to come out and say: 'Actually I'm going to tell my story and I'm happy for you to name me and we'll go through the process of, you know, the legalities of all of that …' But I think that was the real difference, and the reason why the community started to turn in favour of the victims.

Journalists said working as local reporters did not offset their professional ethical responsibility to deepen their understanding of the issue and build trust with survivors, victims' families and supporters through meaningful engagement. Both Charlotte King

and Melissa Cunningham met with survivors in the lead-up to the second hearing of Case Study 28 in Ballarat. Cunningham said:

> I just started going along, every Tuesday morning … to get to know them, to build up a rapport and to find out what was going on with them in the lead-up to the Royal Commission … and that was a really good way for me to get to know the survivors [who were] leading that movement in Ballarat but also get introduced to a lot of other survivors who might not have been … in the media but were a part of this network of survivors that were supporting each other through this and their families as well.

Journalists also highlighted both intrinsic and strategic decisions to engage in a 'reckoning' process of proximal witnessing and show moral support during important moments of the inquiry. Reporters recounted interactions and ongoing relationships with survivors and their supporters that spoke to what we might term a 'shoe-leather commitment to the story' because they literally stood, walked and travelled around the city and across the globe to bear witness to survivor truth and experience. ABC Ballarat reporter Charlotte King recounted a tense stand-off between survivors (who call themselves 'Nazzie girls') and nuns at Nazareth House, the former Catholic orphanage for girls turned aged care facility where Ronald Mulkearns, a disgraced former bishop of Ballarat who the Royal Commission declared 'derelict in his duty', was in the nuns' care:

> I stayed with the women though, even when the recorder was off. And then it just felt like I became much more embedded in the story because of that. And then when we came out, I was able to tell the story in a more genuine way because … you know, I could more comfortably ask them what happened in there and 'tell me what happened and how are you feeling now?' And yeah, it was just a crazy sort of series of events that unfolded and it was really just about being there with a microphone to witness it, and bear witness to it.

Consider too the extraordinary step of *The Courier* sending Melissa Cunningham to Rome in February 2016 to provide coverage. When it was announced Australia's most senior Catholic and Ballarat local Cardinal George Pell would only give evidence about the Church's handling of child sexual abuse via video link, there was a highly successful crowdsourcing campaign to send a group of Ballarat survivors and their supporters to be present and witness his evidence. These survivors wanted Cunningham to travel with them to provide 'local' coverage from Rome. Cunningham explained:

> [T]he reason why I went wasn't because I was saying to my editor: 'You've gotta send me.' It was basically … the survivors were coming into the office and saying to the editor: 'You have

to send Mel with us because she's covered our story and we want her there and we trust her.'

This highlights the rapport and trust she had developed with victims through being both personally empathetic as well as professionally committed to knowing her sources. It provided the newspaper with the opportunity to walk in the shoes of survivors and serve as witness in building reckoning and recovery, and it demonstrates how the moral quest to address past injustices transformed what reporters understood as 'ethical' journalism practice itself, as we address further below. This strategic decision to send Cunningham to Rome occurred despite major resourcing constraints affecting regional journalism nation-wide.

Negotiating tensions and establishing trust

Media witnessing is understood as an explicitly moral practice (Peters 2001) and Chouliaraki argues that by turning evidence of human suffering into moral discourse, journalists invite 'our action and judgement upon it' (2013: 271). This creates ethical rebalancing and challenges for journalists. Positioning Ballarat media audiences as witnesses to survivors' and victims' experiences of clergy sexual abuse meant journalists were dominant actors in the witnessing field and opened their practice to public scrutiny and debate. The embeddedness in a journalism context of 'getting too close to sources', as highlighted above, was by no means considered unethical practice by interview participants, resonating with Callison and Young's (2020) call to rethink journalism's epistemological foundations. A resistance to normative ideas of 'objectivity' and maintaining professional distance from sources was embraced as part of the role of bearing witness.

That said, journalists were accused of bias by some people in the Catholic community. Interviewees spoke about negotiating the tensions attached to truth-telling and were reflexive about witnessing as a key tenet of journalism's legitimation (Frosh and Pinchevski 2009). Andrew Eales termed the substance of these complaints as 'the yuck factor' of revealing and reckoning with Church cover-ups of the evil deeds of pedophile priests and Christian Brothers and their impact on survivors, victims and the wider community. As discussed above, national inquiries can provide spaces for truth-telling and recognition of past injustice. This very act of 'making public' or 'bearing witness' to previously silenced voices can cause discomfort, but journalists highlighted it was key to the act of bringing citizens to a new understanding of the past. For the *Courier*'s current editor, Eugene Duffy, the story of recovery and healing for survivors and the city remains high on the newspaper's agenda:

> That's been the *Courier*'s real – I don't want to call it a triumph, because when you haven't solved the problem, it's not a triumph and you've still got a problem. But I think it's been a really interesting history of advocacy that's gone from the exposé of the crimes, whether it's in court or otherwise to … you know, we support [the victims] as a community … what can we do next?

ABC Ballarat reporter Danny Tran described Ballarat as 'tribal', with Catholics and Protestants taking different positions on clergy sexual abuse. He described covering the Royal Commission as 'the reporting of history' and underlined that not everyone in Ballarat agreed with its version of events or his coverage, and that this involved the 'risk of alienating people'. Journalists and editors indicated, however, that overcoming these tensions and not caving in to pressures from some parts of the community had generated a notable shift towards acceptance and a community desire to ensure the past would not be repeated. This has created an ongoing sense of 'response ability' to discuss a sensitive issue of public importance without increasing the risk of re-traumatising survivors or reinforcing stereotypes (Skehan, Sheridan Burns and Hazell 2009), and it reflects a shared sense of responsibility among the journalists and editors interviewed to show care for both the survivors and the wider community.

While some of the journalists interviewed for this research had left Ballarat to work at metropolitan news outlets or left the industry, they all spoke of their continuing personal and professional relationships with some survivors, and many of them still report on or deal with the issue of clergy sexual abuse. Eales said the *Courier* 'felt really, really strongly that no matter what people thought of our reporting, that we had to be really clear about what we stood for in terms of our community'. Similarly, Duffy said:

> What's really key for Ballarat is this whole cultural issue of the cover-up … I must have written 20 or 30 editorials on it, but it's a hard thing to draw people's attention to when they want a scapegoat, or they want a sacrificial target – and I know that argument has been used in defence of Ballarat a lot. But my point is not to defend it, my point is to put the focus on the whole cultural problem within the Church as an institution and possibly the whole town. So rather than individuals, to investigate as a broader concept the culture that let this happen and, I guess, how it can change so it doesn't happen again.

What emerges from both Eales' and Duffy's comments is how they position their news agendas as being driven first and foremost by a sense of what was right for their community, over and above ideas of newsworthiness or what other outlets were doing. Duffy's resistance to putting too much focus on a single individual or

'scapegoat' is particularly significant considering previous research showing Cardinal George Pell was by far the biggest driver of media attention across five years of coverage of the Royal Commission in Australian media outlets (Waller et al. 2020: 186-188).

For Warrnambool journalist Monique Patterson there is still much work to be done to help victims and community come to terms with the past:

> We are just scraping the top of the iceberg. People used to think there were a few bad eggs but we need to show how big of an issue [it is] so it never happens again. It happened because people like me had blind faith and we need to show people that this is what happens if you have blind faith.

Patterson highlighted that at times she has felt hamstrung by news routines and resourcing restraints that have limited her ability to shine the light on sexual abuse since the Royal Commission finished. She has turned to writing non-fiction to continue supporting victims as part of her own virtue ethics to right the wrongs of the past (Patterson 2021).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the moral and ethical practices of local journalists who bear witness to the suffering of victims of clergy sexual abuse within the communities they serve. Our study has departed from the national-level gaze that most commonly privileges investigative journalism and assumes geographical and cultural distance to explore the 'response ability' of local journalists in opening the discursive space by revealing past crimes, actively taking part in the recovery process, and working with the community in the process of healing. We have documented how, through their coverage of clergy sexual abuse, the journalists and editors we interviewed created public spaces for critical community-based conversation and entered a public reckoning with their audiences. This has provided valuable insights to understand how local journalists carefully cultivated relationships with local sources and audiences in order to report sensitively and respectfully on the local impacts of a national inquiry. By taking 'response ability', the journalists were able to confront and 'own' the past and ongoing trauma of clergy sexual abuse in their communities.

As 'civic custodians', local journalists are attributed with a great deal of power (Hess and Richards 2021). Journalists in the Ballarat diocese reporting on the Child Abuse Royal Commission were acutely aware of the normative expectations of truth-telling and recounted how they enacted that responsibility, including the challenges that arose when their deeply felt moral responsibility to honour survivors' voices was perceived by some in the community

to clash with the journalistic responsibility to remain neutral and not 'take sides'. Personal moral and professional ethical considerations came together here around a common thread of justice; a conviction that victims and survivors had not been treated justly in the past, and this conviction shaped journalists' processes and enabled them to engage in 'response-able' reporting. This approach required journalists to rethink normative practices and journalism ethics (such as 'objectivity'), in order to fulfil a moral imperative to serve community and advance journalism practice.

This complex fusion of virtue ethics led to transformative editorial policies that developed a survivor-centred approach. On a personal level, many interviewees reflected that their reporting of clergy sexual abuse and especially their engagement with survivors, victims' families, and their supporters, changed them forever. This approach aligns then with the communitarian view that local journalism should be understood as part of the moral life as a whole not first of all what practitioners consider virtuous in their own codes of ethics. This means we are acutely aware of how standing in for the moral order can also shape media legitimacy in local settings. As we have demonstrated, this is a power that can and should be activated to give voice to those once silenced and to lead community healing.

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Conflict of interest

This research was funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Projects scheme ('Breaking Silences: Media and the Child Abuse Royal Commission', project number DP190101282). No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

PAPER

Ruth Stoker

Trust us, we are local journalists: How the desire to be trusted shapes early career practitioners' understanding of ethical journalism in the UK legacy press

The workplace in the UK legacy press is an important learning environment for early career journalists where they are exposed to formal and informal learning opportunities. However, in the learning of ethical journalism there is an emergent tension between the formally facilitated work-based training schemes which frame ethics through the lens of a code of practice, and informal learning through social interactions with colleagues and members of their local community where the desire to be trusted is an important driver. This paper draws on an analysis of semi-structured interviews with early career journalists and training managers in the British legacy press, working for local weekly and daily titles. In applying the social learning construct of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) as an evaluative framework, the data indicated that while early career journalists' learning was shaped in part by training schemes, their desire to be perceived as trusted by their community of interest, their imagined reader, as they sought to gain membership of that community, was powerful in shaping their understanding of occupational ethics.

Key words: legacy press, community of practice, journalism ethics, trust, community

Introduction

A crisis of trust has emerged in the British legacy press.[1] Poor ethical behaviours in some sections of the British newspaper industry as exposed in the Leveson Inquiry (2012), including the use of deception, hacking, phone tapping, and paying public officials

for information, did much to damage the reputation not just of those tabloid journalists at the heart of the inquiry, but also of journalism in general, and it was inevitable that it would take time for the reputation of the British legacy press to recover (Barnett and Townend 2014; Mair 2013; Thomas and Finneman 2014; Phillips 2021). Ten years on, low levels of trust continue to plague the British press, which as a sector identifies the rebuilding of public trust as a priority and a fundamental aim underpinning the financial wellbeing of the industry (*UK Press Gazette* 2021; World Association of News Publishers 2017).

According to Fletcher, longitudinal data gathered by the Reuters Institute signals a global decline in public trust in journalism, including that located in the legacy press. British journalism does not fare well in this study where the data suggests a fall in confidence in journalistic news production from 51 per cent in 2015 to 36 per cent in 2021, the fourth largest decline out of 36 countries surveyed (Fletcher 2020; Newman et al. 2021).

Fletcher notes that the reasons for the decline in trust are complex, with the political context in which journalists operate having an impact on the individual nation ratings, and while the promulgation of fake news through online media is widely understood to have undermined public confidence (Reed et al. 2020) the reputation of the individual journalist and their relationship with the reader were important predictors of trust. As Peters and Broersma (2013: 30) discuss, trust is the 'cement' which holds relationships together, including the relationship between the journalist and society, and it is based on the 'motivations, reliability and credibility' of the journalist and their ethical behaviours. Where credibility is damaged, trust is lost. Indeed, Harcup (2007: 144) observes that ethical journalism is a prerequisite to journalism which can be perceived as trusted, adding that good journalists take seriously the trust placed in them by their communities.

Coleman et al. (2012: 38), in a study of the relationship between local journalists and their readers, identified that the reputation of individual journalists and their track record for truthfulness was an important consideration in whether the reader trusted their account of news. Daniller et al. (2017) in a study in the United States found that where readers identify with a particular title that is known to them, where they have a relationship with that title, they are more predisposed to trust that particular source of news.

Journalists, however, receive little direct feedback from their audiences about when and how they can be more trustworthy as there is an absence of any formally mediated space for such discussions. Early career journalists tend to rely on guidance from within their community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) in

determining what good ethical practice might look like. But, as this article argues, the desire to earn the trust of the reader also shapes their development as ethical journalists.

This paper takes as its context the British provincial legacy press, where journalists identify as serving a local readership. It focuses on the early career learning of journalists and how they acquire an understanding of what ethical journalism means. It argues that the desire to be perceived as trusted in the production of news is important, and a powerful driver in their learning of ethical journalism, where the community within which they are located – that of their readers – informs their understanding. It identifies an emerging tension between the structural training of early career journalists in Britain where they are taught to view journalism ethics as synonymous with codes such as the *Editors' Code of Practice* (Editors' Code of Practice Committee 2021; NCTJ 2019b), and the informal influences on their learning of ethical journalism via the expectations of their communities and their desire to be trusted by those communities.

Research method

This paper draws on data gathered during a wider study investigating early career learning of journalism ethics in the British legacy press. It uses qualitative inquiry methodology, based on semi-structured interviews with 14 early career journalists and six training managers, drawn from 11 different provincial publications across England, including three daily regional titles and eight local weekly titles, covering three of the major legacy press groups in Britain. This paper quotes only some of the participants who are identified by pseudonyms, but all participants contribute to and inform overarching findings. Early career journalists are defined as those who are within their first three years of working as journalists, including the period when they may be undertaking occupational training in the workplace.

The main criterion for the selection of the early career participants was that they were within the first three years of employment, either working towards a senior journalism qualification or had recently completed this qualification. Eraut (2007: 415-419), in his study of workplace learning, noted that it is within the first three years of employment that practitioners gain confidence and personal agency, encounter challenge, and gain feedback and developmental support, all of which contribute to a rich learning experience; essentially it is during this period that formative core occupational learning happens. The participants were located within different types of legacy newspapers, from small weekly titles to larger regional daily titles producing copy for print and online distribution. Participants were not located on national titles as initial scoping for the study indicated that they did not employ staff who would be defined as 'early career'. The senior managers

who participated each had responsibility for the training of early career journalists either at a strategic level or through direct contact with trainees. The study did not consider broadcast journalism, which operates to a different context and regulatory framework in the UK to the legacy press.

A common question set was used in the interviews to elicit narrative responses from participants, and questions were designed to find out what the participants understood by the term 'journalism ethics', and who the key workplace influencers were in helping them develop this understanding. Their responses were transcribed, and a constructivist approach was taken to their analysis, informed by Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Each transcript underwent multiple readings, and an open coding approach was taken which allowed for the emergence of new concepts (Gobo 2008: 227; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 163-164; Urquhart 2013: 38).

Formal learning

Eraut describes formal learning in the workplace as that which tends to be organised, leading to an award, and led by a trainer (Eraut 2000: 115). Early career journalists in this study each described formal learning structures and processes in which they participated, all followed a training scheme operated by either the National Council for Training Journalists (the NCTJ), a UK industry-sponsored training body, or by Reach plc (formerly Trinity Mirror), one of the largest legacy press groups in the UK which developed in-house training. There was some homogeneity in the curricula followed for each qualification, in that they focused on the development of journalistic skills and an understanding of law and ethics as they relate to journalism practice. It is within the ethics curriculum where one might reasonably expect to find learning which focuses on what trust in journalism means. However it is not articulated as a topic of study in either scheme.

Trust is perhaps a difficult concept to describe and explain in the context of a skills-based training programme, but it could be argued that debate about what journalists want people to hold their trust in, whether it is in truth telling or news selection, trust in dealing fairly with a community, or trust in holding politicians to account, is important. For example, Pingree et al. (2021) discuss trust through the lens of journalists being trusted as truth seekers; Peters and Broersma (2013: 196) cite Schudson, who discusses trust in the goodwill of others but makes the point that distrust and scepticism are also necessary to maintain a healthy questioning attitude; while Peters and Broersma (2013: 46) and Phillips (2021: 171) consider trust as an essential facet of ethical journalism, in that ethical journalists should seek to be trusted as truthful and deal fairly with their audience.

Early career journalists in this study articulated a desire to be trusted but did not explicitly define trust or frame it as something which formed part of their formal learning. They did discuss learning journalism ethics as part of their training, but when asked what the nature of this learning was, they pointed towards being required to know and understand the *Editors' Code of Practice* (2021); their definition of journalism ethics focused narrowly on following the code. The *Editors' Code of Practice* is supported by the Society of Editors – a British organisation representing editors from all sectors of the legacy press industry – and used as a basis for the regulatory framework operated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Hanna and Dodd 2020: 14; IPSO 2018; Quinn 2018: 365). Each of the participants worked for a news title that was regulated by IPSO (IPSO 2019). Therefore, it is unsurprising that they were expected to learn and adhere to the code which underpins this regulation. Sanders problematises the reliance on codes as the definers of ethical practice, as codes can be viewed as a list of dos and don'ts, and as such are not useful in promoting ethical behaviour or engendering a relationship built on trust as these concepts are too complex to be reduced to a simple list (Sanders 2008: 139). Frost argues that to focus on codes as a means of signalling ethical journalism could also undermine efforts to improve journalistic culture, which would foster greater trust. He notes that codes can serve a public relations function but cautions they can 'add an aura of respectability and fairness without necessarily forcing any real need for responsibility' (Frost 2000: 101). This may be translated as 'trust us, we work to a code of practice', without a full understanding of what trust should look like and ignoring the potential for damaging consequences when trust is lost.

That the code has found itself at the centre of any learning of what ethical journalism might look like is a discussion for a different paper, other than to suggest here that it is arguably the result of a combination of the historic dominance of a single journalism training body in Britain (the NCTJ) and its interpretation of ethics, the challenges in defining and agreeing what a curriculum in occupational ethics should encompass, an historic unwillingness on the part of the industry in Britain to accept that journalism ethics was an area which merited serious consideration as part of any journalism training programme and the convenience of having a code of practice in place to guide occupational behaviours. The relationship between learning how to be ethical practitioners and being trusted by readers has historically been overlooked. It was only post-Leveson that the NCTJ began to recognise more explicitly ethics as part of its formal syllabus, and even then, the focus was on the learning of the *Editors' Code of Practice* (NCTJ 2016, 2019a).

