

# #ISOJ

Official Research  
Journal of the

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM  
ON ONLINE JOURNALISM

Volume 10, Number 1, Summer 2020

**“We are the 200%”: How Mitú constructs Latino American identity through discourse**

*By Ryan Wallace*

**Alternative professional journalism in the post-Crimean Russia: Online resistance to the Kremlin propaganda and status quo**

*By Olga Lazitski*

**#MarchForOurLives: Tweeted teen voices in online news**

*By Kirsi Cheas, Maiju Kannisto and Noora Juvonen*

**Send her back: News narratives, intersectionality, and the rise of politically powerful women of color**

*By Carolyn Nielsen*

**Participatory journalism and the hegemony of men**

*By Mark Poepfel*

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## **About the Journal**

*#ISOJ Volume 10, Number 1, Summer 2020*

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### **About Us**

#ISOJ The Journal of the International Symposium on Online Journalism is an international journal devoted to advancing the scholarship in the area of journalism and innovative technologies. The editors invite manuscripts reporting original research, methodologies relevant to the study of journalism and innovative technologies (online, tablets, mobile platforms, etc.), critical syntheses of research and theoretical perspectives on journalism today. The journal maintains a social scientific and broad behavioral focus. We encourage submissions from scholars outside and within the journalism and mass communication discipline.

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## ISOJ Special Issue: Introduction

***By Alfred Hermida***

Writing back in the seventies, the renowned scholar Herbert Gans remarked “the news reflects a white male order” (1979, p. 61). A predominantly white and male approach has greatly shaped understandings of who is journalism for and who benefits. From his study of the news media in 1970s America, Gans noted that news was for and supported “the social order of public, business and professional, upper-middle-class, middle-aged, and white male sectors of society,” (1979, p. 61). Journalism, then, can be seen as a form of elite discourse that promotes, maintains and reifies political, ideological and economic hierarchies, enacted by journalists working under editorial, professional, managerial and financial constraints.

In the intervening four decades since the publication of Gans’ book, the white male order of news has been challenged and contested, while at the same time, it has also persisted and resisted. The normative fundamentals and professional ideology of journalism are often taken as the default lens for practice and research. Such a normative approach has tended to be rooted in a U.S.-centric view of journalism, intrinsically linking journalism and democracy. The study and understanding of journalism and its purpose has been refracted through by a U.S. lens, at the expense of acknowledging and recognising diverse kinds of journalism in different political systems (Zelizer, 2017).

This themed issue of *#ISOJ* takes as its premise the core question of who is journalism for and who benefits against a background of multiple journalisms in conversation with diverse, global publics (Callison & Young, 2020). Who does the news serve, who it excludes, misrepresents or marginalizes are at the core of the purpose of journalism. The simple answer is that journalism is a public good that is essential for the functioning of a democratic society. In their influential and widely-cited book, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) say that “the primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing,” (p. 12). But which citizens has journalism served and with what kind of information? Recent twenty-first century social movements,

from #OccupyWallStreet to #BlackLivesMatter to #metoo, have highlighted limitations in mainstream media, leveraged social media to connect marginalized communities and articulate counter narratives that challenge prevailing narratives of representation in the mainstream media.

As Callison and Young (2020) ask, why have journalism studies scholars ignored critiques of the media from intersectional scholars, “despite decades of evidence of racism, gendered media coverage, and bias in journalism coverage and the overwhelming whiteness of mainstream media” (p. 7). And that whiteness extends beyond the newsroom to the classroom (Alemán, 2014), let alone questions around decolonialising journalism education (Todorova, 2016). This special issue of #ISOJ aims to contribute to journalism studies by taking a critical look at issues of power, privilege and patriarchy. The five papers in this themed issue take up the challenge, asking difficult questions and advancing fresh insights into what journalism could be.

The first two papers in this issue look at alternatives to mainstream journalism in two very distinct contexts. Ryan Wallace examines *mitú*, a digital native publication that produces culturally-relevant content for Latino audiences born in the U.S. The research article is a fascinating case study of an outlet that reaches 90 million readers a month through novel approaches to journalism that contest traditional, ideological values in Latino culture about race, gender, and sexual orientation. Through an analysis of *mitú*'s content on its website and social media channels, Wallace investigates the construction of a Latino American identity, seeking to find out how far its journalism questions patriarchy and other ideological notions of hegemony. He surfaces how *mitú*'s journalism presents an alternative to legacy media in the United States, both through the choice of, and approach to, issues such as machismo and LGBTQ+ identity in Latin American communities.

