Journalism Studies: Future of Journalism special issue

Introduction

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The sixth biennial Future of Journalism conference was organised by the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University and held on campus from 14 to 15 September 2017. In keeping with its customary approach of identifying emerging trends in journalism research, this year the conference focused on the theme of "Journalism in a post-truth age." It featured over 150 papers from international speakers presented across 40 sessions, with keynote speeches from Guy Berger, Linda Steiner, Silvio Waisbord, and Claire Wardle.

Papers on all aspects of journalism were welcomed for presentation, though contributions addressing the conference theme were particularly encouraged. Suggested issues to explore included:

- Challenges to the authority of legacy news institutions and the ideals of objectivity
- The increasing role of social media in shaping news consumption, and the associated emergence of "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers"
- The emergence of "fake news"
- The role of political satire as a form of news critique
- The increased automation of journalism through algorithms, bots and robots
- The changing patterns of sourcing and roles of expertise in journalism

- Watching the watchdog: Ensuring scrutiny, transparency and accountability of journalism in a “post-factual” era
- The implications for improving journalism education associated with these developments

From the opening session onwards, it was apparent that the recent upsurge of what has been termed “post-truth politics” presents a challenge to several of journalism's guiding tenets. Notions of objectivity and truth-telling are widely perceived to be under threat from a new brand of populist politicians who are being elected in Europe, the Americas and Asia. Whilst journalists have always had to mediate truth claims, what is new is that they are now faced by political leaders who question the whole notion of factual accuracy. At the same time, populist politicians, through attacks on women and minorities groups, call into question key normative principles that underpin the conduct of journalism and wider public discourse. Through the use of social and alternative media, these politicians are able to bypass the traditional mass media to activate and solidify a base of highly partisan supporters. Journalism thus finds itself under attack from both populist politicians and their partisan supporters, both of whom recurrently seek to degrade the reputation and status of journalists and news organisations to advance their interests.

A number of important themes resonate throughout the collection of articles selected for this special issue of *Journalism Studies*. One central theme relates to how technology has destabilised the traditional news order and raised questions about what news is, who can legitimately claim to produce it, and what its purpose is. Contemporary politicians may push at these fault lines but they are issues that have been created by technological advances that predate the rise of modern populist movements. This question of journalism's cultural

capital relates both to traditional news organisations, who are in a struggle to defend their reputation, status, and democratic role - and the new breed of digital native media striving to establish their own legitimacy and authority. A further theme running through this collection concerns how journalists have responded to the epistemological challenges of post-truth. How do journalists deal with statements that are unverifiable or even manifestly false? How do reporters attempt to make their reporting more transparent and thereby trustworthy to their audiences? How has the politicisation of facticity challenged journalists to be self-reflexive about their professional role and social responsibilities? Related to this is the question of how news audiences have responded to contrary claims about post-truth. In what ways have new forms of populist discourse impacted on public perceptions of the news media? (such as US President Trump's declaration in July 2018 "much of our news media is indeed the enemy of the people"). What must journalists do to better engage with those viewers, listeners and readers who believe they are being ignored, their concerns trivialised by reporting they feel is irrelevant to their priorities?

This special issue begins with Linda Steiner's keynote 'Solving Journalism's Crisis with Feminist Standpoint Epistemology.' She boldly proposes the use of Feminist Standpoint Epistemology (FSE) to assist both journalists and scholars alike, both of whom are increasingly finding their credibility, authority, and knowledge undermined in the post-truth landscape. She argues that simply refuting attacks on "fake news" does not solve this problem, but instead, the adoption of FSE would enable journalists to contest accusations that their work is false without having to resort to the "conventional but indefensible" idea of objectivity. Steiner demonstrates how this alternative set of epistemic commitments brings to the fore experience and particularity, and how it gives insight into professional

journalism issues brought into public knowledge by recent exposés of sexual harassment at work, including incidents initiated by journalists.