Certainly, in terms of acquiring an understanding of what ethical journalism might mean, formal learning structures, in pointing early career journalists towards a single code of practice, take them only so far. Journalists might advance an argument that by following the *Editors' Code* they can be trusted to practise ethical journalism. However, that argument is hard to fully substantiate when looking at the detail of the code. It sets out finite expectations of behaviour but doesn't address what ethical journalism might be in terms of its potential for positive societal impact, nor does it account for what a community of readers might define as ethical, or what a relationship of trust between the journalist and the community might look like. The code emphasises the importance of being accurate in reporting news, and it is of course important that journalists can be trusted to be accurate, and it does offer guidance on dealing with people who are vulnerable, for example victims of sexual assault or families who have been bereaved. However, it does not set out to consider the nature and tone of the stories produced by journalists or the societal role of the journalist as citizen. It does not discuss developing a sense of 'humanity' as a journalist, for example, which is included in the Ethical Journalism Network's *Core principles of ethical journalism* (2019). The concept of humanity and being 'aware of the impact of our words and images on the lives of others' may be difficult to bring into a code where it is used as a framework for the adjudication of complaints.

Bradshaw (2021: 19) observed in a study of sports journalists and their negotiation of ethical issues that there was limited reference to ethical codes when journalists were making editorial decisions, yet they were still able to make 'nuanced ethical and editorial judgements'. He argues that learning a code of practice is not necessarily a precursor to being a good ethical journalist.

It is perhaps unfair to expect the code to define ethical journalism as it was not designed for this purpose, rather it is a code of practice to guide occupational behaviours. It was never intended as a code of ethics, and has found itself at the centre of training curricula in ethics by accident, not design (Benson 2017).

Informal learning

It is in looking at informal learning as described by Eraut (2000, 2007, 2008) that a clearer picture of the learning of ethical journalism and the role played by the desire to be trusted emerges. Eraut argues that in the workplace, learning happens through participation in work rather than solely through formally facilitated training, which when applied to the journalistic context, includes learning through interactions with other journalists and also with members of the community their news title serves. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) in their work on communities of practice discuss informal learning in the workplace,

conceptualising learning as having a social dimension, learning being a function of travelling along a trajectory from the periphery of a work-based community to full membership of that community (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). In so doing they are learning through practice, from experience and gaining meaning from their activity, through establishing their sense of occupational identity and through developing notions of belonging to that community.

As this paper suggests, in the case of the early career journalist, there are two distinct trajectories along which they travel. The first is towards full membership of the journalistic community located in the newsroom within which they operate. The second trajectory is towards full membership of the community of their notional readers, based in the geographical area their news title serves. In each case the interactions with others shaped their understanding of their role and behaviours. Lave and Wenger (1991) consider the social dimensions of learning in the workplace, with the desire to 'belong' to that workplace community, to become part of it and gain full membership of that community, a powerful driver in learning.

Community of practice

Early career participants in this study each without exception clearly articulated the importance of membership of their community of practice in establishing their personal occupational identities, in this context the community of practice being that located in a newsroom, consisting of other journalists, including news editors and editors. While each participant was contracted to work for a particular news title in a journalistic capacity, their sense of identity was about more than an employment contract, and it was clear that being part of a community of journalists working collectively in the production of news was their vocation rather than just a job. It was also apparent that members of their community of practice shaped how they acquired their understanding of what ethical journalism meant, and while early career journalists' narratives were heavily dominated by how the *Editors' Code* informed their interactions and discussions, there were other influences evident, chiefly senior journalists who brought substantial experience to ethical decision-making.

Diane worked on a large regional daily news title and her experience was typical of that described by all participants in the study, in that she drew on guidance from senior journalists in making ethical decisions:

> … on our news desk we do have quite a free and open conversation nearly every day in terms of ethics, what we should be doing. Obviously, journalism isn't always a clear-cut thing, we have lots of guidelines to help us make decisions, but I think there will always be grey areas. I would go to our news

> editors and ask them for guidance…often I would get one of my news editors to check the content [of a story] before it goes online just to say look, have we got this right, do you think this is OK as it stands?

She identifies here one of the weaknesses of working with codes in that she talks about the 'grey areas' which cannot be coded for, but there is still the need to identify the 'right' course of action, and her community of practice influenced her determination of the 'right' thing.

Eddie worked for a local weekly news title and shared the office with seven other journalists working across five local publications in total. He described daily conversations across the office as difficult stories cropped up:

> … if you do have any issues yourself, it's an environment where you can bring them up and people will support you in that. At my level as a trainee, it is the informal discussions that are useful as they happen when a story comes up and helps me reach a decision really quickly. As you go through those early weeks and months you do pick up off people around you.

Each of the participants in the study, from the early career journalists to the training managers, to some extent described a similar culture where discussions about the ethical approach to difficult stories were encouraged. Each in some way discussed membership of their community of practice in terms of belonging, clearly identifying as part of that community through a common approach to the resolution of issues in the way stories might be framed, aligning with Wenger's conceptualisation of a community of practice as a learning enabler (Wenger 2008).

While it was clear that the community of practice was important in shaping understanding of what ethical journalism should look like, a strong narrative also emerged in relation to the influence of the community of the notional reader, the people the journalists understood they were writing for. To distinguish this particular community from that of the community of peers encountered in the journalists' newsrooms and described as a community of practice, I conceptualise the community of the imagined reader as the *community of interest* in that this allows for the inclusion of those readers who might not be domiciled in the circulation area of a particular news title and cannot be referred to as members of a local community, but still have an interest in events which take place there – they may for example have family or work ties. They are not part of the local community itself, but hold an interest in it. The term community of interest also allows for the inclusion of those who might not be readers of the particular title but have a

notional interest in the stories and information produced by that title because they are domiciled in the geographical area the title covers, and the information carried by that title.

Community of interest

Each of the participants in the study spoke about the importance of having a good relationship with the community of interest. What the reader – real or imagined – thought of them as journalists was important to them, and many expressed an explicit desire to be trusted in the production of news. Indeed, erosion of trust in journalists was cited by some participants in the study as one of the most important challenges they faced as early career practitioners. Alina, who was based in a small local weekly newspaper office, said: '… people saying: "Oh yes, it was in the local paper," it is important to have that trust and maintain it….'

It is important to note here that a discussion about trust in journalism had not been prompted by the questions put to the study's participants – the word trust was not used by the questioner – yet emerged primarily in response to the question 'what do you see as being the biggest challenge faced by journalists today?' Alina identified loss of trust in journalism as her major concern. Similarly, Penny, working for a small weekly title with just two others in her newsroom, articulated a desire to have a relationship with her community of interest built on trust, saying: 'You want them [the readers] to feel that they can trust what you say.' Alina spoke about the lack of trust in journalists as being a 'major problem' for the industry. She said she had been told 'you can't trust journalists' on a number of occasions when interacting with people within her community of interest, which she felt hampered her in being able to do her job. She articulated a frustration that her readers did not distinguish between national journalism where practitioners had no allegiance or connection to the people they were writing about, and local journalism where the readers' perception is important to the journalist.

> Because we are a local paper, we are writing about people in our local community and you want to stay on the side of the local community, and that is how we have always seen it, for us to champion it and not to unnecessarily vilify people because it makes a better story, because these are people you know. The local approach is so different to the approach a national paper would have. They [national journalists] are going to do that story and never go back to it again, but we are reporting to that community again and again and again and there is a big difference.

In referencing the 'they' versus the 'we', Alina is articulating her sense of belonging to her community of practice, but also reveals through mention of 'our' community and wanting to 'stay onside' she is

somewhere along the trajectory to membership of her community of interest – perhaps not yet at the stage of full membership ('that community' indicating some degree of separation). Alina indicates that building a relationship with readers where journalists can be trusted to operate in their interests ('…stay on the side of…') is important. She also signals that the difference between national and local journalism is a function of where they are in relation to their membership of the community of interest, where national journalists 'never go back to it', versus the local who revisit it 'again and again and again'. She says that her desire to 'stay onside' influenced her journalistic behaviour and how she treated people she was interviewing, treating people with humanity particularly when someone had been bereaved.

Wenger (2008: 81) discusses learning as a function of negotiation of a joint enterprise within a community, where relationships emerge which are built on 'mutual accountability', through negotiation of what is important and why it is important. Alina's account of her relationship with her community of interest reveals she is learning a sense of this through her negotiation with that community, and in the context of the study, she is learning how to negotiate what being trusted as a journalist might consist of and what ethical journalism might look like to her. To some extent this learning is mediated by her peers in her community of practice who help her navigate her relationship within her community of interest, and Alina did identify colleagues whom she would turn to when she needed guidance. However, her relationship with her community of interest was personal to her and formative in terms of her own learning.

A closer analysis of the relationship between the community of interest and early career journalists in this study revealed that the desire to negotiate a relationship built on trust was important to each participant. The data signalled that there were two facets to the notion of trust that were articulated, where journalists wanted to be perceived as trustworthy in the accuracy of their work and also trusted to be 'on the side of' their community of interest, to align with and be part of that community. This perhaps indicates an awareness of the need for humanity in alignment with the Ethical Journalism Network's core principle, which states that: 'Journalists should do no harm. What we publish or broadcast may be hurtful but we should be aware of the impact of our words and images on the lives of others' (2019).

Trust and accuracy

According to Törnberg (2018), the World Economic Forum identifies misinformation as a major international threat, with social medial presenting opportunities for viral dissemination of what has become termed fake news. Berger (2018: 7) emphasises the

importance of accuracy in combatting misinformation, pointing to 'sloppy verification' and 'sensationalising that exaggerates for effect and hyper-partisan selection of facts at the expense of fairness' as markers of poor journalistic practice which risk tarnishing the news media and public trust in it. The majority of participants in this study were very aware of the impacts of the narratives around fake news, and articulated two key areas of concern; firstly, they find themselves in competition with social media platforms carrying unverified information, making the journalistic community look tardy if they take time to check the information prior to publication, or make it appear that they are hiding something by not republishing social media postings they were unable to verify; and secondly they have become targets for accusations that they are untrustworthy, that all journalists peddle fake news, shades of Berger's tarnishing reaching the local news ecology.

They expressed concern that news audiences aligned unfiltered and unverified social media postings with journalism, and that there was little differentiation in the mind of the reader between social media content creators and journalists who worked for the legacy press industry, operating to a code of practice which required them to fact check.

James, a training director for a large legacy press group, observed that it was important readers understood that journalists were different to social media content creators and disseminators because of the work put into fact checking.

> It has always been my belief that when people pick up the local paper or go to its website, they do know that it's the result of responsible diligent journalism. That is something we aspire to, that we are trusted. In a world where there are so many places that you can get news, [including] fake news, we need to provide an oasis of sanity and trust in the middle of that.

Early career journalist Ian said that while members of his community turn to their local newspaper and its associated website because they are a trusted source of information, he found himself in competition with the unfiltered and unchecked social media posts which embellish and sensationalise stories, often publishing information which should not be in the public domain.

> We keep an eye on social media and see comments which say 'oh there is a fire,' or someone has been shot or murdered, and you get there and find out that someone has fallen down some stairs and there hasn't been a murder or stabbing. It is the newspaper's job to decide what is fact and fiction and I think that can be an issue, because if you go on what people say online and because you want to be there first [publishing

> the news] you can end up making the same mistakes that they do on social media and end up printing something that might be false or the wrong address or the wrong circumstances. You have to be accurate. You have to be 100 per cent certain that you are right, particularly when Joe Bloggs on Twitter isn't.

Fact-checking and accuracy in news production were cited by the majority of this study's participants as an important part of their work, shaping their occupational identity as journalists who can be trusted to verify information before publication, so that their work is seen to be reliable across their community of interest. While accuracy is a cornerstone of their code of practice, early career journalists identified being trusted by their community of interest as an important driver in their understanding of the importance of validating information, in alignment with the findings of Coleman et al. (2012).

Trusted to belong

The desire to be perceived as part of the community of interest by early career journalists was also a driver in their formation of an understanding of ethics. Eddie spoke about having a relationship built on trust with his community and was aware that the tarnishing of journalism globally impacted on local news production.

> People want different things from their local paper now… the feeling I get from our readers and the people I meet is that there is a perception that the industry is going down the pot, and it is about keeping those relationships going and making sure that you have that community engagement, and that stems from trust and from responsible reporting and being sensitive to the community you serve.

Here he frames journalism as a service and talks about community engagement with 'our' readers, his relationship with his community of interest and his sense of belonging to that community shaping his understanding of what he terms 'responsible reporting', an important part of his identity as a journalist on a large weekly news title.

Joe worked for a large city daily publication, and he too discussed his role in terms of his place within his community: '…we have a public duty and a duty of care towards everyone we deal with…'. He placed importance on being seen as trustworthy, respectable, responsible and honest.

Lesley talked about learning how to interact with his community of interest from his work-based mentor, Phil, an experienced journalist who lived in the community of interest himself, who would suggest different ways of treating a story, perhaps demonstrating

compassion and sensitivity towards people who were having a difficult time. Phil's membership of the community of interest shaped his guidance towards Lesley. In turn, Lesley as an early career journalist articulated an appreciation of Phil's approach and talked about 'championing' the town and his desire to be perceived as 'onside' as a member of that community.

To understand what may be happening here it is helpful to turn consider Wenger (2008: 4-5) who discusses learning as a social activity with four components: learning as doing through practice, learning as experience and making meaning of occupational activity, learning as becoming through developing an occupational identity, and learning as belonging and identifying as part of a community. When considering this final component where Wenger is referring to belonging to a community of practice, in the context of this study this might be understood as the journalist belonging to the community of their newsroom, being a journalist for a particular news brand and identifying as part of the team of news producers. However, it is possible to make a special case to extend Wenger's concept to consider that the early career journalists in this study were also aware of their place within the community of interest. Through striving to establish that place – to become part of that community and identify as belonging to that community – they were learning, in particular learning the importance of relationship-building based on trust and ethical conduct. While it is possible to argue that the understanding of their place within the community of interest may be mediated by members of their community of practice, it is the individual who is negotiating the journey towards membership of their community of interest, following their own learning journey through their encounters and experiences.

Lave and Wenger (1991), in their original study, defined the learning arena as being bounded by mutual engagement in a joint enterprise with a shared repertoire for it to be conceptualised as a legitimate space for work-based learning (Wenger 2008: 72-73). Fuller (1996, cited in Hughes et al. 2007: 21) observes that the difference between a community of practice and a casual network of social interactions is that 'social relations are formed, negotiated and sustained around the activity that has brought people together'. A more recent definition suggested by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner simplifies this concept to:

> Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

When considering early career journalists working in the British legacy press then it is possible to identify two functional communities of practice which offer learning arenas, one inward facing towards

the newsroom, and a second which looks outward towards the local geographic community where the notional reader is located – the community of interest – and which, while not a traditional workplace as initially envisaged by Lave and Wenger (1991), is more than a casual network of social interactions. There is a shared passion between the community of interest and the journalist in the production of news, from promoting local events to providing a platform for democratic debate, where work-like relationships are formed with key community stakeholders.

This resonates with literature from the field of communitarianism where scholars argue that trust and loyalty are forged through collaborative endeavour towards positive communal goals and the development of social interactions (Christians et al., 1993; Fackler 2020). Christians (cited in Land and Hornaday 2006: 65-66) discusses the relationship between journalists and their community of interest as being based on complex dialogue with the common aim of transforming civic life and Pickard emphasises this in framing local journalism as an 'essential public service' where journalism is a key component of community life (Pickard 2020: 29). Communitarianism is a broad field and it is not intended to discuss it further here, other than to consider that in the context of the research underpinning this paper, which considers learning through work, it is possible to argue that the community of interest can be viewed as a workplace for the developing journalist. It is a place providing legitimate learning opportunities through interaction with members of that community, with the desire to belong and be perceived as a trusted and ethical component of that community.

An analysis of the data in this study indicated that the desire to be seen as part of the community of interest and trusted by readers impacted on ethical news selection and on the framing of particular stories.

Members of Eddie's community of interest had died in the bombing of the Manchester Arena in 2017. He had been able to establish the name of a local teenage victim in time to break the news on his title's early morning online bulletin but had been asked by the headteacher of the school where she was a pupil to delay publication to give the school time to break the news themselves during a school assembly so that they could offer appropriate support to the victim's friends. He agreed to delay publication and explained that for him this was the ethical thing to do. The headteacher had placed trust in him in making the request for a delay and this was sufficiently important to him that he made the case to his news editor to hold back on publishing the story.

Early career journalists at other news titles who were impacted by the Manchester Arena bombing also spoke about how their

membership of their community of interest impacted on their approach to news production around the incident, either through delaying publication of information at the request of families directly impacted or through careful selection of images from the scene to avoid causing distress – and as Diane articulated, such decisions were because they were part of that community, and were in contrast to decisions made by national news producers who had no community connectedness. She said that giving members of her community some sense of control over what was published during a time of crisis 'helped them to trust us going forward, so you know that it was the right thing to do'.

Lesley spoke about how his community membership impacted on his framing of news, turning what might be bad news towards a more positive focus.

> We do see our role as championing the town. We have a lot of people come into our office, people off the street with stories, we have quite close relationships with lots of different groups within the town …. we want to be seen as a positive newspaper.

He worked with his news editor on a story about a training company that had failed an educational inspection and the options they faced of either criticising the company, where negative publicity might force its closure, or giving a more nuanced story which set out the historic problems the company had faced that had impacted on its failure and the measures which had been taken to turn the training provision around. They decided to publish the more positive story, and Lesley said their reasons were that the training providers were 'our people' who had experienced a difficult time, and that it was in the interests of the town to help them recover.

In each case here, the formation of understanding of what the ethical approach to stories might be was predicated on the individual journalist's developing sense of belonging to their community, to be a trusted part of that community.

Literature does point towards risks to objectivity and autonomy in becoming part of a community as discussed in the work of McDevitt (2003) and Hatcher and Haavik (2017). David, a trainee on a small news title, alluded to these risks when he talked about being rigorous as a journalist while ensuring he represented his readers fairly.

> It's a daunting task being the sole reporter in a town to be able to keep that relationship up with everyone, keep everyone happy but also make sure you are doing your job and not just, you know, puffing up people's feathers (David).

This paper focuses on the how and where of learning, and future research may further consider the extent to which becoming part of the community of interest exerts both positive and negative influences on the development of ethical understanding.

Conclusion

Literature on the learning of journalism ethics has tended to focus on formal learning within recognised educational structures, including work by Thomass (1998) who conducted an early review of the journalism ethics curriculum in British colleges and universities and Sanders et al. (2008) who made a comparison of the ethical values of British and Spanish journalism students. Robinson (2017) investigated how to build better connections with communities through better teaching of journalism, drawing on the communitarian philosophy of John Dewey (1954 [1927]) who argued that good journalists helped to foster community. In each case the focus was on the teaching of journalism students within academic structures rather than the learning of journalism in the workplace. Research underpinning this paper focuses on work-based learning, and while formal learning does have a part to play in the learning of occupational codes, it is the informal learning opportunities where the deeper learning of ethical journalism and an understanding of the importance of trust are located.

