# The SAGE Handbook of
# Digital Journalism
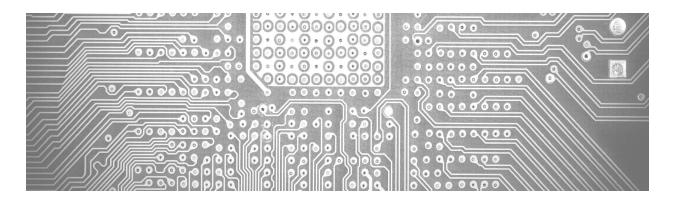
# The SAGE Handbook of
# Digital Journalism

Edited by

## Tamara Witschge, C.W. Anderson, David Domingo and Alfred Hermida

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# Digital Journalism and Democracy

Beate Josephi

## INTRODUCTION

Digital journalism was not born out of nowhere. It grew from technical possibilities and, within a short time span, has decidedly altered the face of journalism, notably in North America, Europe and Australia. Globally, traditional journalism still holds sway, and for this reason digital journalism has to be seen in conjunction with traditional journalism rather than in isolation.

Digital journalism defines its relationship to democracy somewhat differently to traditional journalism. Technological changes have opened channels for all who are able and wish to actively participate in the creation and distribution of news, a role previously confined to journalists and media houses, thus democratizing journalistic processes. This chapter explains the various visions of journalism, and of democracy, and sets out to explore how the new possibilities of participation affect journalists. Many developments in digital journalism are still playing out, but

some gains and losses brought about by the changes can already be assessed.

As this chapter sets out to give an overview of journalism and democracy, it does so with the various trends in journalism, the digital divide and uneven spread of democracy in mind. Given that the beginnings of journalism and democracy as well as the current accelerating changes in journalism are located in the Western world, it is only too easy to focus on that region alone. But this would lead to a reductive picture of journalism.

## Journalism and democracy

The notion of journalism being a vital part of democracy was most explicitly formulated in the twentieth century. But the beginnings of a link between a critical press and the endeavours towards democracy go back to the seventeenth century when ideological struggles were first played out in the press. To free the press from its shackles of state

and religious authority, poet John Milton demanded the 'Liberty of Unlicensed Printing' (1644). His speech to Parliament, published under the title *Areopagitica*, to this day remains a fundamental text in the fight for the freedom of expression. Milton, for his part, was convinced that if all 'the winds of doctrine were let loose upon the earth', truth would win out.

As the bourgeois class rose during the Industrial Revolution and the number of literate readers grew, the press provided a forum for contesting political demands. Facilitating an informed exchange of views has to this day been one of the most influential visions of journalism. It provided the foundation for the view of 'journalism as a source of information in a deliberative democracy' (McNair, 2009: 238)

Some three hundred years later, the Hutchins Commission and its report, titled *A Free and Responsible Press* (1947), favoured an elitist interpretation of journalism and democracy. The commission, which convened in the USA during the Second World War and published its report soon after, set out to clarify fundamental aspects of press freedom and democracy (Bates, 1995). Some of its views were guided by recent experiences with totalitarianism in Europe, which had sowed deep suspicion of popular rule and the common citizen, who was seen as ill informed, emotional and susceptible to the persuasions of demagogues and propaganda.

In this ideological environment it was easy for the quality press and its journalists to put themselves forward as spokespeople on behalf of the public. As such, they would mediate the public's view to the elected officials and vice versa. The media presented themselves as trusted avenues of information, and in their informational and watchdog function as essential to the workings of democracy. The media were to provide 'a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning' (Hutchins Commission Report, 1947). Journalists were encouraged to recognize

themselves as specialists and professionals, even though the lesser-regarded populist press decried this move as undemocratic for its elitism (Bates, 1995: 6).

Much of the subsequent scholarly criticism was devoted to the practices and choices made by journalists and editors in their appropriated roles. Under the impact of digital journalism, the contestation between those who defend the mediated voice of large sections of society through professional journalists and those who prefer 'individual-centred understandings of the democratic process' (Curran, 1997: 100) has come to the fore again.

## Reasons for the paradigm's pervasiveness

A major reason for the pervasiveness of the journalism and democracy paradigm is its prominent place in the normative theories of journalism, notably Siebert et al.'s *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). The book's persuasiveness lay in the simplicity of the binary – libertarianism and authoritarianism – on which the theories were built (Josephi, 2005). *Four Theories of the Press* made press–state relations the measure for media systems, a move that privileged democracies and in particular the American system, where the press was at arm's length from the government. All media systems were then placed according to their independence of government somewhere on the line leading from libertarianism to authoritarianism. Siebert et al.'s book remained a touchstone for countless subsequent studies, also for those that exposed its shortcomings (Christians et al., 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Nerone, 1995).

