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Introduction

The 2019 *Future of Journalism* conference was organised by the School of Journalism, Media and Culture (JOMEC) at Cardiff University and held on the 12 and 13 of September. After six successful biennial conferences where sessions were spread across the University campus, this year attendees were welcomed to JOMEC's brand new home, Two Central Square, in the heart of Cardiff City Centre. The conference themes - Innovations, Transitions and Transformations – reflected a continuing focus on identifying emerging trends in journalism research and practice. The conference featured almost 200 papers from international scholars and practitioners- as well as keynote speeches from Professor Andrew Chadwick (Loughborough University), Professor Adrienne Russell (University of Washington), and Professor Nikki Usher (University of Illinois).

The call for papers for the conference encouraged contributions across a wide range of issues and debates in journalism, including:

- changing definitions of journalism in an evolving news ecosystem;
- the future for today's journalist in an environment increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, big data, algorithmic processing and 'liminal' journalism practices;
- how standards of quality, balance and fairness are changing, including the perceived decline of 'mainstream media' and the rise of hyper-partisan outlets;
- to what extent social media are democratising citizens' engagement with news across mobile platforms;
- how new cultures of experimentation and innovation that reimagine journalistic form and practice might be best encouraged;
- how journalism studies should respond to all these shifts, conceptually and methodologically.

With such a broad remit, the papers at the conference drew on leading edge research across a wide range of topics. Attendees saw a focus on developments including artificial intelligence, automation, metrics and analytics, immersive journalism, partisan media, populism, hate speech, activist media and solutions journalism. However, presenters also engaged with long standing debates in journalism research around professionalism, sources, freedom of the press, facticity, gatekeeping, and the economic viability of news. Thus, the Conference addressed both the transformation of perennial challenges to the industry as well as innovations created in large part by new technological affordances.

A number of major themes run through the collection of articles selected for this special edition of *Journalism Studies*. One core theme concerns how new technology and political polarisation are shifting the news landscape. One consequence has been the rise of partisan digital natives catering to the informational and affective needs of an expanding audience for new – and sometimes extreme – political positions. Another has been the destabilisation of established hierarchies of source credibility as political polarisation and commercial pressures have threatened the privileged position of expertise and journalistic truth telling. However, such developments have also provoked a backlash as journalists themselves have increasingly engaged in boundary work to shore up their professional identity and epistemic status. A second theme that runs through this collection concerns how media organisations are attempting to address what the audience wants – or what they believe the audience wants - in an increasingly pressurised commercial environment. At one level this has led to changes in how news is gathered and presented to audiences. At another, it has involved harnessing the potential of new technology to present news in new and innovative ways.

This special issue begins with Eva Mayerhöffe's 'How do Danish Right-wing Alternative Media Position Themselves Against the Mainstream? Advancing the Study of Alternative Media Structure and Content'. This article examines right-wing media, not as a purveyor of fake news, but as self-conscious alternative to the mainstream. Mayerhöffe makes an intervention in the burgeoning field of alternative media studies by studying right-wing news platforms as 'boundary cases' in the relatively open political context of contemporary Denmark. She finds that whilst they position themselves in opposition to their legacy rivals, right-wing platforms employ a narrow range of journalists, topics, sources, and critical stances. This leads Mayerhöffe to conclude that, in Denmark, this right-wing alternative to the mainstream is often more a matter of style than substance. Her paper contributes a study of social positioning which complements a field of right-wing media studies predominantly focused on facticity and the representation of minority groups.

Shifting to coverage in the mainstream media, Andrew Gibbons's content analysis of Australian newspapers focuses on the representation of experts in campaign news. Gibbons finds no substantive change in the volume of experts used as sources across five successive Australian election campaigns. He offers this finding as a contribution to the debate over whether experts have declined as sources due to a rise in infotainment or have achieved great prominence due to the increasing complexity of political life. Gibbons also suggests that partisanship by expert sources has been on the rise in political journalism, as more former politicians and former party advisors are featured as experts. This study underlines the importance of looking at experts in detail - in that the most important issue may not be frequency of appearance but rather to what extent expert status may hide partisan agendas.