Journalists learn some understanding of occupational ethics through formally facilitated training programmes which focus on codes of conduct. However, work-based interactions help to shape early career journalists' occupational identities as they strive to belong to the communities in which they are located. While their community of practice is important in shaping their understanding of what ethical journalism may be, a desire to be part of the community of their notional reader, their community of interest, and to be seen as a trusted journalist, are also strong drivers in the development of this understanding.

The learning happens as they move from the periphery of their community towards full membership, where early career journalists articulated the importance of developing trust in them and their work as important. Striving to be viewed as trusted – treating stories about the community with accuracy, fairness, and humanity – enabled them to move towards community membership, and along that trajectory they developed an understanding of how to define what journalism ethics means to them, and the importance of operating within ethical boundaries.

That none of the participants in this particular study recognised their interactions with members of their communities as learning opportunities is something the legacy press sector might want to address. When asked about how they learned ethics, each early

career journalist pointed towards formal training programmes and the learning of a code, with little recognition of the role played by the community of practice or community of interest. Developing a better understanding of how social learning impacts on ethical behaviours and practices, and making this learning more explicitly visible, may allow the sector to lay firmer foundations for a relationship of trust between the journalist and the notional reader. Where the journalist can claim the opinion of their community of interest matters to them as they develop their occupational identities as trusted practitioners, and fully recognise how this relationship impacts on their understanding of what ethical journalism means, then they may well be better able to defend the reputation of the legacy press as an institution where trust can be located.

Notes

[1] The term 'legacy press' references the traditional British newspaper industry. The shift to multi-modal news distribution, using print and online technologies, means that the historic terminology 'newspaper' and 'press' no longer fully reflects how journalism is produced and disseminated by this particular part of the wider journalistic ecosystem. 'Legacy press' and 'press' are used in this paper as a shorthand reference to that part of the industry which is located in historic newspaper titles as opposed to those sectors which identify as broadcast news producers or online-only news producers and disseminators

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Note on the contributor

Dr Ruth Stoker is a senior lecturer in journalism at the University of Huddersfield in West Yorkshire, where she is also a director of teaching and learning. A former journalist, her research explores work-based learning in the legacy press sector with a focus on the learning of occupational ethics.

Conflict of interest

The fieldwork underpinning this paper was supported in part by a research bursary awarded by the Association for Journalism Education.

PAPER

David Randles

New 'glocal' players: Exploring the emergence and position of fan-produced football digital media

This paper examines the emergence of fan-produced digital platforms and their position in the football media landscape in what has become a competitive environment for audience share. The growing prominence of digital fan media comes at a time when digitisation has seen a shift in production techniques and changing consumption habits, enabling new voices to be heard and contributing to a redefinition of the relationship between content producers and users that is challenging some of football's traditional reporting practice (Randles 2022, forthcoming). Based on interviews with the people behind some of England's most prominent fan-based platforms, the paper explores how digital fan media has flourished by creating experiential content with interaction and authenticity at its core that is resulting in transnational 'glocal' fan identities.

Key words: sports journalism, digital fan media, social media, football, glocalisation

Introduction: 'Fans with typewriters' 2.0

When sports journalist David Walsh used the phrase 'fans with typewriters' (2012) he was referring to those colleagues on the world cycling circuit who had ignored claims that seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong was a serial drug cheat. Instead of investigating the allegations, Walsh believes some of his fellow journalists chose to look the other way in return for access to Armstrong, who subsequently admitted his doping and was disgraced. Research dealing with the occupational status of sports journalists has also highlighted complicit reporter-source relationships, with football journalists in particular attracting the unwanted 'fans with typewriters' tag (Rowe 2004; Boyle 2006; McEnnis 2017).

Just as the laptop has replaced the typewriter, and websites have contributed to a significant decline in newspaper circulations, all respondents in this study agree that without technological advance they would not have been able to enter an environment that has evolved from what Sugden and Tomlinson described as the 'once simple world of standard match schedules [that was] based in the hegemony of print media' (2008: 159-160) to a more open and democratic space. By extending my previous research involving the digital transformation of professional football coverage in England, which finds how digitisation is redefining workflows, workload and, importantly here, journalistic practice (Randles 2022, forthcoming), this latest study adds to other scholarly work exploring the juncture between fan-produced content and professional sports media. McEnnis (2017, 2022, forthcoming) explores how sports journalists view football fan bloggers in terms of their own professional identity and provides an insightful fifth-estate logic to sports blogging, thereby building on work by Boyle and Haynes (2009) that illustrated how the dominant position enjoyed by journalists through mass media's monopolistic hold over communication methods was being challenged by new producers of sports content.

Just as Gillmor (2004) wrote of grassroots journalism, Jenkins (2006) of the politics of participation and Rettberg (2008) about Web 2.0's empowerment of citizen journalists – a term Harcup (2013) applies to dissident or alternative media – Boyle (2017) recognises how the digitisation of the 1990s put sports journalism at the forefront of a transition within journalism generally. The emergent online culture of consumption allowed new, fan-based sources of information to establish some prominence as sports fan culture evolved. It is here where Domeneghetti (2022, forthcoming) claims the growth of non-traditional independent media signifies how professional sports journalism is not catering for the needs of all sports fans. McCarthy (2012) proposes that sports fan bloggers may well be reacting and responding to a mediated experience of sport. Allied to such perspectives, this paper explores how the authenticity of fan experience is a key component in contemporary sports media content. Such authenticity is raised by interviewees as a unique characteristic of digital fan media that counters some of the standard protocols which they claim are inherent in football journalism in particular.

Where some studies have tended to focus on textual blogging (Kian et al 2011; McCarthy 2012, 2014; McEnnis 2017, 2022, forthcoming) a new wave of fan media have adopted a converged hybrid approach to content production combining video, text and audio while utilising the hosting and distribution capabilities of a range of digital and social media platforms to engage, interact with and grow large domestic and global audiences. Showing how digital fan media presents practical and ethical challenges for

mainstream sports media outlets competing for audience in the same transnational space, this thematic discussion begins with a brief methodology and overview of selected participants. It then develops five distinct, yet related, sub-sections which explore some of the salient points in this developing research field by interweaving respondent data with a synthesis of existing literature.

Research method

The study used in-depth semi-structured interviews with a small sample of founders of prominent digital fan media to facilitate concentrated and detailed insight to the research area. Qualitative empirical data was gathered from three established fan media concerns: The Anfield Wrap (TAW); The United Stand (TUS) and AFTV (formerly Arsenal Fan TV). Each group was selected on the basis of their early adoption and subsequent popularity as pioneering sector leaders in this relatively new digital space.

UK-based fan media aligned with English Premier League (EPL) clubs were chosen due to the international appeal of what Millward (2011) calls 'the global football league'. Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United's digital fan media was of particular interest due to the clubs' long-held place within the EPL's so-called 'Big Six' and their historic and established local and global fanbase. There is evidence of digital fan media start-ups across the EPL in recent years but, as yet, the vast majority have not attracted the follower and engagement levels achieved by the platforms included here that have been running for between seven and 10 years.

Two interviews were conducted over Zoom – Robbie Lyle (AFTV) and Mark Goldbridge (TUS). Gareth Roberts (TAW) was interviewed face-to-face. The interviews lasted between 55 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes. While terms such as YouTubers and influencers are sometimes used, the term 'fan channel' was rejected by all respondents. Rather, the interviewees agreed that digital fan media, fan-led media and fan-produced media were acceptable descriptions of the genre.

The line-up

AFTV (Arsenal Fan TV)

Launched in 2012 by Arsenal fan Robbie Lyle, AFTV claims to be 'the largest football fan network in the world' and, as of August 2021, had 1.37 million subscribers to a YouTube channel that has attracted over 1 billion views (AFTV, YouTube 2021).

The United Stand (TUS)

The Manchester United-focused platform was launched by supporter Brent Di Cesare under the alias Mark Goldbridge in 2014 and has amassed 1.09 million YouTube subscribers and over 592 million views (The United Stand, YouTube 2021). TUS claims to be

'the world's biggest independent unofficial Manchester United fan channel' adding: 'We are focused on giving fans of the club a voice in a world of professional pundits' (TheUnitedStand.com 2021).

The Anfield Wrap (TAW)

A Liverpool FC fan-led platform, it was founded by a small group of supporters including Gareth Roberts in 2011 and has taken a different route than the previously mentioned independent platforms, charging a monthly subscription for access to much of its video content and podcasts, although some content is free. It has amassed more than 60,000 YouTube subscriptions and over 18 million views. TAW is part-owned by US-based Red Touch Media that in 2013 acquired a 25 per cent stake in the business. Red Touch Media has no editorial input and can be vetoed by other shareholders, most of whom are employed at TAW.

In addition to a website, each fan-led concern is prominent across the following social media platforms (figures denote follows):

	Twitter	Instagram	Facebook	Tik Tok
AFTV	588k +	985k +	1m +	197k +
TUS	805k +	211k +	92k +	*135k +
TAW	363k +	151k +	166k +	35k +

*Tik Tok figure corresponds with affiliated TUS account 'GoldbridgeOfficial'

Playing on a new pitch – from print to digital

The origins of digital fan media are arguably less politically grounded than the print fanzine movement of the mid-1980s, and yet inherent to both genres of fan-produced content is a dissatisfaction with mainstream media. Boyle describes this in terms of 'a long tradition of dissent', seeing online fan communities 'evolving out of the print fanzine movement' (2006: 142). Ryan (2021) agrees that fanzines provided a place of resistance for fans to criticise their clubs, players and the mainstream media at a time when football supporters felt increasingly disenfranchised in an era blighted by crowd disturbances against a backdrop of football played in decrepit and unsafe stadia.

Football journalist and founder of longstanding Manchester United fanzine United We Stand Andy Mitten recalls starting the publication in 1989 as 'decisions were being made on my behalf where we had no voice and were all considered hooligans' (Sked 2017). This is a position recognised by Domeneghetti in that fanzines were a means to voice disenchantment with the game's authorities but also, and importantly when we consider digital fan media today, an outlet whereby fans could 'express themselves creatively' (2017: 187).

Football fanzines grew exponentially from the 1980s into the 1990s, with Redhead (1991) recognising over 400 sport-related versions by 1991, up from a mere handful in 1985. Easier access to the means of production has now led to significant growth of digital fan media, but with capacity to reach much larger audiences due to the immediate and trans-national penetration of social media. And yet, similar to the sub-cultural, anti-establishment ethos of fanzines in topics and tone, while digital fan platforms have been greeted with some scepticism in professional circles (McEnnis 2017), and are not universally accepted by all supporters, there are those who welcome the forthright and vocal genre as captured in an interview with Mark Goldbridge in football magazine *FourFourTwo* (2019) that describes digital fan media as 'a natural evolution' of fanzines and 'a counterblast to the dreariness of media-trained banality'. Elaborating in his interview for this study, Goldbridge refers to digital fan media as a 'watered down version of fanzines that tend to hit the same target area' while agreeing they provide content that is unlikely to appear in mainstream media:

> It is that freedom of speech, you know you're not constrained. You also know MUTV or a Man United Twitter account is never going to say 'Wasn't Dan James shit today'. They just can't do it. We're never going to see that on *Match of the Day*. And I don't actually think it ever should exist within club media or mainstream media.

Gareth Roberts was employed as a newspaper sports sub-editor when he started the Well Red fanzine as a pre-cursor to The Anfield Wrap at a time when many Liverpool supporters felt controversial owners, Tom Hicks and George Gillett, were not being held to account by football journalists after leveraging sizeable debt against the club's assets. As Roberts recalls:

> What was going on at the club, why it was going on and what we thought was needed to stop it, none of that was being covered by the mainstream media. They didn't do it so it was left to the fans to do it. People were cynical about why there wasn't enough coverage ... is the relationship between the paper [*Liverpool Echo*] and the club too cosy?

This lack of confidence in football journalism to provide deeper enquiry is symptomatic of the original 'fans with typewriters' phenomenon and provided a spur for fan content producers to react to the perceived failings of sports journalism while enhancing their own prestige and authority (McEnnis 2022, forthcoming).

Access versus authenticity

It is helpful to draw from writings on boundary work and jurisdiction to consider the degrees of separation between the

professional identity of sports journalists and the non-professional domain of fan media and also hierarchies within each field. As McEnnis (2017) locates a 'toy department within a toy department' on sportsdesks, where traditional reporters assume professional prominence over digital sports journalists, later research (McEnnis 2022, forthcoming) presents categories within sports blogging in terms of 'basic', 'intermediate' and 'advanced' impact, the latter area being the furthest departure from the 'bastion of easy living, sloppy journalism and soft news' (Boyle 2006: 1). Comments from all interviewees resonate with McEnnis (2017) in that fans and journalists are now 'playing on the same pitch' in terms of hosting and distributing content across digital and social media platforms, with some crossover of journalistic activity. And while there is evidence of a growing number of contributors to fan media having journalism or media-related knowledge and experience (Ryan 2021), it is not an ambition for fan media to define itself in terms of journalism. Goldbridge recognises two related but distinct realms:

> They're very different in the same sort of area. Fan media is just a very different raw, unfiltered type of content. You're not going to get a lot of it in the mainstream. I think mainstream probably tries to wander where we are. We've probably tried to wander where they are but, actually, they complement each other really well.

Lyle states how providing a different perspective to mainstream media and the 'tired lines from ex-players and pundits' was a key motivation for starting AFTV:

> You can come on here and have your say, have a chat and tell us what you think about the club, whether it be good, bad or indifferent. I just felt that in the past there was no platform offering that.

As Lyle highlights the 'honesty' of fan media over professional coverage, Goldbridge and Roberts see 'authenticity' as a major draw for supporters, suggesting mainstream media lacks the same appeal or, as McCarthy (2014: 67) states, 'an intimacy with the sport that traditional sports journalism, even with its myriad first-hand quotes and access to information, does not'. All respondents acknowledge the professional protocols that can dictate football journalist-source relationships, a key factor being access to players, managers and club officials. But in an age when access in elite football is restricted (Boyle 2006; Steen 2015) the *Manchester Evening News*' Manchester United correspondent Samuel Luckhurst (2021) describes 'a wider distance' between players and journalists and 'a tactful balancing act' in maintaining relationships with clubs. For Lyle, this has created a professional culture that compromises the privileged status of access in that clubs have 'too much control'

and journalists are too often 'fed what the club wants them to hear'.

In an environment where accreditation is typically reserved for professional journalists, there are limited occasions where some clubs grant fan media access to players and managers or to attend media conferences, as suggested by Roberts in that 'we have an alright relationship with the club' but that 'our business model does not rely on it'. Moritz and Mirer question access as a measure to justify the occupational legitimacy of football journalism and see a diminishing of the authority of the exclusive or 'scoop scoreboard', a badge of professional prestige that has been undermined by the speed of distribution of digital information and 'the growth of quasi-journalistic work on in-house team websites' (2022, forthcoming: 138). This corresponds with findings from interviewees, who also suggest a devaluation of access in what has become a commercial environment with different agendas at play (Boyle and Haynes 2009). Content from official access, the interviewees suggest, is not what audiences expect from digital fan media. As Lyle says, 'Getting behind the scenes and being pitch side. That's not important to me.' Roberts points to the 'shirt and tie' approach of traditional football coverage:

> People don't actually want the mainstream stuff from us. Some of the big interviews that we've done with players or whoever, that we think will fly, they don't. People watch and listen to them but they don't do great numbers.

Where fan media is unapologetic for its partisan approach, Bradshaw and Minogue (2019: 84-85) highlight the 'myth' of objectivity in sports journalism, particularly in local or regional reporting where home team coverage often displays forms of 'boosterism', a long-held 'accepted and even expected practice' in US sports journalism where reporters openly favour local teams. Nonetheless, Roberts sees the organic passion of fan media as an advantage over traditional coverage, albeit both can be seen as subjective in their own way:

> It's all very steady, polite applause and tweaking your intro. How dare you celebrate [in the press box]. That's odd. That's not how you watch football. They don't experience it like we do. They sit in the press box with a press pass and it's a very different experience.

The notion of authenticity helps us consider how fan-led concerns have become principal contributors to an experiential and networked media sport environment as communication technologies facilitate the creation and distribution of digitised content away from traditional broadcast and print media (Hutchins

and Rowe 2012). With this, immediacy and interaction are also key factors that have transformed the relationship between content producers and audience, aspects of the sports media complex that have been activated by technology and allowed fan media to thrive.

Interaction and the '24/7-ness' of fandom

Forecasting changes in the media eco-system, BBC media editor Amol Rajan (2020) pointed to an intense battle for audience in the 'attention economy', a term used a decade earlier by Napoli (2011) in recognition of new modes of delivery of content and programming as a consequence of technological advance.

There is broader recognition of how media and communications sectors have been transformed by digitisation and how convergent communications have redefined the balance of power between media content producers, distributors and consumers (Deuze 2007; Castells 2013). Accompanying the changing relationship between producers and audiences as a result of technological progress (Pearson 2010), the emergence and subsequent popularity of digital fan media has added to an increasingly complex sports media environment in which the lines between producer, consumer, enactor, fan and athlete have become blurred as the omnipresence of the internet has led to a surge in demand for and consumption of sports media content (Billings and Hardin 2014).

As the digital environment has removed many of the barriers that once existed between journalists and their audience (Knight and Cook 2013; Domeneghetti 2017; Lambert 2019; Bradshaw and Minogue 2019) digital transformation has democratised the means of production, enabling fans to produce and disseminate content to an expanded digital audience. A consequence of the growth and significance of non-professional sports content producers is the undermining of sports journalism, including football journalism, in that the popularity of non-traditional forms of football coverage has seen some football journalists re-evaluate their professional identity and relationship with audiences (McEnnis 2017; Bradshaw and Minogue 2019).

Digital fan media alone is not responsible for such introspection but, rather, is one of multiple factors redefining professional practice. And yet, as has already been suggested, if football journalism was meeting audience demand, would there be any call for digital fan media? The technological provision of easy and instant access to digital information has seen audiences transition from passive recipients to active consumers of content (Napoli 2011; Hutchins and Rowe 2012) allowing fan-led start-ups to take advantage of the digital tools at their disposal to engage with audiences in a way that was not previously possible. With this, according to Lyle, is a sense that mainstream media are playing catch up:

> We wouldn't exist if it weren't for the technology. It has been a game changer. It's key to what we do and we're constantly looking to get better with it whereas part of the problem with some traditional media is they've taken so long to embrace it. They've even looked down their nose at the technology and they've fallen so far behind.