To this day, the paradigm is deeply entrenched in journalism scholarship 'because much of the scholarly world in the West – and specifically in the USA – depends directly or indirectly on the presumption of democracy and its accoutrements' (Zelizer, 2013: 467). The discussion of democracy is

unlikely ever to fade away altogether because, as Zelizer writes, its normative values have given it 'a moral bypass' (2013: 468). Digital journalism's participatory modes have again revived the discussion of democratic models, especially the participatory one.

Overall, the centrality of democracy is fading. A meta-analysis of theories of journalism in a digital age shows that 'democracy' as a keyword dropped from fourth place in the period 2000–6 to ninth place in the timespan 2007–13 (Steensen and Ahva, 2015: 8). The terms 'public sphere' and 'citizen journalism' have taken its place, indicating a shift in theoretical perception of journalism that is less beholden to a particular form of government.

## REASONS TO CRITIQUE THE JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY PARADIGM

### A paradigm bound to a particular time and place

The history of the link between journalism and democracy tends to be told in a teleological manner, not with democracy but with freedom of expression as its narrative line. John Milton's impassioned plea in 1644 came long before Britain became a democracy and Voltaire, another eminent fighter for freedom of speech, died eleven years before the French Revolution.

The journalism and democracy paradigm, as conceived in the United States where the market-funded press was to be independent from government, sits oddly with the world's many nominal democracies. Even in the USA, as Nerone (2013) points out, the constellation ensuring the validity of the paradigm existed for a few decades at best. Only in the 1950s and 1960s, a period labelled 'high modernism' by Hallin (1994), did the media hold a monopoly on news services and could be seen in a position of power that

buttressed their claim to being the 'Fourth Estate'. This hegemonic model rested on a favourable commercial climate, such as a rise in advertising and a lowering of material and transportation costs. In Hallin's words, high modernism in American journalism was an era when 'it seemed possible for the journalist to be powerful and prosperous and at the same time independent, disinterested, public-spirited, and trusted and beloved by everyone, from the corridors of power around the world to the ordinary citizen and consumer' (1994: 172).

This seemingly idyllic world was premised on political consensus and economic security. Hallin determined the deterioration of the political consensus as the end of high modernism. But it was not until the impact of digital technology caused the deterioration of its economic base that the hegemonic powers of the media and journalists' authority to choose, present and interpret the news came to an end. The narrative attention has now turned from freedom of expression for the press to freedom of information on the internet, and the question can be asked whether the 'Fourth Estate' should become 'citizenfour' (Poitras, 2014).

### An uneven global picture

Freedom House, whose evaluation criteria for press freedom are inspired by the democracy paradigm, has over the past 25 years consistently rated only about one third of the world's countries as free. The graph showing press freedom over a quarter of a century indicates that the number of countries whose media is deemed free – compared to those partly free or not free – is the most steady (Freedom House, 2014). In 2014, the figures read 63 free, 68 partly free and 65 not free. This leaves over two-thirds of the world's nations not possessing the conditions necessary for the application of the journalism and democracy paradigm. Digital journalism, like journalism, is inevitably part of a

country's media system, and as such cannot escape questions of state control. Digital accessibility may initially be a more pressing concern but it will become an issue, determining how much commentary and contributions to news will be permitted in countries around the world.

Similarly, penetration of digital media is uneven in the world, as is the viability of the print media. Picard has summarized the challenges facing the traditional media as 'mature and saturated markets, loss of audience not highly interested in news, the diminishing effectiveness of the mass media business model, the lingering effects of the economic crisis, and the impact of digital competitors' (Picard, 2014: 273).

However, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers would argue print is far from dead. In an update to its global report in October 2014 the organization stated that more than half of the world's adult population – 2.5 billion people – reads a daily newspaper and more than 800 million read it in digital form (WAN-IFRA, 2014a). This puts the present ratio of traditional media to digital media at about 4:1.

A survey, presented in June 2014, showed that, globally, print circulation rose by 2 per cent from a year earlier, but had dropped by 2 per cent over a five-year period. A look at the figures continent by continent underlines how much the loss in print readership is concentrated in North America, Australia and Western Europe. Over the past five years, circulation fell 10.25 per cent in North America, 19.6 per cent in Australia and Oceania, and 23 per cent in Europe. This was offset by rises in Asia, Latin America and Africa and the Middle East.

These figures indicate that 'circulation continues to rise in countries with a growing middle class and relatively low broadband penetration' (WAN-IFRA, 2014b). In particular tabloid newspapers are enjoying a new and growing readership among the literate, urbanized workers in developing countries, such as South Africa (Wasserman, 2010).

Despite these almost encouraging figures, the speech by the Secretary General of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers contains a very familiar warning. 'Finding a sustainable business model for digital news media is not only important for [our] business, but for the future health of debate in democratic society' (WAN-IFRA, 2014b). This warning, rooted in the press' imaginary of the 'Fourth Estate', could have been spoken in the USA a century earlier, albeit in a very different context.