Silvio Waisbord's keynote 'Truth is what happens to news: On journalism, fake news and post-truth' similarly examines the complexities, including at times contradictory meanings which have become associated with discourses of post-truth/"fake news" journalism. Waisbord argues that the phenomenon of "fake news" demonstrates the contested position of news in public life, and the intricacies of belief formation and chaotic public communication by citizens in a new communicative ecology where horizontal -rather than vertical - information flows are increasingly important. In general terms, he maintains that this landscape illuminates "the collapse of the old news order", where conventional notions of news and truth within journalistic practices are harder to maintain, paving the way for new struggles and discussions surrounding the meaning of these terms.

Turning next to Carlson's article, it follows a complementary thread by exploring the information politics of journalism in a post-truth age, arguing that the epistemic context of contemporary journalism necessitates that journalists need to do more to develop and communicate arguments that legitimate their status claims as professionals. For example, he suggests that this should include more public communication of the social value offered by journalism, a more prominent self-critical position through which the limitations and weaknesses of journalism can be addressed, and a stronger defence against criticism directed at them by political actors advancing their own interests. Blach-Ørsten, Møller Hartley and Bendix Wittchen also examine the response by journalists within this contemporary setting, focusing specifically on analysing plagiarism, fake sources and

paradigm repair in the Danish news media reporting of two major journalistic scandals. Within this study they analysed the strategies employed by the news media in an effort to re-instore trust in their journalism. They found that the news media attempted to distance themselves from the journalists involved in these scandals and investigated accusations levelled against them in an effort to publically expose the behaviour of the reporters. However, as the authors point out, these efforts, although seemingly enhancing transparency and fostering trust, focused solely on the journalists in the scandals, rather than the news organisations involved (who largely avoided blame surrounding their role in the events).

Further dimensions of journalistic practice come to light in Carson and Farhall's article about collaborative investigative journalism. Using a mixed methods approach, their study unravels the progression of collaborative investigative journalism in a landscape where watchdog reporting has undergone a resurgence of attention of late – most notably with the Panama Papers. By examining 30 years of national peer-reviewed media awards in Britain, USA and Australia, together with interviews conducted with journalists, their findings pinpoint how digital media technologies can offer new opportunities for investigative journalism to secure an important counter- narrative to 'fake news'. Eldridge II and Bødker begin their article by elucidating the strained relations between some politicians and journalists in the US. They argue that the current landscape has affected how journalists and news outlets negotiate each other's priorities in a manner consistent with what they term a wider 'inferential community'. More specifically, they analyse journalistic demonstrations of authority within two cases of coverage of the Trump administration, and focus on attempts within these to connect 'facts' to unverified claims. Overall, they demonstrate how

communities of journalists form within these circumstances, where journalists build on absent or unverified facts through the invocation of their authority to present 'definitive' news.

The next three articles shift our attention to consider the significance of citizen responses to the post-truth news landscape. Karlsson and Clerwall examine citizens' views on transparency tools in journalism (such as such as explaining news selection and using corrections) conducting an experiment, survey and focus groups in Sweden between 2013 and 2015. They found that the respondents were not personally invested in notions of transparency, with the topic seldom mentioned in focus groups, and achieving little impact in the experiments. Such insights, they argue, invite further reconsideration regarding how best to secure alternative priorities for journalism. Kilby's article also explores journalism and its publics, through an analysis of the role of TV satire in the Trump era, and the extent to which citizens are provoked by such critique. Undertaking a content and discourse analysis of TV satire shows Last Week Tonight with John Oliver and Full Frontal, the study discovered this genre adopts 'solution' and 'motivation building' news frames more typically associated with advocacy journalism, in an effort to provoke and encourage citizens to engage with the traditional notions of civic participation. Mourão, Thorson, Chen, and Tham similarly examine citizen responses, through their analysis of media repertoires and news trust during the early Trump administration. Undertaking a survey, they explored how partisan identification and individual predispositions towards Trump could influence patterns of media consumption, which in turn could predict relative degrees of trust towards the news. Their survey results revealed four different media repertoires: 'low news users/some local news', 'news junkies', 'conservative news users', and 'mainstream news

users'. Overall, the news junkies and mainstream news users displayed a stronger trust of the media, whereas conservative news users maintained the lowest levels of trust. Moreover, their results indicate that support towards Trump was the strongest indicator of distrust towards the news, which led them to conclude that the impact of a White House that expresses open hostility towards news media "goes beyond the way partisanship affects media trust".