Though it is acknowledged that sports journalists must adapt to change and adopt new technologies to ensure outputs are in keeping with audience trends (Laucella 2014; Bradshaw and Minogue 2019; Randles 2022, forthcoming), digital fan media claims to have stolen a march on audience interaction and engagement. The ideas of a connected sports fan and that the revised relationship between producers and consumers of media sport now often focuses on what happens at the user's end (Rowe 2014) are supported by this study's interviews. The interviewees commented that instant fan interaction is a key premise on which they have been able to establish loyal followings. Recalling web forums as a place for online fan communities to gather in the internet's formative years, Goldbridge refers to 'slow sports news' and how his desire for a quicker form of communication saw him turn to YouTube:

> You would go on to something like *BBC 606*, type something out and then you wait 20 minutes for someone to reply and then you reply. ... I was a bit frustrated. *Match of the Day* and mainstream media, I felt it was very tame and lacked speed in its approach. The proper chat that really gets you going is down the pub with your mates, so I wanted to replicate that somehow.

Sugden and Tomlinson (2008) note that the increase in comment and opinion is a consequence of a 24-hour rolling news culture, and the idea of 'sports chatter' (Eco 1986; Rowe 1995) assumes greater significance when we consider the expressive, analytical and opinion-driven premise from which so much football content is now derived, an outcome being that some traditional content formats are proving less popular (Randles 2022, forthcoming). It is significant how digital-social and mobile technologies are used by fan media to broadcast live to engage and interact with fans, not only in the immediate aftermath of matches, but throughout the week to capture the continuum of football fandom. As Roberts explains:

> There's 24/7 media coverage of football now but also the 24/7-ness of being a fan. What's happening at Liverpool? If we're linked to someone, we'll find out about them and constantly do pieces on it. We'll write for the website. We'll do podcasts. We'll let you know. It's just that 24/7 focus on Liverpool that we're bringing to our fans.

Fan-cams, lives and watchalongs

An extended mediated matchday experience means football reporters and club media will now produce more content across fluid deadlines in an attempt to engage audiences for longer, a trend that causes Reach Plc regional head of sport, Jon Birchall, to talk of 'the whole journey around the game' (Randles 2022, forthcoming: 167). Mainstream football content producers are now required to utilise web-enabled technologies (Domeneghetti 2017; Lambert 2019; Bradshaw and Minogue 2019) as matchday workflows are re-evaluated in response to changing audience behaviours. In line with the shift to creating experiential content, that is content that captures and re-enacts fan experience for those not in live attendance, football journalists at Eurosport, BBC Sport Online and Goal.com, among others, point to the growing significance of social-mobile storytelling to help capture atmosphere and engage audience in live environments (Randles 2022, forthcoming). Whereas match previews, post-match summaries and Q&As with fans over Facebook and Instagram lives are becoming commonplace for some journalists, digital fan media have been experimenting with tech-enabled experiential formats for the past decade and are often the go-to place for many supporters who want live interaction.

The provision of experiential content has become a cornerstone of digital fan media that often plays on the emotive value of football and controversially so at times. Some fan media outlets have been criticised for their use of 'fan-cams', that is asking supporters questions on camera as they leave stadia, a format that has become synonymous with passionate and sometimes expletive-laden rants. While the fan-cam has been disposed of by some fan media as, according to Goldbridge, 'it's not what our fans want anymore', other formats such as 'watchalongs' and live post-match shows from venues ranging from purpose-built studios to pubs near grounds are proving popular. Lyle reveals AFTV's watchalong of Arsenal's pre-season match against Tottenham attracted over 300,000 live views: 'It's all about interaction when your team's playing. You want to talk about how you feel, the good, the bad, the ugly.'

Recognising the dual appeal of information and interaction for online audiences, it is here where Schultz and Arke (2015) see the shift away from a static one-way process in which traditional media were very much in control of determining the agenda and shaping messages to be delivered to audiences. The growing significance of user-producer engagement as a consequence of the proliferation of social media platforms emphasises the role of content creation and a recognition by organisations of the social and network value of engagement within social media (Dolan et al. 2016). As a result, social media content is now being used to stimulate engagement whereby fans are mediated participants in spectator sports, what

Bowman and Cranmer (2014) term 'socialmediasport'. They add how technology is bringing fans and sport closer together, providing opportunities for content producers to reach out to audiences on a more intimate and social level that encourages fans to actively seek meaningful connections to athletes, clubs and media organisations that are looking to engage audience through digital content.

By leveraging its position in this expanded digital space for football coverage, fan media has been able to grow audience and interact on a personal level. This interaction has taken centre stage for many supporters who are now able to participate in a live conversation by virtue of a more dynamic and interactive sports communication process that has been enabled by the emergence of digital communication via the internet in that 'literally millions of fans who had been shut out of the sports communication process, can now take part in a variety of ways' (Schultz and Arke 2015: 20).

Just as some fan media contributors have grown their social media profile to become known as influencers independent of the channels that first shot them to prominence, there are football journalists who are also now developing their social media presence to become a brand in their own right with audiences that in some cases are bigger than the organisations they work for (Bradshaw and Minogue 2019: 8). Describing the 'sense of empowerment' that can come with being both publisher and product, Steen (2015: 43) warns of a 'cult of personality' as a by-product of social media, and yet it is this very phenomenon that has contributed to the success of digital fan media with individual personae often proving popular with the audience. It is also apparent how mainstream media are turning to social media influencers, podcasters and YouTubers as sources or, in some cases, presenters. While all interviewees in this study recognise and welcome closer collaboration with mainstream media, there is growing debate as to whether some of this is facilitating the dumbing down of professional sports journalism in the quest to appeal to younger audiences (Kelly 2020).

Going global – transnational glocalisation of '*flâneur*' fandom

In accordance with Hutchins and Rowe (2012) regarding globalisation as one of the main consequences of the broadening of the media-sport complex, the English Premier League's transnational relationships have altered ways in which the game is now consumed in line with the league's global and commercial transformations (Woods and Ludvigsen 2021). Just as technology has been the catalyst for the implementation of digital fan media, it has also enabled global content consumption from fans positioned in this same transnational space who would previously have been restricted from the shared mediated 'live' experience of football fandom, as noted by Roberts:

> Fans we've got in America and Australia, they'll watch it on the telly but they don't get that fan experience. We can give them a bit of that, a bit of the match through our eyes because of the technology. It helps show we're authentic, that we go home and away, that we are who we say we are. People love that, it's some of our most popular content when we look at the numbers.

Lyle says that while over 50 per cent of AFTV's audience are UK-based, the rest is global. Likewise, Goldbridge attributes some of TUS's popularity to Manchester United's global appeal, a factor, like AFTV, that is central to its business model. TUS claims 'our social reach boasts one of the largest followings in the world' and that it 'garners millions of views per month via a variety of different social media platforms', helping businesses 'reach a much wider audience if you partner with us' (TheUnitedStand.com 2021). Goldbridge says content creators can utilise new technologies to attract global football audience:

> The technology is massive and it makes the world of football a smaller place because you can have people from India and America. … We all know we've got those world fan-bases and clubs are very aware of them too.

Fenton (2020) applies Rainie and Wellman's (2012) triple revolution logic of fast internet, social media and smartphones to help illustrate how digital technology has been instrumental to the hyper-digitalisation of fans by enabling the amplification of messages, discussion and interaction between clubs, players and fans while allowing audience reach beyond the local into national or international spaces.

Developing the concept of the 'cosmopolitan football flâneur' – that is, a new wave of global fans looking for a club to support – Petersen-Wagner (2017) agrees digitisation has led to the globalisation of fandom. In so doing, this has created scope for a more diverse transnational fan that is seen as distinct from the stereotypical traditional and authentic fan – those of a perceived homogenous group of working-class males who have enjoyed a long pre-existing local affinity to a club. In terms of fan identity, Petersen-Wagner asks how so-called 'less authentic' supporters were able to start following foreign clubs via digital means and how this influenced fandom practices, a point addressed by Roberts who recognises global fans expressing themselves in line with traditional fandom: 'We have subscribers from the US, Ireland, Australia and wherever who tell us they have learned chants, phrases and other colloquialisms associated with supporting Liverpool FC by following TAW.'

By promoting the traditional signs and symbols of fan identity specific to their clubs and using these characteristics of authenticity to appeal to and attract so-called less authentic global supporters, digital fan media can contribute to the 'glocalisation' of transnational fan identity where behaviour previously only associated with local supporters is now being replicated globally, providing further opportunities for content creators through 'the transnational pull of media technologies' (Ryan 2021: 140).

Warranting further exploration, there is an interesting paradox here that involves the latest transnational technologies being utilised by fan media to promote and emphasise local, pre-digital tropes that are forging transnational glocal fan identities. This is also an area of growing significance to football clubs looking to stimulate fan engagement for commercial gain, the spectre of which might actually contradict the authenticity of fan identity.

Conclusion

If it is now difficult to argue that fan content producers have no part to play in 'sports journalism 3.0' (Domeneghetti 2022, forthcoming), it helps to understand what that role is and what opportunities there may be for other football media content creators. Rather than replicate professional sports media and, in particular, football journalism, the plethora of digital fan-led platforms that have emerged over the past decade are in part a reaction to a dissatisfaction with mainstream media and a desire among fans to produce and engage with content for like-minded supporters.

Better access to the means of production has enabled the implementation, hosting and distribution of content produced by early adopters of emergent digital-social technologies, who have pioneered ways to interact with other fans through innovative content formats that have become embedded within the sports media complex.

Coupled with technological advance as the catalyst for alternative voices to be heard, it is proposed here that opinion-driven digital fan media is the product of a movement to counter some of the perceived flaws of professional sports media and football journalism in particular, filling a gap in the market to stimulate and satisfy audience demand. Where football journalism and club media are often constrained by their own professional protocols, digital fan media has captured authentic fan experience that has led to transnational followings from global fans attracted to local fan identity, culminating in the glocalisation of digital fan culture.

As an area for further research, there are increasing signs of collaboration between football journalists and club media with fan media aware of the potential for greater exposure via each other's digital-social reach. With some fan media formats now also being replicated by professional sports media, it will be interesting to see how this plays out in terms of defining perceptions of amateur and professional realms in a sports media content arena increasingly beholden to audience demands.

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Conflict of interest

No funding was received for the research presented in the paper.

PAPER

Marcelo Fontoura and Sérgio Lüdtke

Ethics and journalism in Brazil: A study of local journalism through the Brazilian News Atlas

This paper addresses the relation between news deserts and ethics in the ecosystem of Brazilian news. For that, we first analyse specific historical factors of Brazilian journalism in terms of ethics, employing ideas from Bucci (2000), Seligman (2009) and Christofoletti (2018). The research is done empirically by a description and analysis of the Brazilian News Atlas, a crowdsourcing, non-profit initiative designed to map local journalism initiatives and news deserts in Brazil. The paper describes the latest data from the Atlas about news deserts, as well as complementary research from the project, to better understand the limitations and challenges to local outlets. We conclude that news deserts are endemic in Brazil and while a recent increase in digital outlets may change this scenario, the over-reliance on advertising as a source of revenue poses challenges to a journalism ecosystem already historically damaged by ethical issues.

Key words: local journalism, News Atlas (Atlas da Notícia), Brazilian journalism, ethics

Introduction: The Brazilian News Atlas and its context

An annual census carried out in Brazil by Instituto para o Desenvolvimento do Jornalismo – Projor (Institute for the Development of Journalism) has shown over the past four years the precariousness of journalistic activity in the country. Atlas da Notícia, or the Brazilian News Atlas (https://www.atlas.jor.br/english/), has demonstrated in its first four editions a picture of the difficulty in financing organisations that produce local journalism, which culminated in the closing of activities of hundreds of traditional newsrooms in the country. For the purposes of this paper, the project will henceforth be referred to simply as Atlas.

The Atlas showed that six out of every 10 Brazilian municipalities were news deserts, that is, places where people do not have journalistic

information about where they live. The weak presence of journalism – or its absence – could do little to prevent the sudden deterioration of the informational environment taken over by misinformation during the 2018 presidential elections and beyond. That was the environment when the Covid-19 pandemic arrived in the country. But the most recent census, published nearly a year after the first Covid-19 cases appeared in Brazil, unveiled a surprising picture. Although traditional newsrooms continued to close their doors, many others emerged in the digital environment, taking advantage of the lack of entry barriers to the online business and the growing demand for reliable information about the health crisis. The interest in quality information, at a time when the pandemic was captured by politics and the informational environment was contaminated by misinformation, gave a new breath to journalism.

Although the pandemic has worsened the situation for local media companies, the health crisis has shown that connecting with audiences is a path to find economic sustainability. This commitment to audiences, which is now being strengthened, can guarantee journalistic performance based on ethical and transparent editorial guidelines designed to oversee the government and bring quality information for citizens everywhere in the country.

This paper analyses the scenario of local journalism in Brazil through the lenses of the Brazilian News Atlas. For that, it encompasses a discussion on recurring ethical issues in Brazilian journalism, with ideas from Bucci (2000), Seligman (2009), and Christofoletti (2018), among others. Then, it describes the history and methodology of the Atlas, as well as its latest results, in order to understand the current ecosystem of local journalism in Brazil and its challenges. Mainly, we have identified that news deserts are endemic in the country, and that an over-reliance on classical revenue models poses ethical challenges.

Ethics in Brazilian journalism: A brief overview

As a country with a large area of countryside but developed cities closer to the coast, Brazil has a difficult geography for local journalism. Beyond the usual challenges for news production in the 21st century, such as monetisation, new platforms and active audience behaviours, local Brazilian news production suffers with the control of local authorities and has not been able to make other financial avenues, beyond advertising, viable. Connected to this, ethical issues have become a major point of concern. Christofoletti (2019: 92) argues that a new ethics of journalism may not save the profession from its crisis, but could 'remove the edges of the commitments it intends to maintain with society'. That is, working towards a more ethical exercise of journalism would make clearer its purpose for society, which is especially important amid a convergence of crises for the profession. However, one

should not understand ethics as either a monolithic institution, or a specific local trait. Rather, it combines global references with local adaptations. Wasserman (2011: 801) refers to the African context:

> Furthermore, the negotiation of ethical frameworks takes place not only internally in African countries but is also linked to cultural flows and contraflows between Africa and the rest of the world in a globalized media landscape. Influences from Northern media ethics are adopted, adapted and resisted in local contexts, and take on new social and political meanings.

Similarly, Wasserman and Rao (2008) discuss a trend of 'glocalization' of the journalistic ethos, or the adaptation of global trends with local emphasis.

At the turn of the century, journalism in Brazil had to navigate a context of freedom and new challenges. After a violent and repressive military dictatorship that lasted 20 years and finished in 1985, journalists and outlets had to deal with the long-sought freedom to report. This freedom was accompanied by developments in professionalisation and improvements in technical infrastructure. In the next 10 years, the rise of the web would pose another challenge to this fast-developing journalism. Overall, Brazilian society had to adapt quickly to a context of democracy and representation (Christofoletti 2008). However, this period was also marked by major ethical faults by Globo, the country's leading broadcaster (Bucci 2000). These included ignoring pro-democracy demonstrations, as well as openly supporting candidate Fernando Collor for presidency, since he would promote policies favoured by Globo, thereby going against the principle of broadcaster impartiality. Thus, the industry was facing a period that combined both freedom and ethical challenges. In fact, the very discourse of freedom of the press may act as a concealment to ethical faults (Seligman 2009), when it shields journalists from critiques, by casting its critics as pro-censorship.

Another specific issue regarding professionalisation of newspeople in Brazil is the fact that, for several decades, being a journalist required a specific licence, through an undergraduate degree in journalism. Such restriction was removed by a decision from the Supreme Court in 2009, but has provided an enduring self-image of professionalism among journalists in the country, although this requirement has not always been enforced, especially in distant cities (Nascimento 2011).

It was 1988, when the country was in the midst of approving a new constitution, after the totalitarian period, when the journalist and academic Perseu Abramo (2016) wrote a typology of manipulations of the Brazilian press. It was developed specifically with the Brazilian context in mind, and can still be observed today,

representing a valuable summary of the ethical issues that affect Brazilian journalism to this day (Christofoletti 2018). They are:

1) concealment pattern – when outlets choose not to cover a given topic, effectively silencing it from the public sphere;
2) fragmentation pattern – when outlets disconnect a fact from its consequence;
3) inversion pattern – when aspects of a news report are inverted, thus changing their interpretation. May also mean to invert opinion and fact;
4) induction pattern – when the media, reporting on an issue, creates and insists on a certain social context, where it is difficult for the audience to escape this interpretation. The media, thus, induces an interpretative framework on the audience;
5) global pattern – specific to broadcasters. Refers to the structure of news reports and their tendency of searching for answers to social problems by listening to an authority.

For the scope of this paper, the first four are the most important ones, since they evoke steps of both planning and producing journalism, and are more widely observable. Christofoletti (2018), noting their enduring usefulness, adds three other types of manipulation: softening – strategies to soften the impact of facts and declaration, with flexible, moderate language; blanketing – when outlets conceal specific details on a report; and shuffling – narrative or aesthetical strategies that confound the understanding of the issues at play.

This typology demonstrates that ethical issues are frequent and diverse in Brazilian journalism, notwithstanding the professionalisation process the industry experienced in the last decades. At the same time, those issues are diverse and can happen at different stages of the journalistic process, both from economic and political biases. 'Structural aspects, such as market concentration, cross-ownership and electronic coronelismo,[1] are decisive not only in the production of informative content, but also in distribution, balance, plurality and diversity' (ibid: 78). Indeed, a strong market concentration and a lack of professional regulatory boards are major historical factors in the ethical issues affecting Brazilian journalism (Lelo 2020), which limit the ability of individual journalists to resist unethical demands by bosses and companies. In the countryside, where overall conditions are worse and economic interference in journalism is greater, this context is intensified.

Another frequent mark of the ethical faults of local journalism is the constant use of sensationalism as a strategy for gathering readership (Seligman 2009). This happens with the use of suggestive pictures, double entendres and the exploration of tragedy – usually city crime and traffic accidents. One major example was the popular

newspaper *Notícias Populares*, from São Paulo, which in the 1970s and 1980s reached a circulation of 180,000 copies daily, and became infamous for inventing stories (ibid). However, Seligman (ibid) points to a trend of local papers to divert from crime and violence to provide service to the audience regarding local issues.

Although journalistic companies emphasise ethics as being a challenge that can be surpassed by hiring ethical, upright professionals, Bucci (2000) captures the importance of scaling this discussion to the company level as well. Journalistic ethics should be tied not only to the individuals and their mistakes, but to the actions of the news organisations involved. At least, the audience seems to have followed this interpretation. As Mick (2019) demonstrated, there are two parallel trends occurring in terms of trust and media in the country: on the one hand, a decrease in overall trust in media outlets and, on the other hand, an increase in trust in individual journalists. The author suggests that an explanation can be found in a distrust of the owners of media outlets, as well as of the advertisers and the relation between the two groups. Journalists, however, are seen as 'experts' who are 'fundamental for the social, contemporary experience' (ibid: 257), acting under the constraints of power structures and everyday work. This reading will be further complicated in a media ecosystem where journalists launch their own initiatives, being both owner and news professionals, a trend identified by the Atlas.