The press is operating in an environment where six billion of the world's estimated seven billion people have access to mobile phones (Wang, 2014; Franklin, 2014). While the access to mobile telephony does not necessarily mean connection to digital networks that permit smart phone capabilities, these figures underline the claim of universal connectivity.

## Journalism outside democracies: a study of practices

The journalism and democracy paradigm has for a long time inhibited research beyond the Western world. To get around the impasse, the study of journalism practice rather than media systems has proven a more fruitful approach (Josephi, 2013). These studies, centred on the working conditions and perceptions of individual journalists around the world, confirm ipso facto that journalistic work is carried out in all countries, irrespective of their political system. The most comprehensive study to date, Hanitzsch's Worlds of Journalism Study, now comprising 60 countries, attempts to conceptualize journalism practices and cultures around the globe. Like Deuze's earlier reconsideration of journalists' professional identity and ideology (2005), Hanitzsch's survey is largely influenced by Western journalistic values.

A focus on practice rather than norms is also seen as the way forward in digital journalism where 'norms act as disincentive to

adopt any innovation that may challenge the institutional configuration' (Domingo et al., 2015: 54). Domingo at al. suggest instead the employment of the entirely practice oriented actor-network theory (Latour, 2011). Actor-network theory very comprehensively not only permits tracing 'the diversity of actors involved in changing news production' but also news use and contribution, that is, 'people's expectation regarding what is news and who is entitled to produce it, … their motivation and practice in the production of news, and their power relationships in the process of the circulation of news' (Domingo et al., 2015: 54). The researchers admit that, from a pragmatic point of view, this is an ambitious aim and may only be approached in segments. But when done, it can help to 'reassess the role of journalism in our contemporary societies' (Domingo et al., 2015: 63).

Actor-network theory can be applied around the globe, as shown by Poell et al. (2013). Their investigation into the Chinese Twitter equivalent, Weibo, reveals the complexity of interactions of human and non-human actors, especially technologically programmed censorship. They conclude that the internet in China is a negotiated and calibrated space where censorship is far from straightforward, and despite high digital penetration, future developments are impossible to predict. This Chinese example underlines that digital journalism, if viewed as an indication of democratic developments, can get easily circumscribed by media systems and state controls whereas the focus on practices can establish how journalism is constructed in a country, even if the findings expose practices that rarely meet commonly held normative expectations.

## DIFFERENT MODELS OF COMMUNICATIVE DEMOCRACY

A determining factor in assessing the relationship of journalism and democracy in the digital age is the kind of democracy seen as desirable. In the twentieth century, three models with strong applicability to the media have emerged (Benson, 2010): the elitist model, proposed by Walter Lippmann, the participatory model, argued by John Dewey, and the deliberative model as found in the theories of Jürgen Habermas.

### Elitist

The transformations brought about by digital technologies have revived interest in a 'debate' that, although never an actual dialogue (Schudson, 2008), has gone down in history as the 'Lippmann–Dewey debate'. It was Dewey's book and comments on Lippmann's work, which set their positions apart.

Lippmann expressed his disillusion with the ways democracy was playing out in his books *Public Opinion* (1922/1997) and *Phantom Public* (1925). To his mind, democratic theory, starting from the vision of human dignity, had become beholden to the wisdom and experience of the voter. As Lippmann put it, stereotyping, prejudice, propaganda and the self-centred nature of man were prone to undermine this wisdom, and many problems had become far too complex for voters to grasp. Lippmann did not perceive better communication of the state's affairs as a solution. In his view, newspapers made small headway against 'violent prejudice, apathy, preference for the curious trivial against the dull important, and the hunger for sideshows and three-legged calves' (1997: 230). Importantly, Lippmann asked for the 'abandonment of the theory of the omnicompetent citizen' and instead to assign decision-making processes to experts so that when issues arose they could be dealt with in a manner that were 'not mere collisions of the blind'. The press, too, needed to be rid of its shortcomings. The news was to be 'uncovered for the press by a system of intelligence that is also a check on the press' (1997: 229). This intelligence was to

be entrusted to disinterested experts free of their own preconceptions and self-interests. It is no surprise that Dewey called this 'perhaps the most effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived' (Steel, 1997: xv).

Lippmann's distrust in a somewhat ignorant, easily-led mass electorate has to be seen against the backdrop of rising totalitarian regimes, whether of communist, fascist or national-socialist persuasion. His preferences made Lippmann an exponent not only of an 'elite democracy' but also of an elite press, written by experts – that is professional journalists – for a public that needed to be enlightened. Editors and journalists were to be the gatekeepers in this top-down approach (Hermida et al., 2011).