A complementary but different form of media is the focus for Olga Lazitski. She tracks the emergence of alternative forms journalism in a non-democratic and non-liberal media system, in this case, Russia. Lazitski writes about “alternative professional journalism” to capture how professional journalists in Russia are trying to contest intimidation and censorship. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews and discourse analysis, she finds journalists attached to a prevailing norm of objectivity as defined by the U.S. normative tradition, and who reject being labeled as critics of Putin's government. The research article avoids presenting a binary choice of a state-controlled or free press and instead presents a nuanced theoretical contribution of the role of journalism in non-democratic societies.

The next two papers switch the lens from the newsroom to the public and consider the intervention of audiences via social media in the sourcing and framing of the news. Kirsi Cheas, Maiju Kannisto and Noora Juvonen consider the student movement, #MarchForOurLives, that emerged following the mass shooting in February 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. What stands out in the research article is how they unpack the intergenerational power hierarchies between teens taking to social media and the mediating role of the news media. Through a content

analysis of online news articles in five news outlets in the U.S., the researchers reveal how tweets by Parkland students appreciably influenced media coverage. At the same time, though, the liberal or conservative ideological bent of news outlets mediate the message, with divergent representations of the youth voices.

Narratives in news media also come under scrutiny in Carolyn Nielsen's research article on the coverage of President Donald Trump's tweets on four women of color, newly elected to Congress. Trump's tweets telling the Congresswomen to "go back" to the countries they came from prompted extensive coverage. Nielsen draws on critical race theory and intersectionality to analyze how three national outlets in the U.S.—*Vox*, *Buzzfeed* and *The Washington Post*—reported the story. While her findings reveal how coverage labeled Trump's comments racist, they also showed the limitations of reporting on racism as an everyday occurrence, let alone including intersectional perspectives to explain how different forms of prejudices come together.

The fifth research article offers an invigorating take on potential and limitations of participatory journalism to address patriarchal structures in journalism. For the article, Mark Poepsel draws on Critical Studies on Men, and specifically the concept of the hegemony of men, to unpack the power and authority of men as an institutional group. He goes on to discuss how participatory journalism in and of itself does not provide an antidote to gender inequities. But he adopts an optimistic outlook to consider the potential for boundary work and/or reciprocity in journalism to challenge the hegemony of men. Poepsel raises significant and overlooked research questions for journalism scholars, surfacing the importance of addresses gender and power in the study of participatory journalism projects.

Taken together, the research articles in this special issue highlight the persistence of power structures within the practice and study of journalism. They unpack evolving multiple journalisms for diverse publics, in the case of this issue—Latino Americans, Russian journalists, teens, women of color, and journalism practitioners and scholars. The hope of this issue is to advance the conversation about how ideas of power, privilege and patriarchy intersect and shape journalism's institutional forms, practices, and epistemologies.

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## “We are the 200%”: How Mitú constructs Latino American identity through discourse

***By Ryan Wallace***

*Focusing on a digital native publication, this study uses the example of mitú to understand how culturally-specific content may be transforming the ways in which news and culture are articulated to online news audiences. In order to analyze the diverse messages constructed by mitú and their intended purposes, this study used a critical discourse approach to deconstruct mitú’s content across multiple platforms and symbol systems. Aside from directly confronting notions of patriarchy, machismo, and other hegemonic ideologies within Latino American culture, mitú’s discourse illustrates the formation of a broader Latino American identity—acknowledging the diverse intersectional characteristics of this group.*