Thus, media ethics, especially in small towns in Brazil, tends to be touted by companies as a strong value, being bound to the traditional notions of journalism. However, practice tends to be influenced by resources and professional and audience restrictions. In order to better understand the distribution and characteristics of local media in Brazil, we must now turn to the aspects of the Brazilian News Atlas.

The Brazilian News Atlas and its methodology

This section highlights the inception of the Brazilian News Atlas, as well as the methodology employed to execute the mapping. The main inspiration for the Atlas was the project on America's growing news deserts, in the *Columbia Journalism Review*.[2] The American project, done in 2017, proved a useful way to highlight a widespread problem that was easily forgotten in big metropolitan areas: most cities do not have local, journalistic coverage of what happens there. This trend seemed even bigger in a developing country such as Brazil, with higher poverty and a potentially tougher scenario for local newsrooms. Then, Projor decided to create a similar project, adapting it to the local context of Brazil. Since its inception, the Atlas has been supported by a fellowship from Facebook, also receiving institutional support from Abraji, the Brazilian Association for Investigative Journalism. So far, the

Atlas[3] has had four editions, being updated annually since the initial edition in 2017. Usually this involves adding more data for outlets that are in the mapping, marking the ones that have closed, and adding more outlets. During the writing of this paper, the fifth edition was in the making. The technical development of the platform is done by the consultancy Volt Data Lab, and is licensed under a Creative Commons licence. The Atlas has been used as source by several academic studies, including Serpa et al. (2019), which uses the Atlas to describe and analyse new business models, Da Silva Deolindo (2018), which studies news deserts and how people in them access information, and Reis (2018), which maps and analyses news production in medium-sized towns in Northern Brazil.

Given that Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world, a mapping that intends to cover all its territory involves difficulties and choices. As such, the methodology was adapted to fit a context of a large country, with a rural, developing countryside, and where ethical perspectives in journalism are blurred.

Brazil is divided administratively into five regions – North, Northeast, Central-West, Southeast and South – made up of 26 states, plus the Federal District. The number of states per region varies from three to nine. Every region has a research coordinator on Atlas, who has experience as a journalist, and frequently a graduate degree in the area. Those professionals are responsible for gathering volunteers, guiding them and overseeing the submission process.

The first edition of the project was based on lists of outlets from industry organisations, government press offices and similar departments. This allowed for the construction of a beta mapping that could be updated later on. Currently, the Atlas works mainly via crowdsourcing. Local teams of volunteers are organised to do the basic aspects of identifying outlets and submitting them to the platform. Usually, teams of volunteers are created through contact with local schools of journalism, where undergraduate students have an incentive to learn more about the ecosystem of local news that surrounds them, in their cities and nearby regions. If students are in low numbers other volunteers may be sought, for instance among journalists. Overall, the local teams are responsible for a given region or set of towns and are tasked with three main activities:

- identifying new outlets that are still not on Atlas, whether because they were created recently or because they were not mapped before;
- identifying outlets that have closed (especially common with print papers);

- adding more details to outlets already on Atlas;
- reviewing regions of news deserts, to check if they are indeed still deserts.

This division of tasks ensures that the mapping remains relevant and is the reason why the project is updated annually.

The very nature of the Atlas brings about the question of what counts as a news outlet. Indeed, during the course of the project, this issue proved to be a point of debate, although a stable idea was agreed upon. The working definition of a news outlet, for the Atlas, is a publication of socially relevant, recent, original and journalistic content. Thus, the outlet needs to have been updated in the last month, and needs to publish original content (even if just partially), so outlets that just republish information are not counted. In addition, the Atlas does not count initiatives that are part of an institution, such as a paper from a church, a union, or an organisation, since those are not considered as independent. Those initiatives may be added via the submission form, but are checked as 'non-journalistic'. All Atlas's calculations regarding news deserts and the distribution of outlets are done based on the number of journalistic initiatives. Radio and TV stations are added via a general list, from a freedom of information request, since every broadcaster in the country needs to have an authorisation from the government.

One important point regarding the methodology is the division of outlets by media. An outlet may be marked as print, online, TV or radio (exclusive choice). However, in the case of a print newspaper with a webpage, it is counted as two separate outlets: a print one, and an online one. In this fashion, if a print newspaper closes, but continues its online counterpart – a common scenario – the print entry in Atlas is checked as closed, but the online entry stays the same. The same goes for radio and TV stations. Podcasts, online radio stations and YouTube channels are interpreted as online. All the definitions were discussed and agreed upon among the team at the beginning of the project.

All submissions to the Atlas database are made through an online form,[4] which has fields involving general aspects of the outlet, their business model, journalistic aspects used (such as opinion pieces, blogs, newsletter, data journalism etc), frequency of publication, ownership, staff size and social network links. Most of the fields, however, are non-mandatory, since this information can be hard to come by, especially in deep corners of the country. All submissions from each region are reviewed and approved/complemented by the researcher responsible, in order to ensure standardisation and quality. The next section reviews the distribution of news deserts in the country according to the Atlas's data.

Marcelo Fontoura
Sérgio Lüdtke

News deserts across Brazil

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world, with a territorial extent of more than 8.5 million square kilometers, an area equivalent to 86 per cent of the territory of the United States. This vast territory is divided into 5,570 municipalities distributed in the five major regions mentioned above. Brazil is also the sixth most populous country in the world, with an estimated population of 213 million inhabitants (IBGE 2021). Almost 70 per cent of this population is concentrated in the south-east and north-east regions.

Brazilian geography is fundamental to understanding the presence of local journalism in the country. The news deserts, mapped annually by the Atlas da Notícia, are six in every ten Brazilian municipalities, but affect around 16 per cent of the total population. According to the survey, around 34 million Brazilians do not have journalistic information about where they live. Currently, 3,280 Brazilian municipalities have no record of any journalistic means of communication to produce and disseminate local information. These municipalities have an average of 10,200 inhabitants and are distributed throughout the territory, especially in areas farther away from large centers, such as the Amazon region and the semi-arid region of the north east. Deserts are also found in the interior of the richest states and in municipalities located on the outskirts of large cities, as shown in the map below.

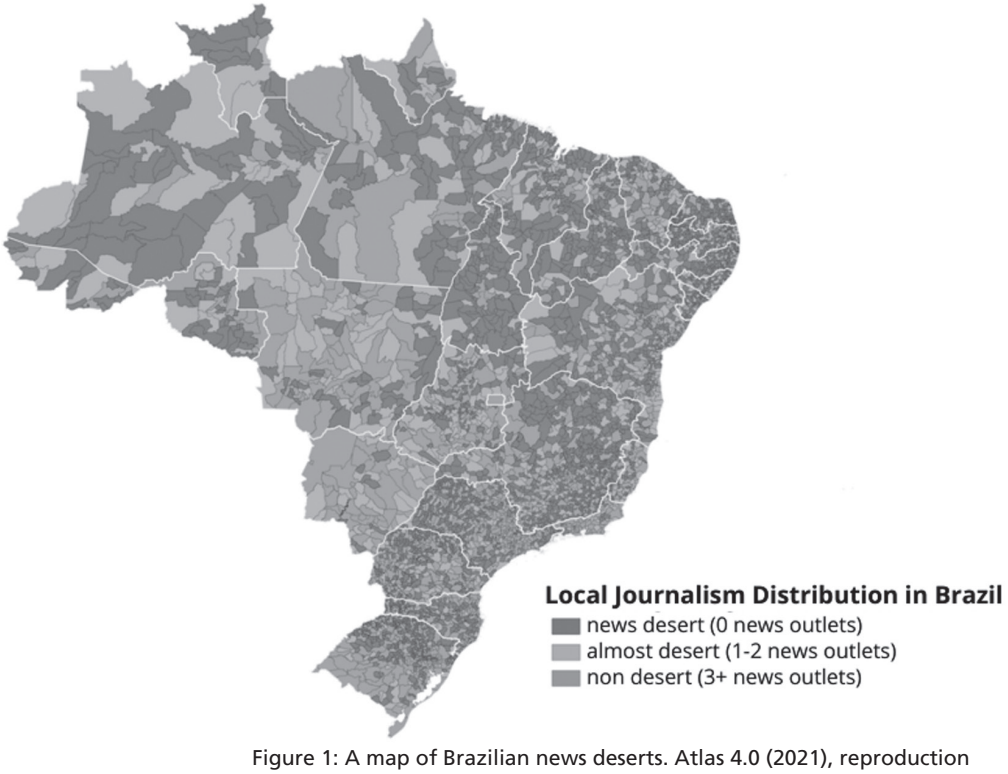

Figure 1: A map of Brazilian news deserts. Atlas 4.0 (2021), reproduction

In addition to news deserts and areas irrigated by local information, the Atlas also distinguishes what it has come to call 'almost deserts', places that have only one or two media organisations with local coverage and risk becoming deserts. These semi-deserts are inhabited by another 28.9 million Brazilians. According to the survey, 1,187 municipalities are currently in this condition, which represents two in every ten municipalities in the country.

Geography also partly explains the means used to distribute journalistic content. The Atlas mapped 13,092 active journalistic outlets in 2020. Of these, 4,403, or one-third of the total, are radio stations. Another 4,221 are online newsrooms. Radio stands out in more remote regions, but the preponderance of online initiatives is understandable in the contemporary media ecosystem. The emergence of digital native journalistic initiatives has given new impetus to local journalism. The 2020 census identified a growth in online journalism and incorporated 1,170 new digital native vehicles to the base, most of them in the north-east region of the country. In terms of context, according to the TIC Domicílios[5] survey, 134 million people regularly access the internet in Brazil, which is equivalent to three in every four inhabitants over 10 years old. Brazilians are also heavy users of social networks. According to the Global Web Index 2020 Q2-Q3 study,[6] each person in Brazil spends an average of 3 hours and 42 minutes a day connected to social networks.

The flourishing of digital journalism caused a reduction in 2020 of 5.9 per cent in the number of municipalities considered local news deserts in Brazil, largely offsetting the closure of 272 media outlets, mainly print, also registered by the census. The results of the fourth edition of the Atlas contradicted expectations. Although 2020 was an atypical year, with a series of restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, drastic routine changes, the adoption of remote work and a deepening of the economic crisis with an immediate impact on the revenue of the media dependent on advertising, the interest of the population for information prevailed. The 2020 census showed a 10.6 per cent growth in the number of journalistic organisations in the country compared to the previous survey.

The growing participation of digital media in the local information ecosystem and the occupation of old news deserts should, however, be viewed with some caution. If, on the one hand, it is possible to perceive a vitality and renewal of the information environment, with media more diverse and connected to the populations, the Atlas also points to a precarious situation in journalism, with the closure of traditional, larger operations, and the emergence of many individual initiatives, mainly in the form of blogs.

With few barriers for entry, digital entrepreneurship presents itself as a natural path for journalists who leave traditional newsrooms behind. These professionals, who usually bring with them journalistic experience, specialisation in one or more topics, and knowledge of sources and audiences, among other things, are not always qualified for running a business. When they take the path of pursuing the initiative individually without associating with experts or organisations of wider business competencies, this becomes an even greater risk for the initiative's survival. Individual ventures are also in danger when these entrepreneurs' ability to influence is co-opted by politics or even used to serve as a springboard to their owners' own political careers, recalling the ethical constraints mentioned by Christofoletti (2018) and Abramo (2016).

Two lines of action need to be explored by the digital native outlets willing to irrigate news deserts with information. One of them is to espouse and follow the editorial principles and ethical commitments that serve to light the path for the evolution and maturity of the news outlet. The other is to train its actors or seek external competences to strengthen the business aspect of the enterprise and give it the economic independence that will guarantee editorial independence. These two lines must go together. Business model and editorial model must be seen as inseparably linked to each other. The consistency of these two interdependent models lies on the capacity that the new digital vehicles will have to flourish in deserts or to revitalise the ecosystem of already 'forested' areas. The next subsection deals with this debate, addressing the challenges that local media, especially digital native outlets, faced in Brazil during the pandemic.

Challenges for the ecosystem: Revenue sources and audience

The Atlas involves a quantitative, broad look at local Brazilian journalistic production. In order to complement this perspective, the team carried out a survey of 179 native digital communication media or those with an online presence. Held in March and April 2021, the objective was to take a closer look at the daily reality of these vehicles and their relationship with the reality of the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused significant changes in the ecosystem of local Brazilian journalism. The study's conclusion is that, while the health crisis took journalists off the streets, imposed new routines, reduced advertising revenues and weakened businesses, on the other hand it expanded the reach of the work produced by journalists and their audience, and as such strengthened journalism. During the pandemic, audience and revenue took opposite paths. As local media saw their audience and interest in their content grow, revenue plummeted. With no means to address both fronts, these organisations run the risk of losing the audience and the relevance they have achieved. Instead of investing in maintaining this new

audience, they feel the need to pay full attention to the recovery of revenues and find new sources of financing, a fundamental condition for them to continue operating. Figure 2 shows, in the media organisations' view, their priorities for the next 12 months.

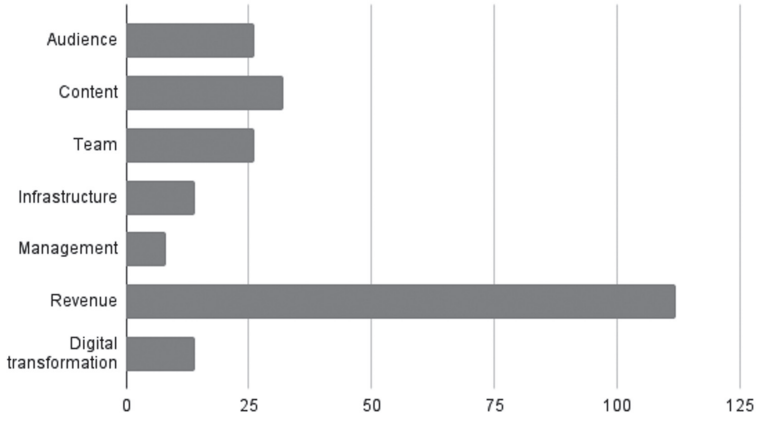

Figure 2: Priorities for media organisations in the next 12 months.
Source: survey by Atlas (2021). N = 179.

Changes and achievements during the pandemic period

The pandemic encouraged both journalistic activity, with expansion of coverage, and the launch of new outlets. Of the 1,170 new ventures identified by Atlas da Notícia in Brazil in 2020, four responded to the complementary survey. A fifth reopened as print, four years after the print edition stopped. Of the 179 organisations that participated in the survey, 26 per cent expanded editorial coverage during the pandemic. These outlets rushed digital transformation processes that were already underway, reorganised newsrooms, and their teams had to learn to cover science and work remotely. More than half of the initiatives (55.1 per cent) adopted remote work throughout the pandemic period and another 27 per cent only in some periods.

The change in routine forced the learning of new techniques and tools that can continue to be used in the post-pandemic period to improve journalistic work and gain productivity. Remote working is likely to be more common in these organisations in the future. Almost half of the newsrooms that adopted the remote working model admit the possibility of keeping the entire team or part of it remote in the post-pandemic age. A quarter of the outlets intend to return completely to face-to-face activities in the newsroom and another 27 per cent had not yet defined how they would work again after the health crisis. One in five of the newsrooms surveyed reduced the size of teams in 2020, while 8.9 per cent expanded the team of employees and 6.1 per cent of the respondents kept the staff at the same size, but, in order to do so, reduced the coverage of other topics. The remaining 64.8 per cent of the companies kept their editorial and coverage teams unchanged.

What really grew in the pandemic were audience numbers and followers on social media. This finding reinforces the idea that, during this period, the audiences recognised the importance and usefulness of journalistic work, which strengthened the relationship of trust between readers and media.

But, despite this apparently very favourable environment to consolidate these relationships and appeal for the support of this audience, there were few organisations that saw the numbers of paying subscribers and supporters increase.

Financing sources

The survey identified 13 revenue sources that give sustainability to local journalism. Of these, three are based on advertising. Ad revenue ranks in the top two positions of the most explored sources. This dependence on advertising explains the financial crisis experienced by many. The temporary closures of trade, the economic crisis and the migration of advertising budgets from advertisers to technology platforms are pointed out by them as the causes of the reduction in revenue.

Source of income	Explored by (companies)
Advertising (other types)	110
Graphic advertising (banners, pop-ups etc.)	83
Partnerships	75
Sponsored content	71
Services provision	61
Native advertising (paid journalistic content)	42
Institutional financing (e.g., Foundations, companies etc.)	27
Direct donations	26
Financing by project	19
Sale of copies	16
Subscription/paywall	15
Crowdfunding	12
Selling reports/content licensing	2

Table 1 - Sources of income of the respondents. Source: survey by Atlas (2021)

All organisations that lost advertising revenue during the health crisis have made it a priority to recover their revenues and return to at least to pre-pandemic levels, but many are sceptical about this possibility. A fact revealed by the research explains this scepticism. Despite advertising being the main source of revenue for the interviewed newsrooms, 61.5 per cent of them no longer have

their own structure dedicated to the commercial sector, and 39.5 per cent of those who still have a sales department reduced the number of personnel during the pandemic. Note that the ethical difficulties of Brazilian local journalism, as seen before, are often related to an intense search for revenue. With the Brazilian local press mainly structured around the pillar of advertising, and with that pillar especially susceptible to the pandemic and progressively abandoned as a journalistic subsidy method globally, a remarkable space is opened for a closer relationship between journalism and potential advertisers than between journalism and the public.

The solution may lie in exploring new financing models, taking advantage of the increase in audience that many had during the health crisis. The relationship that has been strengthened between the media and reader communities, and the level of trust that has been established, create favourable conditions for exploring new financing models, with greater support from readers and reducing dependence on funds from advertising.

The urgency for revenue, which emerges in this survey as the main challenge for local journalism in the country, should not hide nor minimise other equally important challenges that are in the path of local journalism, such as improving management, implementing the digital transformation, training qualified professionals, increasing transparency and giving more visibility to the ethical commitments of organisations.

If the search for financing overlaps with the organisation's other challenges, there is a risk of breaking the association between the business model and editorial principles and commitments. Putting all the effort into revenue can create new dependencies that lead newsrooms to destroy a considerable part of the appreciation gained during the pandemic, an especially sensitive period for Brazil and which showed Brazilians that quality information is a valuable service.

Final considerations

As in other places, local journalism in Brazil has experienced two different trends: an increase in audience and relevance of journalism, but a decrease in revenue, associated with a lack of resources to pursue funding. Although they were focusing on digital native outlets, Salaverría et al. (2019) identified that news managers do not usually have experience in business, a very useful skill in such a scenario.

In this paper, we have seen how journalism in Brazil has a history of ethical troubles. We have also detailed the Brazilian News Atlas and how it has identified news deserts across the country.

Although Brazilian journalism has passed through professionalisation, specialisation and improvements in technological aspects, historical factors such as market concentration and political influence facilitate the crossing of ethical limits. Thus, local journalism in Brazil has two challenges to overcome. On one hand, it faces the same financial issues as other parts of industry, and on the other, it still has to tackle the heavy influence of local politics and business. The financial troubles of the industry risk increasing the ethical troubles, since they may encourage newspaper owners to establish even closer ties with potential advertisers. In small towns, where advertising space tends to go to the same companies and to local governments, and where professional culture is weaker, this risk is higher.