But the concept of an elite press also had the consequence that those papers, which saw themselves as papers of record, tried to live up to their obligation. They endeavoured to print 'all the news that's fit to print', as the *New York Times'* motto reads, including the dull but worthy stories mostly placed on the papers' even pages. They aimed at quality discussions and contributions that many without college education may have found impenetrable. Some flaunted their elite status with slogans such the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*'s 'Behind this [paper] is an intelligent mind', and revelled in their status as opinion leaders. They were – and are – the quality press, which now has to re-legitimize itself in the face of a tangibly more democratic form of journalism.

## Participatory

Dewey's contribution to the 'debate' came in the form of reviews of Lippmann's work and the publication of his own book, *The Public and Its Problems* (1927). Schudson (2008: 2) stresses that these were favourable book reviews and not noted as confrontational. This amicability is surprising since Dewey's concept of democracy differs considerably from that of Lippmann and now serves as the philosophical underpinning of the participatory forms of communication that the internet affords (Hermida et al., 2011).

Dewey argued for the importance of civic participation, which he saw as the source of democracy's legitimacy (Rogers, 2010). He aimed at removing the opposition of individual and society, and saw the individual placed within the diverse networks of social relationships in which he or she was located. Unlike Lippmann who distrusted the public as rational participant in democracy, Dewey acclaimed the views of the people as a source of political authority itself, prompting his biographer to describe him as 'the most important advocate of participatory democracy' among liberal intellectual of the twentieth century (Westbrook, in Rogers, 2010: 3). Political judgements for Dewey were to be tested on the extent to which they could withstand contrary argument, reasons, and experiences (Rogers, 2010).

Dewey's vision of a participatory media culture, for much of the last century, seemed impossible to enact, although his concepts were desirable to some scholars. Herbert Gans, in his *Deciding What's News*, pleaded for multiperspectival news that would lead to a cultural democratization (2004/1979). Gans's seminal book, which shone a light on the close interaction between politician, officials and journalists, culminates in the demand for a pluralist nation that can accommodate co-existing ideologies and a far wider gamut of voices than could be heard in the mass media at the time. This, Gans suggested, 'would enable journalists to function as more democratic stand-ins for the public than they do now' (2004: 327).

## Deliberative

The philosopher and theorist most commonly associated with the deliberative model is Jürgen Habermas. His *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, originally published in Germany in 1962, achieved

iconical status with its publication in English almost thirty years later. It is this book rather than his later main work, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), which elevated him to being the main proponent of deliberation as a core element of democracy.

For Habermas, the coffee houses of the early bourgeois capitalist times in England had become a public space where citizens, informed by the newspapers of the time, could engage in discussions about political and social events. In this space, which was neither a private domain nor the halls of parliament, public opinion was formed, based on open and critical deliberations. Habermas has been accused of idealizing the eighteenth-century embryonic public sphere but, according to Curran, it 'offers nevertheless a powerful and arresting vision of the role of the media in a democratic society' (1997: 82).

Habermas's emphasis in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, and even more so in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, is on rationality. Following Kant, debates had to be guided by reason. Habermas shares with Lippmann the demand for thoughtful reasoning. With Dewey he shares the belief in deliberation as a core of democratic communicative action. In privileging reason, like Lippmann he implicitly rejects prejudice, stereotyping and other irrational sentiments. Habermas and Lippmann knew of the pitfalls of emotive responses from personal experience. Lippmann had worked in wartime propaganda whereas Habermas's childhood and youth fell into the times of the Third Reich. Neither had Dewey's ease with allowing the public to express their needs.

The dividing lines carry into the times of digital journalism. They are akin to, but also dissimilar to, the lines drawn between quality newspapers and tabloids. Tabloids have been condemned for their reliance on emotion, affect, sensation, and drama. But precisely this preference for popular knowledge, this drawing on 'the dense texture of … lived experience' (Wasserman, 2010: 123), makes for their popularity and engagement factor, especially for those readers feeling left out by the 'elite epistemologies linked to class hierarchies' (Wasserman, 2010: 122).

Digital journalism has been equally described in terms of drama, sensationalism, affect and emotion. In particular, news spread via social media carries these elements. Retweeted breaking news stories, be they acts of terrorism, shootings or natural disasters, are dramatic and responded to with considerable emotion. Unlike tabloids, the tweets cannot be easily dismissed as contributing nothing to the life of citizens (Sparks, in Wasserman, 2010). The immediate spread on Twitter of these events can create immense public engagement in the locality they occurred in and beyond. In these instances, digital journalism is part of civic action, although not in ways John Dewey would have imagined. The hope for a purely rational debate will not disappear, but in years to come may retreat into an idealized space where deliberations are carried by a few rather than the many.

## DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF JOURNALISM

There is no consensus as to what journalism is. The views range from the textual form of journalism seen by Hartley as the 'primary sense-making of modernity' (1996: 32) and by Wahl-Jorgenson and Hanitzsch as 'one of the most important social, cultural and political institutions' (2009: 3) to Nerone's view of journalism as a discipline of news. To him it is 'the belief system that defines the appropriate practices and values of news professionals, news media, and news systems' (2013: 447). Schudson similarly prefers to narrow the definition to news: 'Journalism is the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance' (2003: 11). Digital journalism will inevitably be measured against these visions

by the participating public as much as by scholars, and the degree to which it fulfils the demands placed on journalism to date.

### Information provider

The least contested function of journalism worldwide is the provision of accurate, reliable and relevant information and news. The practices, by which the news are gathered and distributed, have become infinitely more complex in digital journalism. At this point in time, which Domingo et al. have described as a 'moment of mind-blowing uncertainty in the evolution of journalism' (2014: 4), it seems a Herculean task to trace all the possible highways and byways of practices which now constitute journalism. In this dynamic situation, what remains as a norm is the public's expectation for accuracy and credibility (Domingo et al., 2015: 62).

### Guardian of the public's 'right to know'

In their fight for freedom of speech, the media have often positioned themselves as guardians of the public's right to know. This freedom is expressly used to uncover facts which governments, officials and businesses would prefer went unnoticed or kept hidden. The watchdog role is most closely associated with investigative journalism that sheds light on decision-making processes, presumed corruption or illegal activity. In many countries, as measured by the awards it garners, investigative journalism is seen as the most revered form of journalism, usually carried out by experienced journalists. The watchdog role, although most closely connected with democracies that afford freedom of expression, is all the same recognized globally (Hanitzsch, 2011).

Claiming this role as a bastion for professional journalists and traditional media has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible. Social media provides platforms where deviances can be reported to the wider public in a matter of seconds, usually with visual material to back up claims. More intricate stories tend to need the help of a trained journalist, but a vigilant public today far outshines newsroom-bound journalists.

### Mediator of societal values

Benedict Anderson has given a powerful description of how the 'ceremony' of reading was performed simultaneously by thousands of people at certain times a day, reassuring the newspaper reader that 'the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life' (Anderson, 1991: 35–6). This gathering of thousands, if not millions, of readers around a 'common set of facts' (Nerone, 2013: 453) facilitated a common consciousness and sense of community, if not nation.

This consensus model, also depicted by Hallin (1994), has dissipated, at least in the USA and Western Europe, even if the notion persists that 'journalists describe society to itself' (MEAA, 2014). Modern technology enables communities, be they bound by common interests or ethnicity, to imagine themselves in myriad forms, irrespective of national or geographical boundaries. Diasporic communities, frequently marginalized in their host country, have made use of the internet to create their own social, cultural and informational spaces in web-based publications, forums and interpersonal communication (Georgiou, 2003). This ever increasing mix of global and local puts into question whether democracy needs a 'common set of facts' to enable its workings.

## WHO DOES THE NEWS WORK?

The discussion of who is a journalist moves between two poles, professionalism and participation. The former is to guarantee the

quality of the journalistic product and ethical standards; the latter the inclusive and multi-perspectival reporting desired for democratic debate.

## Journalistic professionalism

Journalistic professionalism has been a problematic area long before digital journalism 'forced' journalists into boundary work against user-generated content and other cooperative attempts (Waisbord, 2013; Fenton, 2010; Schudson and Anderson, 2009; Domingo et al., 2008, Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Professionalism can be judged harshly as 'a discursive strategy mobilized by publishers and journalists to gain social prestige' but it can also be used 'to negotiate boundaries with other fields while producing a distinctive form of knowledge and news' (Waisbord, 2013: 4–10).

Hallin and Mancini divided the concept of professionalism into three dimensions: autonomy, distinct professional norms, and public service orientation. Since they only looked at democratic countries, the question of autonomy could be raised, although Hallin and Mancini already placed the caveat that journalism has never achieved the same degree of autonomy as other professions, and never will (2004: 37).

Autonomy is also the touchstone for Bourdieu's understanding of the journalistic field. For Bourdieu (2005), the degree of autonomy circumscribes the field, and within the field, it is the degree of autonomy of the media outlet from economic and political pressures that ensures the journalist's authority in that field. Bourdieu presciently remarked that 'precarity of employment is a loss of liberty' that serves to severely undermine both autonomy and authority (2005: 43).

This loss of authority is now evident in many parts of the world. As Picard remarks (2014: 273), digitalization has destabilized media's business models, and with it the economic basis of journalistic employment. The contraction of the traditional media sector, especially in North America, Western Europe and Australia, has led to a wider shift towards casual and contract work. It has given birth to the self-employed 'entrepreneurial journalist', who can act as a supplier directly to the consumer or whose work is aggregated into a larger website.