While contemporary journalism has had a long tradition of empowering democratic societies and informing mass audiences, critiques of the industry’s maleness and whiteness have raised significant questions about who it is that journalists envision their audiences to be. News has been described as an elite form of discourse, created and reproduced to reinforce existing socioeconomic hierarchies (Van Dijk, 2013). But as new generations of Americans are becoming increasingly engaged with news media, some publications are beginning to think outside of the box, to not only engage diverse audiences but produce content tailored to the experiences and cultures of what were once considered to be minority groups in the United States. One such media company, mitú, not only challenges traditions held by journalists in the United States, but also those throughout Latin America. As a digital native, the company has created a vast network of audiences with a global reach—averaging more than two billion monthly views for its creative content (Graham, 2016). And as a form of Latino journalism, mitú is creating culturally-relevant

content for Latino American audiences and directly challenges the ways in which this multicultural group has been represented in the news and other forms of media (Acevedo & Beniflah, 2018). It also tackles ideological values deeply ingrained in Latino culture that serve as biases against gender, race, sexuality and color. Through both its discourse and organizational structure, being co-founded by Latina Beatriz Acevedo and having elevated other Latinas to executive roles in senior leadership, mitú proves to be an interesting case study for investigating how contemporary journalism is being reimagined in the United States—challenging sociocultural power structures, privilege across cultural contexts, and patriarchy.

Connecting with more than 90 million readers each month, mitú is a brand that acknowledges the increasing multiculturalism of the United States and is developing multidimensional content that appeals to Latinos born in the United States (Acevedo & Beniflah, 2018). Their inspiration and their audience is what they refer to as “the 200%—youth who are 100% American and 100% Latino” (We Are Mitú, 2019). And while still technically considered a minority group in the United States, this audience represents a growing force in the American population. According to recent census data, over the past decade Latinos have accounted for more than half of the nation’s population growth, while Millennials are projected to soon become the largest living adult generation in the United States (Pew, 2014, 2018a). At the intersection of these two groups is a diverse population of individuals, with mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds. And though their numbers are growing, recent data suggests that Latino Americans have serious concerns over their position in the United States—as recent policies and racism have specifically targeted Latinos during the Trump presidency (Pew, 2018b). By using social media and journalism to represent these realities, mitú is engaging audiences with “Things That Matter” through the lens of what makes them connected, rather than different (We Are Mitú, 2019).

This study takes the example of mitú to better understand how digital native publications are now creating opportunities for moving beyond traditional journalistic roles. By analyzing mitú’s discourse, it looks at how culturally specific news and other media content can be used by news media in order to challenge ideological hegemonies like notions of patriarchy. It also brings to light ways in which journalism may be working beyond traditional roles to help construct new identities for its audiences—by articulating the complexity of Latino American racial, gendered, and sociocultural diversity. This study analyzes mitú’s discourse to better understand how Latino American identity is constructed through confrontation with traditional ideological hegemonies. The research questions it seeks to answer are significant, as they bring together two theoretical strands of Latino journalism and hegemony, particularly during an era when both journalism and Latino American identity are being openly challenged in the United States. Just as mitú seeks to reach underrepresented audiences and address the multiculturalism of the United States, this study brings attention to how particular ethnic and cultural groups are challenging hegemonies and using different media to reconceptualize what is journalism in a contemporary context.

## Literature Review

### Legacy News Media

Emerging at the turn of the seventeenth century in western Europe, contemporary journalism began as a feature of the printing revolution (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). From the beginning, early newspapers targeted a particular audience of social elites and spoke to positions of power (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). News as a form of mass communication did not take shape until the eighteenth century, when it emerged as a form of discourse for representing and informing public opinion (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). While journalism spread across western Europe, the modern conception of journalism and its news values are believed to be a product of Anglo-American invention (Chalaby, 1996). This historical context of contemporary journalism is important to understand because of the central role that Anglo-American ideological values played in the creation of the modern press (Chalaby, 1996).

Journalism co-evolved with the American nation itself, so much so that the two became inextricably interrelated (Chalaby, 1996). While this can be seen in the conception of a "free press" in the United States, it can also be seen by the role that the English language and Anglo-Saxon identity play in the production and representations of news media—not only are they central, but they also contribute to the dominant hegemony (Chalaby, 1996). Because news is a social construction that is not discursively neutral, these foundational values are important factors for analysis of how journalism contributes to the formation of a social reality (Broersma, 2010). In particular, as this study focuses on the growing importance of media that speaks to specific racial/ethnic audiences, it is vital to recognize journalism's role as a symbolic process that creates, recreates and maintains social reality (Broersma, 2010). And, in particular cases, can also largely contribute to the social construction of racial/ethnic identity.