This danger may result in a lack of critical coverage, concealment of corruption and self-censorship. News deserts enter as another element of repression, since they represent a decline in places where journalists can exercise their profession. Of course, they also represent opportunities for journalists eager to create their own experiments and serve audiences that are neglected, but there are financial, political and even safety issues. This paper has contributed to the discussion on how the ecosystem of local news in a developing country is faring in a time of change, but more research is needed, especially in the convergence between ethical faults and the reliance on advertising as a main source of revenue.

Notes

[1] A Brazilian expression, common in politics, denoting a power structure where local figures, especially in the countryside, control local politics, public work and money, usually spanning across generations

[2] https://www.cjr.org/local_news/american-news-deserts-donuts-local.php

[3] https://www.atlas.jor.br/english/

[4] https://www.atlas.jor.br/plataforma/formulario/ (in Portuguese)

[5] https://cetic.br/pesquisa/domicilios/

[6] https://www.gwi.com/hubfs/Downloads/Market%20Snapshot%20Brazil%20 2021%20-%20GWI.pdf

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Conflict of interest

Both authors work for the Instituto para o Desenvolvimento do Jornalismo – Projor.

ARTICLE

Paul Wiltshire

Are all boats rising as local media ride the ebb and flow of the pandemic?

Paul Wiltshire, a former local newspaper executive and now journalism academic, discusses how the effects of the pandemic are reshaping the contours of the United Kingdom local media industry in some surprising ways. Incorporating detailed interviews with current executives, his article considers how the evolving local media eco-system is accommodating both established players and more recent hyperlocal ventures.

Hundreds of journalists' jobs were lost in the early days of the pandemic. In the United Kingdom, the axe fell at national titles, at the BBC and in the regional newsrooms of Reach, Newsquest, Archant and JPI. It felt like an existential crisis, coming on top of so many waves of cutbacks in recent years.

But in the last year, the tables have been turned. Virtually every employer has somehow found the resources to expand, with firms unashamedly launching in areas previously dominated by their rivals.

There are indications of increasing competition, driven by recruitment surges. Reach has taken on 50 new journalists, fuelling an expansion of its Live network of websites into virgin territory such as the Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Herefordshire areas previously dominated by Newsquest, as well as into Archant's Norfolk back garden. Newsquest unveiled 50 new jobs, part of a new focus on a subscription model, which has restricted the amount of content readers can access for free. Roles include 32 digital reporters and a 15-strong Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) team. Elsewhere among the established players in the local media sector, Archant announced 70 new jobs, including teams of new 'live' reporters, as well as videographers and web developers. JPI is creating 45 jobs with new websites to cover areas outside its heartlands, such as Manchester, Bristol, Newcastle and Liverpool – all currently served

by Reach newsrooms. Additionally, *Nub News* has continued its expansion across Britain, with virtually rolling adverts for its network of around 70 hyperlocal sites.

There has been much talk of all boats rising on the tide of the new investment, and some existing independent media have welcomed the incursions. The editor of the *Manchester Mill* website, Joshi Herrmann, for example, told industry website *Hold the Front Page* in August 2021: 'Single newspapers having a monopoly in a city or town is a disaster. It's not good for readers and breeds complacency. The *Mill* shouldn't be the only alternative in Manchester. There should be half a dozen and that would be healthy.' But on what basis are organisations deciding to launch new local media ventures in areas previously outside of their publishing footprint?

'Just rip me apart and tell me I'm mad'

By Karl Hancock's own admission, it was a 'crazy, mad' idea. At a time when local newspapers were being closed down and websites regionalised amid waves of redundancies and an advertising recession, the former city banker was suggesting that his key contacts invest in hyperlocal news. 'I said: "just rip me apart and tell me I'm mad." But to my surprise, they loved the business model, and wanted to invest.'

Nearly three years on from that first sales pitch, Hancock has no regrets. His *Nub News* venture now has more than 60 local news websites in places from Cornwall to Cheshire, and is continually expanding. Soon after launching their first three sites in Devon, Hancock and his team were being approached by businesses wanting to advertise. 'I thought, "Wow, this is really happening here."' Traffic went through the roof, and Hancock went back to the City to expand again.

On sustainable expansion, he says: 'The key now is finding the right journalists and finding the right town. That is absolutely critical for the success of *Nub News*.' His team of more than 30 reporters is a mix of new graduates and experienced older journalists with years on traditional regional titles. They are tasked with spending 70 per cent of their time on finding exclusive local content, with the other 30 per cent taken up with ensuring that headlines, imagery and social media are as good as they can be. On that subject, he says that traffic from Google is 'eight times more valuable' to him than referrals from Facebook.

Hancock admits that his team are still very much on a journey – and that too much of the content they produce is based on press releases from councils and the emergency services. 'We're learning,' he says. 'We're far from the finished article. On a journey up to 100, we're still on one.' He has appointed a head of communities

to give the sites greater journalistic leadership, and to drive home that message of exclusive, quality content. 'I don't care about clicks. I care about people coming on to our site and liking it.'

He says the ideal community for the *Nub News* treatment has a population of 15,000 to 20,000, and is likely to be a satellite town neglected by the main news outlet in a much larger nearby city. His most successful site covers the South Wales seaside town of Penarth, on the edge of Cardiff, while places such as Kenilworth in Warwickshire and Maldon in Essex are also giving him good business.

Hancock says his sites aim to be upbeat – and he clearly hates seeing them carrying too many crime stories, which he says don't 'build the brand'.

On the other hand, he loves seeing content about businesses coming and going, saying that 'people want to read about themselves and what's going on in their town'. And being an ethical, supportive part of a community is at the heart of the *Nub News* model. 'I tell everyone we're a good news newspaper. We will report on crime, but we won't chase it up, and we won't write it up salaciously.'

But Hancock, whose sites are all regulated by IPSO, insists his ethical barometer very much encourages journalists to hold power to account. In the early days, his Honiton site live-blogged the East Devon community's town council meetings, while his site in the Essex town of Thurrock has been among those shining a light on the controversial investment decisions of the local authority.

He has access to the output of the BBC-backed Local Democracy Reporter scheme, but begs me not to 'get him started' on the way it benefits bigger news providers such as Reach.

As the United Kingdom emerges from the restrictions of social distancing and the habits of remote working and interviewing that the restrictions have instilled, Hancock very much wants to return to face-to-face journalism. 'If you look at our mascot, Nubby, they've got a cap on, a notepad, and they're running along. That's what we want to do: we want to go into our towns and we want to meet the am-dram society, the MP, the councillor, the sports teams.' All his reporters have to live on or very close to their patches, and all have to work from home. He says creating a sense of team spirit, of supportive camaraderie, is possibly his biggest challenge. *Nub News* is far from alone in that, as far bigger operations such as Reach close down offices that lockdown has proved are no longer essential. But Hancock says: 'I'm very aware that a graduate coming to *Nub News*, how does she become better? How do you build camaraderie and build culture? It's bloody difficult, it really is.'

He ensures that reporters in the same region have regular meetings, and wants to set up a *Nub News* academy to boost training. Despite all the challenges, Hancock is confident he remains onto something. 'The reason local news has been dying – and they can all blame Facebook and Google – but the reality is that local news is burdened with print and burdened with costs. Local business advertising has been disappearing and they can't make local pay. That's why they've gone wider and more regional. We're coming along and making it pay. We're touching solicitors and care homes and people who haven't advertised for years. We're bringing a new market back that they [mainstream regional media companies] can't touch.'

Reaching for the stars – or at least the shires

As might be expected, not every aspect of Hancock's analysis is accepted by the companies which, in one form or another, have been the long-established main distributors of local journalism. Ed Walker is the executive from one such business. And Walker admits he is on a mission to conquer the country.

By the end of 2021, his company Reach – where he is audience and content director (regionals) – aims to have a website covering every square inch of England and Wales. The firm's footprint already covers the bulk of Scotland and Ireland. In some parts of the country, the Reach imprint is big and strong: it has lively, robust *Live* brands in areas from Cornwall to Newcastle, as well as its own northern powerhouses whose website names still reflect print titles like the *Manchester Evening News* and the *Liverpool Echo*.

But it is flexing its muscles with new sites challenging long-standing incumbents, such as *Wiltshire Live* and *Hampshire Live*, after success in shaking things up in Yorkshire with *Leeds Live* and north of the border with *Edinburgh Live*. And its InYourArea network aims to deliver a one-stop shop digital service, offering news not just from Reach journalists but from many other news sites as well, on top of hyperlocal information on everything from planning applications to crime figures.

Walker says it is now a relatively easy process to set up new sites – the key is to get on with it. 'You can spend a lot of time planning something and never doing it,' he says. 'We get it launched and then build.' In order to feel supported, each new player is backed by Reach's central journalistic and digital resources. Walker says the key to success is finding the right people on the ground – a process that can be easier in urban areas where there is already journalistic infrastructure. A decent network of social media groups that it can tap into is also helpful. The new sites need to carefully build their profile with Google, but in the end, Walker says getting the content right is not rocket science: 'You need to write about things people are interested in and will engage with.'

'No divine right to publish'

Walker claims that he and his Reach colleagues are not bothered about putting their tanks on someone else's lawn, as they have done in Wiltshire – a county traditionally sewn up by Newsquest. 'My personal view is that there is no holy divine right to publish in any location,' he says. 'If someone sets up in one of our areas, I always consider and reflect. You have to ask: "What can we do that's better?" But all boats rise in my view. It produces competition and competition is good for journalism.'

Reach's news sites are fuelled by video storytelling tools and a content management system that makes it easier to produce photo-led stories and timelines. In the early days of *Wiltshire Live*, the site stole a march on rivals with its use of a drone to get exclusive pictures of a high-profile fire.

'We are challenging ourselves to tell stories differently,' explains Walker. 'We need to ask ourselves: "What are we doing that's different?" If we at *Leeds Live* are producing exactly the same stories as the *Yorkshire Post*, then something is wrong.'

Reach's recent strategic move towards national coverage alongside the growth of smaller sites is something of a reversal of its strategy from a few years ago, which prioritised large regional operations. Walker claims that what needs to be understood is that people's worlds can grow and shrink throughout the day. 'We can't pigeonhole people as only interested in a small area.' Making the important interesting is at the heart of Reach's community journalism, he adds, claiming that traditional ethical imperatives also underpin his organisation's output. 'Just because something's digital doesn't mean it's not proper journalism,' says Walker. 'Hard-hitting journalism digitally can reach more people than ever before and have far greater impact. It has lightning speed. The ability for journalism to challenge and hold to account has never been greater.'

Reach's traditional sites such as the *Manchester Evening News*, with award-winning politics and investigations editor Jen Williams, and the *Liverpool Echo*, whose political editor Liam Thorp was in 2021 named specialist regional writer of the year by the UK Society of Editors for the second year running, have an impressive public service journalism track record. But Walker points to the ground-breaking work of *Yorkshire Live* investigative reporter Kristian Johnson and *Belfast Live*'s hour-long Facebook Live interviews with senior politicians as evidence that the new kids on the block are here for the serious stuff, too. And he claims the growth of the BBC-funded Local Democracy Reporting service means there is more coverage of public bodies online than at any time in history.

He is also keen to get his teams out and about in their communities at a time when a common perception is that the majority of journalism is done from behind a screen, at a distance from real communities. 'All of our journalists have found it hugely frustrating that face-to-face journalism has not been allowed because of Covid,' says Walker. Some public figures have been more accessible, but real life, human interest stories where you need to sit down with people have been trickier. And he agrees getting in front of more people is important to build trust, praising the initiatives of teams such as *Plymouth Live*, which has organised Facebook Live Q&As, and colleagues who hanker after the chance to stage real or virtual open days in newsrooms.

But Walker also wants to empower teams to confidently join the debate 'below the line' on stories or on Facebook, engaging with their critics. 'We need to upskill our teams so they are confident in tackling these issues, to step in early in a conversation to say this is what we do, and to link to other stories,' he says. 'If you do that, you can stop the snowball effect.' He believes journalists have to work harder to point an audience to the rest of their coverage because stories will appear in isolation on social media platforms.

The firm says it now employs more journalists than ever before and Walker is optimistic. 'If we didn't think our journalism was making a difference, we wouldn't be launching all these new sites,' he says. 'What we are always wanting to do is build, and build at a scale where we can invest.' But for all of Walker's bullish talk, Reach's local media rivals have plans of their own to reshape the sector, potentially at Reach's expense.

Subscribe and conquer?

If you had to think of three topics guaranteed to win you a new audience, it's unlikely that politics, lower league football and the arts would figure high on the list. But Gavin Thompson has identified them all as targets that might enable him to fund an expansion of his newsroom. The editor of the *National Wales* and the *South Wales Argus* says he's playing a 'longer game'.

He launched the *National* on 1 March 2021 – St David's Day – as a new website and weekly national paper for Wales. It was a move seen as a challenge from Newsquest to the dominance of Reach, with its *Western Mail* and Wales Online brands. The paper is spearheading a subscriber model which offers 80 per cent less advertising on its website, along with discounts and other reader offers, for £50 a year – rising to £75 in subsequent years. The *National* has had an unashamedly civic approach from the start, and part of Thompson's mission is to drive up engagement with the Senedd (the Welsh parliament), where election turn-out consistently lags behind that for Westminster polls. So politics is at the centre of a lot of what his team does.

But so, increasingly, is Welsh football – not the big boys of Cardiff City and Swansea City, but the lesser-known clubs such as The New Saints and Barry Town. And one of his ambitions is to develop more coverage of Welsh culture and arts. 'We're attempting to cover the areas that we don't think are well covered,' Thompson says. 'The reason that there isn't coverage of those things is because they won't drive big audience. You are not going to get thousands and thousands of page views. But what we're trying to do is have a different business model, which is subscriber-led. And that allows us to approach content differently from the more advertising-led model.'

He says both models can work, but that the one he is striving for adds to media plurality.

Thompson says there is a financial equivalence in terms of the revenue generated between 500 subscribers and 500,000 page views a month in as much as both can pay for a journalist. But it will take time, he admits. 'It's a longer game than you'd like it to be,' he says. 'The goal is for the newsroom to be self-funded by subscriptions and we're not there yet. We are growing but we need a long runway to get there.' The focus on content not associated with a high-volume digital audience is one of the things that Thompson says differentiates the *National*'s coverage from that of the incumbent media – and from the UK nationals.

The pandemic has underlined the power of the Welsh government, which under First Minister Mark Drakeford is responsible for the NHS in the country, and which has consistently had a more cautious lockdown regime than England's. 'We want people to have a sense that who runs Wales and how it works is relevant to their lives,' says Thompson. He argues Wales had been underserved by the media when compared to Scotland, where there are four daily print titles covering the whole of the nation, on top of Scottish editions of the UK papers.

North of the border, Newsquest operates the *National* as a nakedly pro-independence title.

But its Welsh sister is pro-Wales, not pro-independence. Thompson says a more partisan style wouldn't make sense, particularly economically: 'We could have become an exclusively pro-indy title, but we'd have been excluding a lot of readers.' He adds that the Welsh population is smaller than Scotland's, and the independence movement less well-defined.

The public service approach which values detailed political coverage of the Senedd corridors of power is tempered by realism, perhaps because of that. 'It's all very well having high-minded ideas about

what people will pay for and quality journalism and subscriptions, but you still need people to read it. We're doing more stories which we think will bring people to the site, so we can get them engaged.'

The print product goes on sale on Saturdays, but stays on the shop shelves throughout the week, with its content being largely feature-led – taking more in-depth looks at its five pillars of politics, the environment and rural affairs, culture, business and sport.

Thompson, who has edited the *Bath Chronicle* and the *Western Daily Press* for Reach, recently moved to Wales himself. He regards it as important that his staff live among the people they are writing about, with the ethical accountability of having to look their subject matter in the eye a crucial element. 'You need to be connected to your communities,' he says. 'If you have a big story on your patch and Fleet Street moves in, you live in that community when they're gone. You're still there.' He says Newsquest has a renewed emphasis on local, on the ground reporting, even with a raft of new roles with digital in their title. 'We want reporters to be out and about in their communities, doing on the scene reporting, so that people know their journalists are here. It's essential that we're here.'

Note on the contributor

Paul Wiltshire was deputy editor of the *Bath Chronicle* and in charge of training journalists across Reach's regional titles. He is now senior lecturer and course leader in BA Journalism at the University of Gloucestershire's School of Creative Industries. He has worked as guest editor on this special issue of *Ethical Space*, alongside joint editor Tom Bradshaw.

ARTICLE

Marcus Ryder

For too many people of colour, going to work in the media is to enter a hostile environment

Media diversity campaigner Marcus Ryder, head of external consultancies at Birmingham City University's Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, makes an impassioned plea for far-reaching changes to the UK media industry – both at local and national levels – in order to improve representation.

Thriving, not just surviving

For many journalists of colour the media profession can be a hostile environment to navigate. We have to give them the tools not only to survive, but to thrive. Not doing so would not only be counterproductive in achieving greater media diversity but ethically irresponsible.

This is critical in news departments, and local news in particular, where the data suggests that under-representation could be at its worst. According to the 2020 *BBC group annual report and accounts*, for example, the latest figures for senior management for BBC Radio News show that only seven of the corporation's 118 senior leaders come from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background, and only 4 per cent of senior leaders in the 'nations and regions' come from a racial ethnic minority background.

The mental health effects of such under-representation is now being discussed more openly. In August 2021, I watched the Tokyo Olympic Games and was stunned, along with the rest of the world, as Simone Biles – the most-decorated gymnast in World Championships history – withdrew from the women's team gymnastics after only one rotation on the vault, citing mental health issues. Just weeks earlier in May, the four-time tennis major-winner, Naomi Osaka, withdrew from the French Open also citing mental health issues. And, in March of the same year, Meghan Markle spoke to Oprah Winfrey candidly about her struggles with mental health. These three high-profile incidents, less than six months

apart, shone a very public light on one of most important issues facing people of colour today: mental health.

According to Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England, black British women are twice as likely to experience common mental health issues as white women, while the mental health charity Mind says that black British men are ten times more likely to have experienced a psychotic disorder than white men. And the Mental Health Foundation has found that black British people are four times more likely to be detained under the Mental Health Act than white people.

Both Markle and Osaka have talked about how the media has been a contributory factor in their mental health issues. Following Markle's interview with Winfrey there was general uproar when the influential trade body, the Society of Editors, representing the interests of the UK's most influential news publications, issued a statement denying the existence of systemic racism and bigotry in the industry. If the likes of Markle, Osaka and other black celebrities have experienced racism as the subjects of media coverage, with a detrimental impact on their mental health, one can only guess what the impact must be on the people of colour who actually work for these news organisations day in and day out.