Despite the evident 'precarity of employment', Waisbord, speaking globally, still sees professionalism as an ongoing process 'by which journalism seeks to exercise control' (2013: 222). While labelling 'the kind of full autonomy envisaged at the onset of modernity' as 'anachronistic', he sees professionalism as a necessity to counterweight power (2013: 225). It is a journalist's skill to distil 'bottomless amounts of information into news' (2013: 227). To Waisbord, boundary work has to go on continually in a 'horizontal and chaotic' news environment, where focussing on news expertise rather than the public trustee model will help journalists to shore up the vestiges of their status.

## Democratizing the journalistic process

The digital news ecosystem has severely challenged and undermined the one-way nature of journalism (Bird, 2009). Initially, journalists had little inclination to share their space with 'amateurs'. In their exploration of participatory journalism practices, Domingo et al. found that in 2007, 'core journalistic culture had remained largely unchanged' in that professional journalists 'kept the decision-making power at each stage' (2008: 339–40).

Despite a slow start, the new news ecosystem keeps evolving and the progression towards openness and the involvement of citizens continues (Scott et al., 2015). Participatory journalism is taking on numerous forms: 'audience participation in mainstream outlets, independent news sites, full-fledged participatory news sites,

collaborative media sites and personal broad-casting sites' (Lasica, in Scott et al., 2015: 739). Much of the activity is channelled via social media and Twitter. In open systems, citizens are able to influence the entire pro-cess of news production and distribution' whereas in traditional media the news pro-cesses tend still to be controlled by journal-ists (Scott et al., 2015: 755). These findings support Hermida et al.'s view that there are 'few indications that participatory journal-ism is democratizing the journalistic process' (2011: 143).

Journalists' boundary work and continu-ing claim to performing an essential part in democracy indicate that they will not easily let go of their hard fought struggle for author-ity. To a large part, they will be situationally forced into more inclusive work practices which, ironically, are far more democratic than their own.

### Moves to multiperspectival news

The future of journalism has irrevocably migrated to the digital sphere. But uncer-tainty surrounds where ongoing experimen-tation will take it and, importantly, what will 'stick' with readers and participators, as it is theirs to choose. As yet, the major forms of digital journalism are only online publica-tions and online publication of content par-tially or wholly presented in the traditional media. The most frequent forms of interac-tion are responses to news stories, tweets and retweets, blogs, and user-generated content, mostly in the form of visual material. In this way, digital journalism has ushered in the greatest changes in the areas of sourcing and distributing news, moving decidedly closer to Gans's demand of multiperspectival news and Dewey's vision of a participatory media culture.

By far the widest reaching impact has been the inclusion of social media and especially Twitter in the 24/7 news cycle. Twitter has become the crucial platform for breaking news and subsequent developments, prompt-ing the company to proclaim, 'If it happened in the world in 2014, it happened on Twitter'. In 2014, Twitter reported 284 million active monthly users and over 500 million tweets sent per day (Twitter, 2014).

While tweets are not per se journalism, they can be journalistic acts. Franklin has observed 'the 140 character format requires journalistic skills of tabloid compression to be highly developed' (2014: 257). The inclu-sion of the adjective 'tabloid' is an apt one. Much Twitter content is emotive, and many personal reactions, be they to accidents or the death of a well-known person, are carried on Twitter. The unprecedented level of 'public-ity' can also enter the political sphere, such as when US Senate Intelligence Committee Chair, Senator Feinstein, who headed the Senate report on torture, live tweeted her fact-based rebuttals during the CIA direc-tor's defence of their actions. Twitter, at that moment, constituted a public space for high-level political deliberation that comes close to the Habermasian demand for a reasoned debate in front of a chora of interested par-ticipators and followers.

Twitter by no means only communicates in circles of political and journalistic elites. It also allows new voices to emerge in civic discourses. By gathering discussion around hashtags, it can contest mainstream media representations, as was shown in the Canadian example of #Idlenomore. In this case of legis-lation endangering Indigenous land, half the input came from non-elite actors and alterna-tive voices (Callison and Hermida, 2015: 18), demonstrating that crowd sourcing achieves a multi-vocality previously not heard in tra-ditional media. Retweets then enabled a crowd-sourced elite to effectively articulate alternative views to a wider audience.

Additionally, Twitter is increasingly used for crowdsourcing. This still places the jour-nalist at the centre, or as a node, of gathering and filtering, but it includes the perspective of official or elite sources and alternative actors (Hermida et al., 2014). Research into

Andy Carvin's news stream on the Egyptian Arab spring revolution for NPR drawn from tweets and put together in Washington, shows that almost half the tweets used could be considered non-elite sources. Hermida et al. describe Twitter in this case as a 'platform for coconstruction of news by journalists and activists' (2014: 483). In their conclusion, the researchers emphasize that the networked news ecosystem permits work with sources thousands of miles away in ways that disregard ingrained and hierarchical interview patterns. They call it an environment 'where knowledge and expertise are fluid, dynamic and hybrid' (2014: 495).