### Latino Journalism

As a form of journalism that is created with a particular audience in mind, both in the modes of production of media and in the central focus of their narratives, *mitú* is a contemporary illustration of Latino journalism. Latino journalism is strategically and purposefully created for the 200%—those that are at once American and Latino. This form of discourse is unique in that through it the Latino identity is denationalized, recognizing similarities amongst the collective diaspora, and a new national identity of Latino Americans is created (Rodriguez, 1999). Shared experiences in cultural and social knowledge serve as touchstones for this new national identity, as well as shared struggles with power (Rodriguez, 1999). Through a unique and detailed symbol system, Latino journalism constructs the social reality of Latinos living in the United States by relating their identity to other Latinos—creating a narrative that shows Latinos around every corner of American life (Rodriguez, 1999). Although two of the key motives of Latino journalism (as a form of cultural preservation or recreation, and as a way to situate Latinos into the dominant society) have been written about, few studies have investigated how Latino journalism serves as a form of cultural resistance to hegemony (Rodriguez, 1999). Us-



ing mitú as a contemporary case of Latino journalism, this study brings to light concrete examples of these motives in practice and introduces new lines of inquiry into theories of identity and the effects that journalism can have on society.

In order to understand the discourse of Latino journalism, it is important to consider the central motives of these practices and how they relate to broader sociocultural hegemonies (Lazarte-Morales, 2008). This form of journalism is articulated around the interplay between power and differences, conveying complex dimensions that not only serve as critical lenses through which the news can be viewed, but also contribute to the construction of a new group identity (Lazarte-Morales, 2008). Resulting as a consequence of contemporary American xenophobia, representations of Latinos in the United States and for Hispanic audiences are inherently tied to political and cultural power (Rodríguez, 1999). In fact, by analyzing the construction of a Latino American audience, researchers must consider the political, economic and social dimensions of various communities (Rodríguez, 1999). In the United States, Latinos are often treated as a homogeneous group (Cauce & Domenech-Rodríguez, 2002). However, multiple waves of immigration have brought groups of individuals from various regional, economic, and racial groups into the United States (Cauce & Domenech-Rodríguez, 2002). For these reasons, Latino journalism must report differences in a nuanced way that acknowledges the complexity of many factors, but also coalesce similarities in order to construct a new Latino American identity.

In recent decades, journalism as a broader industry has become transformed by the introduction of new technology (Fenton, 2010). The rise of the Internet and digital media have not only changed the modes of production for journalists, but have also changed the dynamics of what information could be relayed to news audiences (Fenton, 2009). With the introduction of hyperlinks and ease of sharing multimedia content like video and audio, online news publications are able to supply their audiences with greater context than ever before (Fenton, 2009). And now, as the Internet has become as ubiquitous as journalism, the industry is beginning to see the emergence of “digital native media”—news publications that were born and grown only online (Wu, 2016). Digital native media differ from traditional news publications in many ways, but perhaps most importantly in their ability to benefit from digital networks and use of the affordances of different social platforms to create multimedia content that directly speaks to an online news audience (Wu, 2016). As a digital native publication, mitú represents an interesting case study for looking at how Latino journalism is articulated in an online environment.

### **Race and Ethnicity in the United States**

Race and ethnicity are complex social constructions based on a myriad of traits ranging from ancestry and nationality to physical appearance and culture (Renn, 2012). In the United States, these social categories have been significant not only as they are used for identification of social groups, but also for the creation of individual and group identities (Renn, 2012). Individual experiences in the United States are seen through the lenses of race, culture and nationality, so much so that they are significant factors at the foreground of conceptions of identity (Renn, 2012). As a widely diverse ethnic group, it is important to acknowledge the mixed-races of Latino people—coming from European,

African and Indigenous heritage (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). Thus, the racial identities of Latinos is vast, with most individuals being bi- or multiracial (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). How this racial mixture is articulated into contemporary racial identities is complex and often has to do with sociocultural contexts.