I mention these points because I often feel conflicted when talking to young people of colour at the start of their journalism careers, positively encouraging them to enter what is undoubtedly a workplace that is riddled with racism and bigotry, so much so that even trying to deny it led to the resignation of several senior figures in the Society of Editors. I feel conflicted because how can I in all good conscience encourage people to enter toxic workplaces that can literally make people of colour sick? According to a 2020 report by Melanie Wilkes, Heather Carey and Rebecca Florisson, of the Lancaster University School of Management, for the Film and TV Charity, more than 70 per cent of BAME women under the age of 50 consider leaving the industry due to concerns about their mental wellbeing.

The fact of the matter is we need more black, Asian and minority ethnic journalists.

Widespread under-representation

The lack of diversity is a widely acknowledged problem in British journalism. A 2016 study by Neil Thurman, City University of London, reported that 94 per cent of working journalists are white. That means non-white journalists make up just 6 per cent of the profession despite making up 13 per cent of the general population. Only 0.2 per cent of British journalists are black, compared with 3 per cent of the population.

This issue is made even more acute in local and regional news outside of London where, even if percentages of black, Asian and minority ethnic representation may be the same (there is little data on this), due to the lower figures in absolute terms journalists of colour will have fewer support networks to call upon.

Not only are journalists of colour under-represented, the few that are in the industry are thought to be paid considerably less than their white counterparts. Only a few UK news organisations publish their ethnicity pay gap. ITN first published its ethnicity pay gap in 2017 revealing a pay gap figure of 16.1 per cent and a bonus gap of 66 per cent. In the last three years the pay gap has worsened, increasing to 20.8 per cent, while the bonus gap has stayed relatively static at 63.8 per cent.

Then in 2020, the UK trade journal, *Press Gazette*, published a feature on research by Women in Journalism. In one week in July 2020 – at the height of the Black Lives Matter protests across the world – of the 174 bylines in 11 newspapers examined in the study, only four were credited to journalists of colour. The same report also found that in the same week just one in four front-page bylines across the 11 papers went to women. That same week it was found that BBC2's flagship agenda-setting nightly political programme, *Newsnight*, failed to interview a single non-white expert.

It should be noted that the week the study surveyed featured front-page stories and television reports about Black Lives Matter, the replacement of the toppled statue of the slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol, and the appeal over the British citizenship of the Muslim mother Shamima Begum.

These were major stories covering issues directly relevant to women and people of colour and yet even in this week the lack of representation was bleak. I dread to think what it would be like the other 51 weeks of the year.

The study is far from an anomaly in highlighting the lack of diversity in British journalism. Invariably when it comes to diversity in journalism we measure progress, or lack thereof, by looking at these kinds of statistics: the percentage of black, Asian and minority ethnic people working in the newsroom, the number of bylines credited to journalists from under-represented groups, and the types of stories covered.

As shocking as these statistics are, when it comes to the analysis of the type of journalism the industry produces I believe they only tell half the story and we are in an even more dire situation than many of us realise.

It was not until black journalists asked questions at the Covid-19 Downing Street press briefings that the issue of the pandemic disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities was raised. Similarly, the lack of coverage of fire safety standards in low-income housing before the Grenfell Tower fire is now seen in many circles as a damning indictment of the lack of diversity in newsrooms and how that shapes news values and priorities.

What we see on the news determines what politicians talk about and actually do anything about. There is not a single major national news programme – from BBC *Breakfast News* and the *Today* programme to *Panorama* and *Dispatches* – that is headed by a person of colour. That is going to affect which stories they decide to pick and how they cover them. When BBC Scotland launched its new digital channel earlier this year the lack of racial diversity on its flagship news and current affairs programme was marked.

Diversity: A precondition of genuine free speech

For me, media diversity is fundamentally a question of democracy. You cannot have democracy without freedom of speech. And this is meaningless if certain sections of society are disproportionately denied access to the platforms for their voices to be heard and stories to be told.

I believe in democracy and I believe in freedom of speech. It is for this reason that I encourage people of colour to go into journalism and the media industry. But it is irresponsible for us to prepare young people of colour to go into journalism without equipping them with the tools of how to navigate a racist and toxic environment. Unfortunately, it is a situation that I see far too often.

In our attempt to encourage them to go into the profession, to address the diversity deficit, we too often shy away from the difficult conversations and the uncomfortable truths. We fear that the young would-be journalists may be discouraged, or look for other types of work.

What we are asking them to do is literally fight for our democracy, for the principle of freedom of speech, without giving them the correct 'supplies' or even a 'map' to survive the hostile territory. It would explain why anecdotally retention rates for journalists of colour are thought to be disproportionately lower than for their white counterparts. It would go some way to explain why figures in the 2020-21 *BBC annual report* for people leaving the corporation show that white employees are more than twice as likely to leave the BBC with a redundancy payment than their black counterparts who are literally simply just walking out of the door.

It would explain why, according to a report commissioned by the Film and TV Charity, black women in the media, more than any other ethnic group, think about changing their profession due to mental health issues.

There is arguably little or no point in encouraging more people from ethnic minorities to enter journalism if they are simply going to leave at higher rates. Knowing the racism they will face, it is ethically irresponsible. However, we must encourage and aid efforts to increase newsroom diversity. The status quo is not acceptable either for wider society or for the communities that are under-represented in the media discourse. But if we are going to find ways to help people of colour enter the profession we must tackle the systemic racism in our industry and the mental health issues associated with it.

This is precisely why we at Birmingham City University launched the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity in March 2020 and *Representology* – the journal for media diversity – later in the same year. The centre believes that a holistic approach to media diversity, inclusion and equity is essential. One must look at the industry as a whole to understand how one can achieve real progress. Key to this is the philosophy of academics and practitioners working together. Practitioners bring the first-hand experience of working in the field and the issues they have struggled with, while the academics bring a methodology and analytical approach to the issues that are being tackled that can often bring a fresh perspective.

Also diversity and inclusion in the media are too important to be the responsibility of a 'diversity department', or even to influential advisory roles in media organisations that want to diversify the creative output without asking tough questions about the fundamental structures of those organisations.

To our pleasant surprise many of the UK's media organisations have recognised the shortcomings of their current approach to diversity and have engaged with us to work on various projects. This has included the BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Viacom, Sky and the *Financial Times*. The centre hopes to make an important contribution to the UK media industry in helping organisations improve their approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion. And where they are unsuccessful, be a critical friend to help them do better.

We must increase media diversity but we cannot do that at the cost of the mental health of our young journalists. Therefore, any journalism training must equip students with the knowledge and skills of not just how to do the job but how to survive the job.

Together – as academics and as practitioners – we have the knowledge of how to create training methods and policies to do just that. But only if we work together. We cannot afford for another journalist of colour to leave the industry prematurely when there are already so few of us.

Note on the contributor

Marcus Ryder is the Head of External Consultancies at the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity which was set up to explore and increase diversity across the industry including journalism, acting, film, TV and radio. He is also the chair of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA). He has spent over 25 years working in the media across the world including the UK, China and Malaysia, and eight years as a senior executive at the BBC, winning numerous industry awards, from Baftas and Royal Television Society Awards to Foreign Press Association Awards.

ARTICLE

Matthieu Lardeau

Journalist or supporter? The ethical and professional challenges for freelance local sports reporters in France

A local freelance journalist, covering the news of a sports club every week, balances on a knife-edge between journalistic distance and proximity to their subjects. At what point are they more supporter than journalist? Matthieu Lardeau, an academic and sports journalist, reflects on his own experience in the field.

Complicity, friendship and journalistic rigour

'Well, we don't really talk about it, eh? You saw nothing, heard nothing...' How often does a journalist hear this said by one of their interviewees? A journalist should be in direct contact with their sources and their field to bring together both professional and ethical obligations: to impartially witness the event they are covering in order to be able to observe and collect its constituent elements without recourse to secondary sources, and to be the first interviewer of the protagonists and witnesses of this same event to collect their testimony as soon as possible. But to what extent do sports journalists' relationships with their informants compromise this obligation?

This question, which brings together the ethical, professional and epistemological issues of the journalistic profession, has been considered in both academic and professional literature (Bradshaw and Minogue 2020; Ruellan 1993, 1997) for journalists working for national news media or even established regional media. However, some groups of journalistic content producers have arguably been overlooked: freelances and especially the local press correspondents. An auxiliary labour force for the team of staff journalists, freelances mainly cover sports news in the French local press. A relationship of complicity, even friendship, is naturally woven with the personalities of these clubs or teams, a relationship which often calls into question certain rules or ethical standards:

accuracy of information, respect for people, independence (Agnès 2015; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014), affective non-involvement/involvement of the journalist with their field and more generally the management of the distance/proximity relationship with their sources.

I propose to analyse this problem by comparing it to my long experience as a local sports press correspondent in the local or regional French press. Cumulatively, I have fulfilled this role for 14 years, either side of being a full-time professional journalist for a total of six years. I will first discuss the particular role of a local press correspondent in France, particularly in regard to the ethical and professional standards and rules of journalism. Then, I will discuss in more detail the difficulty in managing the proximity/distance relationship with the subject.

The local freelance reporter: An ambiguous status

When considering the role of local press correspondent (LPC) we must consider the legal position of the incumbent and the frontiers of professional journalism – are they actually freelances or *de facto* employees? (Ruellan 1993, 1997; Thiery 2020). Are they subject, like journalists holding press cards, to the same professional and ethical obligations?

The status of the LPC in France is defined by article 16 of the French law of 27 January 1993 in the following terms: 'The local correspondent of the regional or unit press contributes, depending on how events unfold, to the collection of any local information relating to a specific area or to a particular social activity on behalf of a publishing company. This contribution consists of providing information submitted prior to verification or editing by a professional journalist before potential publication.'

A LPC covers news in a geographical and/or sectoral domain (sports, local life etc.) which has been entrusted to them by the departmental management of a local daily or weekly: they cover events, suggest articles to their management or sometimes submit ready-written articles. If accepted for publication, these articles may be partially or fully edited and/or rewritten by a professional journalist who, therefore, assumes the responsibility of producing content that meets professional requirements.

Unlike a professional journalist whose journalistic endeavours are their main remunerative activity (supported by the holding of the press card), the LPC cannot be legally recognised as a professional journalist and must therefore have another main source of income. However, depending on the circumstances, a situation can arise for experienced LPCs to produce articles which do not require the intervention of so-called professional journalists because their

length of experience allows them to deliver articles which are acknowledged as respecting the ethical and professional rules of journalism. This can be seen when the professional journalists who oversee LPCs quickly read over the articles sent by them, giving great confidence *a priori* to the submissions and making few if any corrections to the document.

The lack of distinction between journalists holding a press card and LPCs is also observed in certain newspapers of the regional daily press (RDP), the departmental daily press (DDP) and the regional weekly press (RWP) that authorise their LPCs to sign – or byline – their articles, just like professional journalists. In the various newspapers for which I worked as a LPC, I have had periods during which I bylined my articles just like my superiors (with first name and last name, or initial of the first name and last name, or double initials) and other periods during which the LPC was still allowed a byline., However, a note was placed in front of the byline ('corr.' or 'cor.', abbreviation of 'correspondent') allowing for the LPC to be distinguished from a professional journalist.

Nonetheless, these distinctions between LPCs and professional journalists are, in my experience, of limited significance to readers and interviewees: the latter equate LPCs with professional journalists. Indeed, often the LPCs' interviewees consider them to be 'more journalist' than the professional journalists because they are their regular interviewers in the field, whereas they rarely meet the journalists who run the service.

Finally, the LPCs can find themselves in a very unusual situation when they have worked for the same editorial office for several years, such as every weekend in the case of sports news. In such circumstances, their journalistic experience allows them to master the professional expectations of their writing and, therefore, they end up integrating, often unconsciously, the ethical and professional rules and standards even though their LPC status does not require it. As a result, professional journalists tend to view some LPCs as journalists in their own right. Thus, the legal dimension on which the status of LPC is based – that of the LPC not being an employee and in that sense not having a subordinate relationship – is blurred and the editorial staff which employ a lot of LPCs end up considering them as full members of the team of journalists.

This situation can cause team issues for the managers of the LPC teams in the sense that, if a LPC does not wish to work on certain weekends or even sometimes during the week, or does not accept the request to cover an event or demonstration – because they do not like it, it does not interest them or they do not consider the request sufficiently profitable financially or professionally –

their superiors may claim that they are not making an effort to ensure sufficient regular monitoring of their sector or their sports teams. For example, in order for regional dailies to fill their sporting timetable every Monday (and sometimes Friday or Saturday), the LPCs' writings are essential; without them, most of the pages could not be produced by the few professional journalists (Cuny and Elobo 2018).

Thus, regular and experienced LPCs are *de facto* considered to be professional quasi-journalists by their bosses, which creates a paradoxical situation: the law requires that the LPC is not in a subordinate or dependent relationship with their sponsors, but the practice makes them very regular contributors, to the point that some have been LPCs for several decades. As a consequence, these LPCs actually act like professional journalists with their bosses controlling the work of 'their' LPCs, while also considering them to be professionally equipped or qualified to work with large autonomy.

Should the local freelance reporter comply strictly with journalism ethics?

In this arrangement, should LPCs be expected – when they do not have a legal obligation to do so – to be subject to the professional and ethical standards and rules of professional journalists? To begin answering this, we will take the example of sports journalism. Sports journalism can be considered as one of the rare specialist areas of the profession to be able to claim the practice, sometimes and at least theoretically, of so-called 'objective' journalism, that is to say a practice of writing reports of sports competitions which are characterised by changes in numerical scores and/or objective actions. Specifically, these facts can be observed by any spectator, without the journalist's approach interfering in the evolution of a match's score, the emergence of a dominant team or individual at a given time, and the timing of player changes. Likewise, post-match interviews aimed at collecting statements from trainers, coaches, captains, etc., cannot, in principle, be dependent on the particular point of view of the journalist since it is a highly codified exercise which consists of repeating word for word, as a quotation, the comments made by the people interviewed.

In this aspect of 'objective' sports journalism, the ethical dimension of journalism arguably remains peripheral, due to the highly codified exercise of reporting a sports competition. In just a few dozen lines or seconds, the aim is to bring to the attention of the public the objective outcome of a sporting event and the comments made by the people interviewed. In some senses this is a highly theorised account of straight, fact-based reporting. Complications to this model arise when those covering contests aim to provide

'colour' pieces which are inherently more subjective, or ask post-match questions which are intended to elicit answers to a particular agenda of the reporter's choosing (Bradshaw and Minogue 2020).

How close is too close?

The professional and ethical questions that arise for the LPC relate to the management of their relationship with their informants in the field, particularly in the case of local sports journalism. The sports LPC is first and foremost a liaison and communication agent between sports clubs and the newspaper editorial staff, but they may also be a strong supporter of the sportspeople and sports clubs on their beat for which they provide regular coverage.

The main pitfall that awaits a sports LPC – like a professional journalist operating at the national level – lies in being both an observer and a committed participant in their area (Gimbert 2012), in this case being a supporter of the team or athlete they cover every weekend or very regularly. By necessity, the LPC, like any journalist, must establish close links with their informants to create the most favourable conditions for collecting information, in particular information that the interviewee does not wish to disclose or does so according to their own agenda. This proximity very often results in the creation of friendly relationships that invite closeness or even familiarity. Week after week, when the LPC follows the same teams or clubs and creates connections which may lead to a positive or favourable treatment for the club or team, sometimes the need for honesty or balanced information may be compromised. The possible 'supporterism' or boosterism of the LPC follows 'their' team or 'their' club can be expressed on several levels: by supporting their club against that of a neighbouring town, or against a club from another department or region.

However, this risk of 'supporterism' is mitigated by the duty of fair journalistic treatment by the professional editorial staff who proofread the articles. But, in my experience, LPCs generally remain ethical in their presentation of a balanced treatment of the facts from the different protagonists. For example, before the start of a sporting event, I always introduce myself, greet and speak to the managers (president, coach, players) or even the supporters of opposing or visiting teams, giving them even more time than the host team that I already know; likewise, I try to give a fair, if not equal, treatment to the two teams in the article.

The local freelance as a liaison and communication officer to sports associations

Some of the LPCs activities do not pose an ethical problem when it comes, for example, to being an agent of information transmission between a club and the newspaper and vice versa. In the vast majority of real-life situations, this exchange of information is part

of my conception of the local journalist, namely an actor mediating between the news protagonists and the public. However, arguably like many journalists or LPCs, I have frequently stepped outside of my role as an outside observer and journalist to behave like a member of the management of the club or sports association whose news I was covering.

By way of illustration, as a sports LPC for a weekly in the large city of Seine-Saint-Denis, I covered the matches of the local basketball team which played at the national level and hosted teams from provinces and small rural towns. Often, their players, staff and supporters came to Seine-Saint-Denis for the first time and upon their arrival at the sports centre, expressed their fear of visiting this area of the Parisian suburbs, of being attacked, of their coach being targeted etc. I then see myself as having stepped out of my role as an external observer to take on that of a member of the club management – which I was not – or of a 'mediator' to welcome them, talk to them as soon as they arrived at the sports centre, accompany the staff and the players to the locker rooms and then sit in the stands next to their supporters throughout the match to reassure them. It required, leaving the role of external observer, to act as a resident of this city of Seine-Saint-Denis and a friendly face at the local basketball club with the purpose of improving the negative image these people had of the city. However, there is an unwritten rule in sport: that athletes or sports teams who play away may be made to feel apprehensive about moving to an unfamiliar, even hostile environment. That is part of the challenge of a sporting event and it is not expected that the host will make visitors particularly comfortable, psychologically.

Actually, these ethical questions emerge when it comes to responding to extra-journalistic requests from clubs. Frequently, I have been asked to advise them on their communication strategy with the various media – including potentially those for which I was working – to ensure better media coverage and for their marketing strategy. Occasionally, I received requests, which I refused, from large sports organisations to write editorial content and communication, while, at the same time, I was required to cover the sports news as a LPC.

A local journalism of 'committed observation'

My long experience as a sports LPC has led me to be, like I think any LPC, a committed observer of the life and news of sportspeople and sports clubs that I have covered for many years. However, I feel that the commitment was demonstrated in a contained manner in the sense that it never exceeded the professional codes of local sports journalism, which require the expression of a minimum engagement on the part of the journalist in the covered event, or ethical and professional standards and rules. The pyramidal organisation of a newspaper's editorial staff allows a second reading of a document

sent by an LPC to a journalist who did not attend the event and, therefore, maintains the distance and the necessary perspective. In so doing, the second journalist fulfils the role of 'guardian' of the ethical and professional requirements by proofreading and correcting, amending, or even rewriting the LPC's article.

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Note on the contributor

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BOOK REVIEWS

Towards a theory of true crime narratives: A textual analysis

Ian Case Punnett
Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2019 pp 110
ISBN 9780367892784

Ian Case Punnett's monograph *Towards a theory of true crime narratives: A textual analysis* is certainly a timely and engaging study of what the author reminds us has become a recent multi-platform phenomenon. Punnett points out that despite the obvious overlap between everyday investigative crime journalism and the (usually more long-form) category of 'true crime', the genre needs a theoretical base and a method of distinguishing between the two.