The issue of partisanship also acts as a backdrop to Regina Lawrence & Young Eun Moon's article "'We Aren't Fake News': The Information Politics of the 2018 #FreePress Editorial Campaign'. Lawrence and Moon investigate how newspaper editors employ discourses of professionalism, accountability, and impartiality to defend the legitimacy of mainstream news. To do this the authors provide a content analysis of American press editorials in 2018 that defended newspapers from Donald Trump's persistent public attacks. They find that claims to public accountability and professionalism built on accuracy, objectivity and detachment formed the basis of most editors' defensive discourses. But relative impartiality – or remaining external to politics – was a more heterogeneous position across newspapers. This trend was strongest where newspaper audiences would be most sympathetic to an anti-Trump stance, potentially reinforcing partisan divides. Lawrence and Moon's paper thus illustrates the difficult choices facing editors in a deeply partisan environment.

Journalistic authority and epistemic claims are themes that also run through Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund's ethnographic study of newsroom and live desk practitioners in Sweden. The authors examine how knowledge is claimed, acquired, and justified in the production of 'breaking' news- as well as asking how claims of accuracy and promises of meaningfulness made to the audience are fulfilled under intense time-pressures. They find that routines and authoritative sources remain important as they allow fast processing with minimal scrutiny. However, they note that journalists also rely on disclaimers to indicate the unverified nature of information. Overall, they argue that potential inaccuracy may be less of an issue than the possibility that breaking news proves to be neither interesting nor important to audiences.

The next two articles focus on innovations in news gathering and presentation. Kyser Lough & Karen McIntyre address the question of whether ‘solutions’ journalism better engages audiences than traditional reporting by looking at a regional newspaper in the United States that consciously made the shift to this form of reporting. Lough and McIntyre surveyed audience engagement both subjectively and objectively before and after the transition, an approach that revealed contradictory results. After the change the newspaper’s audience self-reported less engagement, fewer site visits, less knowledge about local news, less reading of the physical paper and the same perception of bias. However, analysis of the paper’s Facebook page and Twitter feed found significant decreases in negative sentiment and significant increases in positive sentiment, whilst solutions stories had longer engagement times and views. In explaining these contradictions, Lough & McIntyre note that the paper’s shift to solutions journalism was only partial, with traditional news stories still dominating content. Ultimately, their contribution, highlights the challenges of both delivering solutions journalism and assessing whether it addresses the needs of audiences. Radwa Mabrook also examines newsroom innovation but this time in relation to how new technology - in the form of virtual reality – raises issues in relation to journalistic objectivity. Mabrook asks journalists who create virtual reality content how they understand the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity for both themselves and their audience. The interviews show that journalists grapple with their own appearances in a 360° frame and the potential for user authorship -versus their own editorial control. Mabrook also finds there are new structural opportunities for (and constraints to) storytelling that mean the medium works best with the kind of character-led and first-person stories for which objectivity is naturally more of an issue. She concludes that objectivity is as problematic in virtual reality as traditional journalism, and argues that a pragmatic approach built on the journalists’ methodological scepticism is still needed.

The impact of new technology – albeit in a different form and context – is also the focus of José Luis Rojas-Torrijos and Xavier Ramon’s article: ‘Exploring Agenda Diversity in European Public Service Media Sports Desks: A Comparative Study of Underrepresented Disciplines, Sportswomen and Disabled Athletes’ Coverage on Twitter’. The authors investigate the Twitter outputs of four European public service broadcasters, finding that their feeds are dominated by football and male able-bodied athletes. This, as they note, means that the social media activities of European public service media reinforce wider inequalities of gender and disability in sport. Rojas-Torrijos & Ramon view these patterns as arising from the pressure exerted by a largely for-profit sports environment and the extent to which public service media rely upon their sports output to capture audience attention. However, they also argue that public service media are morally obliged to represent marginalised sports and identities in a more diverse and complete manner.

Finally, this special issue of Journalism Studies closes with an article by Karen McIntyre examining the pressures and constraints that journalists operate under in Uganda. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 27 press, broadcast and online reporters, McIntyre finds that Ugandan journalists face a range of challenges that emanate from every level of Shoemaker and Reese’s (2013) Hierarchy of Influences model. At the *organisational level* journalists are poorly paid and not provided with proper training and inculcated with professional standards. These creates pressures at the *individual level* for journalists to engage in envelope journalism or even become government spies, whilst at the *political and societal levels* reporters face harassment, restrictions on access to information and outright censorship. McIntyre concludes by arguing that to open up a critical space for journalism in Uganda will

require deep democratic reform, economic empowerment and the strengthening of the rule of law.

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