The next two articles shift the focus to explore conflict in the news. Mette Mortensen examines the dilemma of censorship surrounding media coverage of terrorists in the post-factual era, focusing specifically on the meanings surrounding terrorists receiving, or being deprived of, media attention. The article offers a theoretical framework for the understanding of the complexities of media self-censorship and the news coverage of what is termed as the 'selfie-generation' of terrorists. Undertaking a content analysis of news coverage on the websites of Danish public service broadcasters DR and TV2 in 2016, the findings demonstrate that despite conflicting public statements for and against self-censorship from the two TV channels, both media organisations engaged in similar coverage of terrorists. Olivier Nyirubugara's study analyses the representation of children in Syrian War reporting by Russia Today and Al Jazeera by using a visual content analysis of Syrian war coverage from both news channels during the latter part of 2016. The study found that children were shown to be regularly appearing within the coverage in specific roles, namely as 'victims', 'sources', 'décor' and 'fighters'. However, as the Nyirubugara notes, featuring identifiable images of children raises urgent ethical considerations because those children are potential witnesses in future war crimes prosecutions and so identifying them may place them in danger.

Adopting a complementary perspective, Slavtcheva-Petkova's article centres more squarely on post-truth politics, namely by examining journalistic corruption and the process of self-othering in Bulgaria, a country currently holding the lowest press freedom ranking of the EU states. Conducting a survey of Bulgarian journalists as part of the Worlds of Journalism study, the analysis of the ensuing findings demonstrates that these journalists have been confronted for years by the issues currently facing their Western colleagues. Some principal difficulties have been bribery, smear campaigns, cover-ups through sponsorships, and covert influence from political and business elites. At the same time, the study finds that Bulgarian journalists engage in 'self-othering', a process which involves a condemnation of the current state of journalism, and a distancing from unethical practices, and subsequent responsibility.

Issues of journalistic legitimacy and authority figure prominently in the next two articles. Stringer's study explores two digital native news organisations, Buzzfeed and Vice, and how they pursue recognition and legitimacy in and through their reporting. The article examines the hiring practices and organisation of news reporting at both sites, examining capital expenditure in the service of authenticating their place in the journalistic landscape. The study's use of interviews with editors and reporters at both organisations provides an evidential basis to argue that Vice and Buzzfeed impact the cultural capital (in other words, the legitimacy) of journalism. Vos and Thomas's article delves into issues of journalistic authority, looking at its discursive construction in a post-truth age. Through a "discursive institutionalism lens", the study analyses how US journalists have attempted to defend their journalistic authority between 2000 and 2016, within the landscape of challenges to

“journalism’s material, professional role, and social impact bases”. Overall, they argue that there have been a range of ‘pivot points’ where reporters have constructed arguments to justify the unique contributions that professional journalism can make., including on material, professional role, and impact bases. They conclude by observing that the journalists participating in the study expressed uncertainty about the current “basis of their authority” in a post-truth climate.

Finally, this special issue of Journalism Studies closes with an article by Hadland and Barnett, who examine the gender crisis in professional photojournalism. Having first underlined the lack of research previously conducted on women photojournalists, they proceeded to identify several of the specific challenges they face in often harrowing conditions. Empirical evidence is gathered via a survey of women photojournalists with the World Press Photo Foundation across 71 countries. Findings suggest their level of formal education is more likely to be higher than male counterparts, and they have more often achieved a higher level of photography training, yet are often confronted by more demanding circumstances. Overall, the results help to document the underrepresentation of women in news photography. The authors argue that this could result in an even smaller cohort of women photojournalists in the future, ultimately prompting a “further decline of the female gaze” with important implications for journalistic integrity.