As a start, suggests Punnett, there are definitions: that true crime is a multi-platform genre, most often, though not always, associated with murder narratives. While it may share a heritage with journalism, it is 'driven by different impulses' (p. 3) – in particular, the way the story is shaped by the teller and how their values may be imbued in the narrative.

Its arguably most famous historic example, Truman Capote's *In cold blood* (1966), may have been the first to legitimise the consumption of this kind of long-form, detailed story of a brutal crime. Capote, however, did not use the term 'true crime', preferring to describe the work as a 'non-fiction novel' or 'new journalism'. Even *Serial* (2015) with its non-fiction murder narrative content used for 'entertainment', did not identify itself as 'true crime'.

The time is ripe, therefore, for a theory to help define and categorise true crime. Although the author does not attempt to define 'journalism' by way of a distinction, one difference, he argues, is that journalism is not limited to murder narratives (p. 5). But nor is 'true crime': recent examples of such multi-platform narratives have covered unsolved disappearances, sexual abuse, hate campaigns and even the fraud carried out on the UK ITV show *Who wants to be a millionaire?* (2020). The non-murder remit of the genre is not greatly considered here.

Theorists Bakhtin, Derrida and Barthes all challenge the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. But while Bakhtin and Derrida offer readers a critical base, for Punnett they do not go far enough in distinguishing between the non-fiction forms of true crime and true crime reporting (p. 19). Punnett finds Barthes's (1974) semiological

systems more useful, particularly the five-code theory with which he analysed Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* (1830).

Here, therefore, Punnett codifies his true crime samples with eight categories. The first is the teleology code of 'moving towards a truth'; if a text does not meet this TEL code, or too many elements are fictional, then it cannot be defined as true crime (p. 96). After this, Punnett proposes a second stage with seven further codes. They are: Justice where the text is victim-centric and seeking a need to secure justice; the Subversive code, which seeks to disrupt the status quo, for example, proving the innocence of one accused or convicted; the Crusader code, or a call to action resulting in a change; the Geographical code, emphasising the importance of locality in the narrative; the Forensic code, with its emphasis on crime science in any detailed descriptions of scenes and autopsies, for example; the Vocative code, in which the authorial style shifts from an objective and journalistic ordering of facts to a non-neutral, advocacy position; and the Folkloric code, which acknowledges true crime's instructive function. This final code may be of particular interest to the predominately female consumers of true crime. This whole aspect of female consumption of the genre, its role as a morality tale and issues of victimhood are touched upon in this work, and there is a nod to the work done in this area by Browder (2006), but clearly this is an area in need of much more focused investigation.

Punnett chooses ten American texts spanning more than a century for textual analysis and coding. There are three magazine articles, three books and the movie adaptions of two of these, three video productions and a podcast. The selected texts are Dashiell Hammett's 'Who killed Bob Teal?' (1924), Jim Thompson's 'Secret in the clay' (1939), Capote's *In cold blood* (1966), Ann Rule's 'Baffling murder of the Washington lumber tycoon' (1969), Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry's *Helter skelter: The true story of the Manson murders* (1974), Ann Rule's *The stranger beside me* (concerning serial killer Ted Bundy) (1980), Dateline NBC's *To catch a predator* (2004-2007); Series One of *Serial* (2015), HBO's series *The jinx: The life and deaths of Robert Durst* (2015) and the Netflix series *Making a murderer* (2015). The texts were chosen based on their popularity and impact, acknowledging that since the study many more multi-platform texts draw attention to the genre. Indeed, another area ripe for further investigation is the impact of these changing platforms on the critical reception and widening audiences of true crime.

Punnett finds sufficient evidence of textual continuities and repeated characteristics to form a criterion for true crime as a separate art form, even though he concludes not all texts that refer to themselves as true crime meet the criterion. Capote's *In cold blood*, for

example contains too many elements of fiction to meet Punnett's definition. In spite of its investigatory nature, *To catch a predator* lacks a larger truth about the human condition or the sense of a metanarrative. *The jinx* and *Making a murderer,* however, have a stronger case.

The author would probably agree on the study's limitations: it is Western, indeed entirely US-centric, and a study of true crime narratives from a more global perspective may produce different conclusions. Gender issues relating to true crime's consumers, victims and perpetrators need deeper analysis, although this was never the author's focus. The ethical problems of 'crime porn' are only lightly touched upon, but again, in-depth analysis of this aspect is not the author's goal. The impact of different platforms on the narratives is also of interest. Nevertheless, this monograph is a clear, entertaining and useful starting point in a little-theorised area of study.

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Barbara Henderson

What's the point of news? A study in ethical journalism

Tony Harcup

London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020 pp 165

ISBN 9783030399467; ISBN 9783030399474 (eBook)

Tony Harcup's *What's the point of news?* dropped through my letterbox slap bang in the earlier days of the Covid pandemic. It could not have been more timely. We were awash with news and most of it was grim. News had become a public health channel: people craved it. The government deemed journalists to be key workers. Even trust levels went up. It was clear that journalism really mattered – and it is this theme which lies at the core of this book.

Harcup kicks off with an almost bleak, but realistic, portrayal of the current state of the news media and journalism. It is a reality everyone employed in, or studying, the news media will recognise. Yet, in the midst of a stark, tough reality for news producers and avid news consumers, Harcup offers hope. He points to the diversity that exists in the choice of journalism in the 21st century, but mostly he reminds us of the necessity of news.

Harcup's primary concern is with ethical journalism and how this is done, why it needs to be done and is required to be made to make that happen. News values – not surprisingly given the author's seminal work in this field (Harcup and O'Neill 2001, 2017) – lie at the heart of this book. In seeking to answer his own question about the point of news, Harcup draws widely and deeply on that research but is also open to expanding what we perceive these values to be and how the news media employ them.

Harcup's methodology is reflexively grounded in his own experiences as a journalist, journalism educator and researcher. He speaks of it as 'native researching'. And what I love is his acknowledgement of his own favoured status '… that I am a white man of a certain age … who currently works in a university based in the global North. … I can be said to occupy a position of relative privilege' (p. 8). But it is what we do with our privilege that matters and here Harcup uses it to attempt to shift perspectives: he notes his approach seeks to acknowledge and incorporate a feminist perspective that will enable the author, scholars and the book's audiences to begin to appreciate and understand the field differently. It is encouraging, admirable even, to read a work where women scholars are cited with regularity and with an ease that is rarely apparent in much academic writing. It is refreshing. It is what we should expect to see more often.

Harcup's other key theme is the role of the citizen in the broader context of news: he seeks to explore how far news meets the requirement of informing citizens in a meaningful way and how news values meet the needs of citizens to be better informed and enabled to play their part in society and democratic processes to the full. Harcup acknowledges the tensions between commercial pressures and the need for news organisations to remain economically viable, and the ambitions of editors and reporters to produce the sort of news that would most benefit the wellbeing of our political, social and cultural lives. He points to a need for greater agency for citizens and audiences: in the terms of determining the sort of news produced, and in enhancing their impact on society and how it works.

Does Harcup, then, answer his own question: *What's the point of news?* He concludes that news does still matter, but that journalism

needs new news values: ones that reflect a changed world. Journalism still matters: but how it is done; what constitutes it; how it is received and how it is responded to have changed. The world it reports is more crowded, more diverse and perhaps fundamentally more challenged that it has ever been. Harcup posits that by recognising and responding to this in ways that embrace difference and diversity journalists can produce news that is as engaging, dramatic and distinct as it needs to – and can – be.

This book is not a lengthy tome, which considering the span of topics covered, it could be. Its brevity is its strength, it gets to the point quickly, identifies the issues and seeks to provide solutions. Harcup has published widely as an academic, but he has not forgotten how to write in the succinct style of a journalist. His writing is crisp and fluent, his voice distinct and his intention to provoke the reader to think differently is clear.

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The Routledge companion to local media and journalism

Agnes Gulyas and David Baines (editors)

Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, 2020 pp 496

ISBN 9780815375364 (hbk); ISBN 9781351239943 (ebk)

The study of the local media is rarely in fashion among academics. When Bob Franklin and David Murphy set out their stall for their foundational work, *What news? The market, politics and the local press* in 1991, they lamented the 'scant attention' which had been given to local media in general, and the local newspaper in particular, despite a flurry of studies which had been published in the 1970s.[1] 'Subsequently, however, media research has become increasingly national in its focus and relatively unconcerned with the

press, whether in the national or local setting,' Franklin and Murphy write (1991: 3). Some 30 years later and it is often still necessary to justify why these smallest media organisations are worthy of attention – with scholarship often dismissed as irrelevant because 'who cares' about local media anyway? It is, therefore, particularly gratifying to welcome the *Routledge companion to local media and journalism*, which, at just shy of 500 pages and with 46 chapters, not only makes a valuable contribution to knowledge in this area, but, by its scope and ambition, stakes a claim for the continued significance of international scholarship in this area.

The study of local media is not particularly straightforward, drawing on a range of disciplines and perspectives. However, since the millennium, journalism studies has increasingly matured into a discipline in its own right, as the continued establishment of the Routledge series of academic journals, *Journalism Studies* (which first published in 2001), *Journalism Practic*e (2007) and more recently, *Digital Journalism* (2013) attest. At the same time, with the shift of journalism teaching in the UK at least into universities, a new breed of hybrid 'hackademic' scholar has emerged, able to combine critical analysis with their own experience in the industry, with most, inevitably because of both employment numbers but also disruption to those jobs, drawn from local media. It is interesting to note that, according to the biographical information supplied, no fewer than 20 of the contributors to the *Companion* have enjoyed careers in journalism – including myself.

Despite the greater number applying their attention to this field, there remain obstacles to its progress; in their introduction to this volume, Gulyas and Baines, put forward a critical appraisal which identifies the major of these, including the propensity towards platform specific approaches, national-level studies and a lack of historicisation which condemns the field to a 'collective amnesia'.[2] The volume is organised into six parts which consider: the histories and legacies of local media and journalism;[3] local media policies; political contexts; forms and structures of ownership; local journalism practices; and local media communities and audiences.

Firstly, by problematising key concepts of 'local' and 'community', Gulyas and Baines introduce layers of complexity to the understanding of local media. Terms which are often taken for granted because of their common-place usage, the editors argue, demand a more precise definition so that the field itself can be better navigated. In their reading, 'local' is not simply a spatial concept, 'it is a place formed by its social setting' (p. 3). Similarly, they expand the notion of 'community' beyond that of an object to that of community as a process – something which can be supported by local media and journalism, rather than something which can be objectified for commercial gain. The volume proceeds to draw upon a range

of authors who describe examples of this in different national contexts, such as Meissner and Tsukada, who describe how local media in Japan successfully support communities at time of disaster because journalists have a 'grassroots perspective' drawn from a shared social environment with the audience (p. 429), or Rao, who writes that local media in India 'influences not only day-to-day decision making but the very texture of society' (p. 150).

Secondly, Gulyas and Baines identify the complexity of circumscribing the field of local and community media itself, a field that spans an array of mediums, from regional level organisations to small hyperlocal practitioners. The field is diverse, they argue – much more so than national level media because of the geo-social embeddedness which characterises it. This means consideration of local media and journalism must include consideration of the political and policy environments in which they operate and also how they relate to other media – increasingly conceived of in terms of the ecological term 'ecosystem'. Significantly for the field Gulyas and Baines argue that this relationship is 'reciprocal' so that local media 'processes and practices, institutions and organisation, form and content are informed both globally, nationally and locally' (p. 8).

This is why local media matters and it is this which gives rise to the themes and structure of the volume, which includes contributions from a wide range of scholars at varying stages of their academic careers. The strength of this volume is that it succeeds in placing the significance of local and community media on a global stage by presenting such a wide range of international contributions. Thus, we are not only persuaded that when local and community media are threatened, we should all care but also are opened to the possibility that it is still possible for local and community media to thrive – so debunking the overarching discourse of decline which continues to dominate discussions of the sector in the US and UK. We are also pointed towards some areas for future research, not least among which is the need for more internationally comparative studies, which this volume opens the door to. Finally, we are counselled by the editors and contributors alike to be aware of the 'messy, chaotic nature of local and community media and journalism today' (p. 16) which is in many ways in the eye of the storm wrought by digital transformation. This volume gives us a way of navigating that storm so that the mess and chaos is seen as an opportunity, rather than a threat.

Notes

[1] This flurry was possibly stimulated by the widespread local government reforms in 1974 and the preceding years of deliberation about changes

[2] Pickering 2015: 12

[3] In the interests of full disclosure, my own contribution is in this section

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What's the point of Ofcom?

Edited by John Mair

Goring, Bite-Sized Books, 2021 pp 124

ISBN 9798742003441

The precarious timing of *What's the point of Ofcom?* risked it becoming a swiftly-outdated collection of big-hitter contributions in the face of the summer 2021 appointment process for the new £142,500pa[1] regulator's chair, which was widely tipped to be Paul Dacre's for the taking.

Recruitment halted when the former *Daily Mail* editor was not selected. A new appointment process was emerging in November 2021 and looked to give Paul Dacre another shot at the title.

Still, John Mair's 39th 'hackademic' book remains a must-read for culture Secretary Nadine Dorries and special advisors (Spads) alike, not least for the portrayals of what a Dacre-led Ofcom might resemble. It is essential reading also for fellow hacks and academics, and for industry practitioners, strategists and lobbyists.

Designed with the publisher to air bite-sized insights and opinions from key protagonists, Mair's intention is to provoke debate about

the fitness for purpose of the 18-year-old regulator in a digital and post-liberal era, and of Paul Dacre as chair.

The book's four sections comprise: an overview of today's big questions for regulation; a look at Ofcom's huge brief; analysis of the BBC's three-year relationship with the watchdog; and suggested priorities for the new chair.

Mair says he 'sweethearted' the 16 contributors for a chapter each with controversial or spirited testimonies, cautions and recommendations. Every chapter in *What's the point of Ofcom?* is worth a follow-up as a news story.

Former head of the press regulator, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Ipso), the Rt Hon. Sir Alan Moses, writes ironically that he could apply for Ofcom's empty chair. His 2,000-plus words wistfully reflect on discomforts he felt at press self-regulation, and his envy of statutory licensing applied to public service broadcasting.

His words also sting – Sir Alan's top line, Ofcom's regulation of the BBC 'leads to the bland leading the bland' comes at the end – and he proposes a trial period of deregulation for the press to improve its editorial behaviour, and for the BBC and PSB to sharpen its content. Bill Emmott, a former chair of Ofcom's Content Board, a Remainer in the UK's Brexit debate and 1993-2006 editor of the *Economist*, argues that Ofcom was formed as a regulation confidence trick to divest the (then Labour) government of 'head-hurty stuff' (p. 10).

In his 2,500-plus words, Emmott grinds his axe (to paraphrase him) over the circumstances around his litigious departure from the Content Board in 2016. He proposes the Bank of England's style of governance and management as models for a future Ofcom, which otherwise, Emmott believes, will become organisationally broke (p. 16).

Steven Barnett, Professor of Communications at the University of Westminster, retraces Ofcom's roots and argues it is losing its focus on its responsibility to UK citizens, and now holds back the BBC's digital agility (p. 18).

A book such as this needs a BBC director general and Mark Thompson's 2021 Philip Geddes Memorial Lecture is edited and reproduced. In it, the former BBC DG (2004-2012) looks at published and platformed free speech and at trans-Atlantic statutory and self-serviced regulation. Award-winning broadcast journalist Clive Myrie's speech on news impartiality, which he made to honour the late Sir Harold Evans in March 2021, is edited and reproduced. Trans-Atlantic contrasts continue and Clive Myrie explores whether the US's non-requirement for political balance in

broadcast news threatens democracy, and how regulated public service broadcasting in the UK might help broad public trust in journalism to endure (p. 34).

In the section on Ofcom's huge task, diversity champion Marcus Ryder reminds us that Ofcom exists to address market failure, just as other *office-of* regulators (such as Ofwat, Ofgem) address profit-making utilities and their financial relationships with customers. The lack of diversity in British media is a market failure and, therefore, Ofcom's failure; the solution is for Ofcom to regulate diversity, argues Ryder (p. 70).

If I have one issue with *What's the point of Ofcom?*, it's the gender ratio of contributors. The cover page of my Kindle edition highlights male contributors. Every writer is, indeed, worth reading – television's David Elstein and Simon Albury; *Daily Telegraphists* Robin Aitken and Christopher Williams; news*men* Peter Jukes, Paul Connew, Philip Collins and Professor Julian Petley. Of the 16 authors, two female experts with the same surname are commissioned: global strategist Janice Hughes and former Ofcom director of content policy Jacquie Hughes.

Janice Hughes's chapter, a 25-year history of UK regulation, is a must-read for students, educators and industry strategists. Her longer lens reminds us of the former telecommunications regulator Oftel; the might then and now of British Telecom in the media landscape; and the five authorities which Ofcom replaced. She provides first-hand accounts of the Thatcher governments' desires to curb public-service television through defunding and regulation. Her informed view of the present is that today's government must square up to regulating the tech giants with urgent legislation handed to Ofcom to police.

Jacquie Hughes argues that Ofcom is now disproportionately perceived as the regulator of the BBC above all else. I find her a great choice of contributor, given her move from BBC production and commissioning, to broadcast executive, to Ofcom's director of content policy (2016-2020). Her chapter provides contemporary insight into the exacting nature of Ofcom towards the BBC under its new 2018 licence. She is certain 'the BBC is better held to account by Ofcom than by previous arrangements' (p. 84).

What's the point of Ofcom? was compiled while the media industry held its breath at the likelihood of Paul Dacre becoming the next chair of Ofcom. In his article 'Why NOT make Paul Dacre the story rather than a regulator', Philip Collins argues that Paul Dacre 'really brings to the table only a capacity for controversy and not much else' (p. 100).

Writing before then-culture secretary Oliver Dowden paused the appointment of Ofcom's next chair, Collins portrays Dacre as interested in breaking out of regulated impartiality in the UK and motivated to take on the big tech companies through the upcoming Online Harms Bill.

Professor Julian Petley sees Dacre as 'a crazy' and deliberate governmental choice for a disruptor, and recalls the 2011 spat between Dacre's *Daily Mail* and Ofcom, about *X-Factor* content complaints to Ofcom which seemed inflamed by *Daily Mail* coverage of an episode.

Chair-less Ofcom makes *What's the point of Ofcom?* no less a pertinent read in 2021 (there is, of course, an interim chair, Maggie Carver). Readers in education, in the media and in politics have here an accessible and engaging set of essays which inform, analyse and speculate sagely on Ofcom's challenges and potential successes ahead.

At the time of writing this review, the chair's new appointment process is unfolding – I'm looking for at least one more chapter from John Mair to take us behind that dramatic pause.

Note

[1] HM Government Public Appointments: https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/appointment/chair-ofcom/, accessed on 5 November 2021

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The International Journal of Communication Ethics

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