## GAINS AND LOSSES

In her introduction to *New Media, Old News*, Fenton (2010: 7) asks the question that is still hotly debated: Do the new media reinvigorate democracy or do they throttle good journalism? The jury is still out on that question, mainly because the situation is 'dynamic and fluid', and scholarly researchers find it hard to keep up with developments (Domingo et al., 2014; Franklin, 2014).

What follows is an attempt to highlight gains and losses so far. It has also to be said that many of the developments discussed here are happening in North America and Europe where print media is crumbling and news reaches people, particularly young people, via Twitter and online. In China, too, news reaches its readers via digital media but this has to be evaluated in a different light, as China had no legacy media that could have called itself 'Fourth Estate'.

### *Participation versus engagement*

Fenton's edited volume with the subtitle, 'Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age' (2010), was brought together at a time when legacy media was only wobbling on its

legs. The value embodied in traditional journalism therefore provided the touchstone against which new developments were judged, as if there was still a choice for journalism to return to traditional forms. Five years later, it is clear that the participatory forms of digital journalism are here to stay and develop. The question, therefore, is no longer whether the 'open and iterative world of online commentary' is to be seen as taking journalism to new heights (Fenton, 2010: 10) but whether the participation as witnessed today should be valued as civic engagement.

Participation is a core value of democracy, and it has become a visible practice in the production of news in ways not seen before. Many times, citizens have become the primary providers of breaking news, and 'the bearing witness function – observing and providing accounts of what happened – is being switched to social media and increasingly practiced by public witnesses and activists' (Picard, 2014: 278). Dahlgren (2007: ix), for one, sees democracy enhanced by participatory media involvement, even if there is 'no guarantee that participation based on broader value considerations will always lead to progressive decisions'. To him, participation is not just about 'manifesting political involvement' in the public sphere but also an activity anchored in personal values and moral views.

Peters and Witschge, on the other hand, raise doubts that the participation permitted by digital journalism should be equated with citizenship in the broad sense. In their view, 'participation *in* news' rather than '*through* news' narrows the 'broader dialectic surrounding journalism's democratic function for citizens in society' (2015: 24) and substitutes them with 'highly individualized notions of political engagement' (2015: 29). For this reason they warn against 'simply replacing the "democracy paradigm" with a "participation paradigm" (2015: 30) when assessing digital journalism's democratic affordances. Carpentier, in a study focussing on audience, similarly warns of theoretically isolating the concept of participation as this

would not gauge in wider society 'its relevance, appreciation and significance' (2009: 411).

At this point it is important to remember that participatory practices are not the norm across the globe where mass media logic still serves as a bridge between populace and political process. Having said this, the participatory modes of news generation and production bring the media tangibly closer to the Habermasian concept of the media as an instrument of popular will. Whether digital journalism is in practice perceived by the public in this vein remains to be seen. In terms of Dewey's vision of democracy, the avenues of deliberation are more open than ever, although the quality of these interchanges needs to be put under the spotlight.

### Reason versus emotion

The traditional journalism paradigm places high importance on reasoned thought. Both Lippmann and Habermas in their outlines for democracy and communicative action made rationality a central value. Schudson credits Lippmann with being 'the most wise and forceful spokesman for the ideal of objectivity' (1978: 151). Objectivity and neutrality still remain an important component of the journalistic ethos, although historically they have not been at all times, nor are they in all cultures (Waisbord, 2013; Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

The internet's open access no longer filters out the sentiments Lippmann tried to keep at bay with his elitist vision of democracy and the press: prejudice, stereotyping and emotive argument. The removal of tight gatekeeping processes online has allowed these to re-enter the public discourse (Witschge, 2007). Other scholars have argued that these have always been present. '[N]o journalistic enterprise has ever succeeded in separating reason and emotion, information and entertainment, the real and the imagined, the facts and the story' (Hartley, 1996: 316).

Tabloids, as distinct from quality newspapers, were never shy of playing to prejudices, of sensationalizing or being entertaining in order to get the readers' attention. Readers showed their appreciation by buying tabloids in their millions, implicitly indicating that quality newspapers were for an elite, and that their form of journalism excluded the common man (Wasserman, 2010).

While the inclusivity of online participation is still up for debate, it is clear that many of the tendencies foreshadowed in tabloid journalism have entered digital journalism, especially when emanating from social media. The frequently emotionally charged messages or tweets are engaging and can be directly responded to. A look at an online site such as BuzzFeed reveals a great kinship with the tabloid world. News is but one part of the overall package of lifestyle, entertainment and sports results. While these sites do not offer the in-depth coverage or ever rising number of contextual articles that are found in the legacy press (Fink and Schudson, 2013), they can be defended on similar grounds as tabloid journalism. They attract and include a far wider public, the texts are more accessible to a wider readership and their emotional engagement can spill into the public sphere (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2007).

The subjective nature of social media's pervasive personal communication was bound to impact on the (American) ideal of objectivity. Domingo et al. found that objectivity 'seems to be perceived by more and more participants in news work as a myth' (2014: 10). They argue that the rituals of transparency replace the rituals of objectivity, although this does not account for all activist journalism found on the web. 'Assuming that activism does not promote or indirectly generates violence,' Dahlgren writes, it 'should not be viewed as something negative that signals a "failure" of deliberative democracy in the various public spheres" (2007: ix). Yet, as Domingo et al. also point out (2015: 62), citizens and readers have normative expectations as to the credibility of information and

journalists, in an attempt to underscore their professional skills, highlight their commitment to accuracy and balance.

## *Societal cohesion versus trending*

Legacy media has a commitment to presenting and clarifying 'the goals and values of society' (Hutchins Commission, 1947). Digital journalism, while potentially a collaborative effort of a wide range of people, is placed on platforms that do not feel the same obligation.

Mass media institutions have been much criticized for being little more than commercial enterprises, masking their deeper interest in profits with lip service to journalistic values and journalism's role in democracy. But social media are far from neutral platforms. As Poell and van Dijck demonstrate, they have introduced 'new techno-commercial mechanisms in public communication, which intensify rather than neutralize the commercial strategies of the mass media' (2014: 185). Part of the commercial strategy is an algorithmic coding that maximizes user engagement and boosts traffic to their websites. To this end, Facebook and Twitter privilege breaking news and quickly trending stories, whereas even topics with much used hashtags, such as #OccupyWallstreet, could show systematic rise in volume but did not trend. The privileging of breaking or engaging news means that complex political issues, which play out over a longer period of time, may hardly register with users or may not get any airing at all. Poell and van Dijck conclude that social media's algorithmic logic 'undermines journalism's ability to fulfil its key democratic functions of keeping governments accountable and facilitating informed public debate' (2014: 197). The collectivity expressed in trending subjects is often short-lived and fueled by public curiosity, i.e. the public's interest rather than public interest. It is therefore seen as qualitatively different from the societal connection provided by legacy media with its orientation towards public interest.

## MERGING FORMS OF JOURNALISM

The arrival of the digital media environment has called forth many conjectures about possible dominant traits of future journalism, or the lack thereof. 'Twitter revolutions, if they do exist', Nerone surmised, 'are unlikely to be the infrastructure or the animatory fantasy of new normative structures, of a new hegemonic journalism, because they do not light up the mass of citizenry the way the daily paper once did in the West' (2013: 454).

There are various strands to Nerone's off-hand remark. One is, that normative theories of journalism in actual fact had only a small radius of application. If normative theories were developed for digital journalism, despite its wider spread, they would come from a similarly temporarily and spatially defined situation. Mature democracies are not the norm globally, and any move to have a theory developed in the West and exported to the rest should be avoided. In fact, it has been argued here all along that the centrality of democracy for any future theory – normative or otherwise – should be treated with caution. The vision of participatory journalism has great possibilities, but it is far from realising its full potential technologically and in actual participation.

The moments of cooperative news that can be observed now are reminiscent of Habermas's embryonic public sphere which held much promise until it was overtaken by different developments. Some of these, such as the commercial exploitation of participation, can be observed already. The empowerment of participation comes at the price of having user behaviour tracked, aggregated and mined. The expansive ecosystem of connective media is no less ruled by commercial imperatives than the old media. Their ways are in fact far more intrusive than the old media in that they connect user activities and

advertisers, employing mechanisms 'of deep personalization and networked customization' (van Dijck and Poell, 2013: 10).

The second strand in Nerone's remark centres on the adjective 'hegemonic'. Participatory and hegemonic are not necessarily an oxymoron, but the notion of participation sits oddly with notions of domination and hegemony. As yet, participatory forms of news work, whether through commenting, story input or becoming a news source, are far from being dominant. News media organizations 'still produce most of the news we consume today, even those that circulate through social media and aggregators' (Domingo et al., 2014: 1). This institutional form of news, based on common belief systems, structures, standardized practices and norms (Picard, 2014), is produced by journalists who will continue to hold the expertise on news values and crafting a story (Waisbord, 2013).

Not only do we have at this moment parallel worlds of journalism, the traditional one, rooted in mass media logic, and the digital one, opening up to forms of participation that are still to mature, but also the prediction that journalism will not be de-institutionalized any time soon. At least a portion of journalists is likely to work for a 'few large general, commercial news providers … [that] will dominate provision in most countries in digital form' (Picard, 2014: 279).

The probable merging of institutionalized journalism which, in democratic countries, imagines itself as one of the four pillars upholding democracy, and digital journalism with its possibilities of participation, multiple perspectives and emotional engagement, will ensure that democratic values are upheld and the deliberations continue, also in non-democratic countries.

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