### **Theories of Identity—Intersectionality and Simultaneity**

As theories of identity have developed throughout the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars began to acknowledge that one aspect of an individual’s identity cannot simply be extracted from their identity as a whole (Renn, 2012). Differences amongst race and ethnicity, therefore, do not illustrate the true complexity of social dynamics. Taking an intersectionality approach, looking at the integrative ways in which social identities are created, it can be seen that race and ethnicity cannot be understood alone without the contexts of gender, sexuality, social class, ability, and other social characteristics (Renn, 2012). Together, the experience of individuals and groups of individuals must consider the multiple, intersecting facets of their identities, as well as how these identities differ from the prevailing hegemony. Intersectionality allows scholars to not only interrogate the dimensions of social categories of differences, but also their similarities and the ever-present role that inequalities play in social context (Azmitia & Thomas, 2015).

To understand how identity contributes to and is altered by broader discourses of power, hegemony and patriarchy in the United States, it is important to turn to another feminist concept—simultaneity (Holvino, 2010, 2012). Transnational feminists developed the notion of simultaneity out of an understanding that identities signify relations of power in social contexts and that other social processes like class contribute to the construction and constant re-articulation of identities (Holvino, 2012). Simultaneity can be defined as “the simultaneous processes of identity, institutional and social practice, which operate concurrently and together to construct people’s identities and shape their experiences, opportunities, and constraints” (Holvino, 2012, p. 172). And this concept not only helps explain existing power structures based on dimensions of identity that may vary from the prevailing hegemony of power, but also how inequality is reproduced through other characteristics (Holvino, 2010, 2012). This understanding of identity allows for a more complex, multi-dimensional view of what it means to be Latino.

In a contemporary digital landscape, the transition from traditional legacy media to those of “social media” have had significant implications for the process of creating, representing and recreating identities in a social context (Manago, 2015). As young audiences transition into adulthood, the Internet and its various platforms provide them with the opportunity to not only construct their identity in the public sphere, but in the digital sphere as well (Manago, 2015). The affordances for self-expression and the ability to actively contribute to the formation of one’s own identity are powerful consequences of social media (Manago, 2015). They not only allow young audiences to consume messages, but also create them on the same screen, and to very strategically craft public personas (Manago, 2015). Digital media, therefore, are important for understanding new networks that are emerging, how people are coming together on social media, and how new publications may help articulate these online identities in meaningful ways.

## Patriarchy and Hegemonic Ideologies

Empirical evidence increasingly suggests that an American national identity is pervasive throughout the United States in spite of its members increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse (Citrin et al., 2001). However, the conception of the American identity is far more complex when diversity is addressed (Citrin et al., 2001). Although White members conflate their national and ethnic identities by creating a sense of solely being American, minority groups have begun to describe themselves in plural terms—being at once American and members of distinct ethnic/racial groups (Citrin et al., 2001). This plurality not only results in the simultaneity of multiple identities, but also various ways of encountering similar notions of patriarchy and hegemonic ideologies. In particular, this study looks at news discourse as both a way of promulgating and of confronting ideological hegemonies (Van Dijk, 2009). Questioning how culturally specific news discourse deals with these ideological views, it is important to identify the ideological hegemonies in American culture, but also their analogues in Latino culture.

Similar to the White patriarchal hegemony of the United States, the role of the family has been a significant cornerstone for social education and identity construction for Latinos (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). In some ways, although it has been posited that the goals of American families of color may be different than those of White families in the process of social education, certain hegemonic ideologies manifest across these groups (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). However, because they are rooted in distinct cultural norms, particular values are articulated in unique ways for minority groups (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). For Latinos, values that have been described include: *familismo* (importance of family closeness), *personalismo* (importance of personal goodness), *marianismo* (emphasis on a woman's role as a mother, who sacrifices and suffers for her children), and *machismo* (emphasis on a man's role as head of household) (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). These values collectively contribute to a larger goal of maintaining stability and tradition in Latino families, however, in the context of the United States they reify hegemonic notions of masculinity, patriarchy and distinct cultural roles (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002).

Other ideological values that are common in Latino culture also contribute to the hegemony of what it means to be American, particularly as it is seen through the lens of race. Pigmentocracy, a stratification system based on the color of one's skin, is a common practice in Latin American societies and continues into the American context (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). Power dynamics in the United States reflect a similar and often unstated Black-White binary paradigm, where power relations are constructed based on skin color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Rockquemore & Arend, 2002). Historically, race relations have played a significant role in public discourse and in the United States have contributed to structural inequalities in many aspects of everyday life (Rockquemore & Arend, 2002). Although Americans are increasingly acknowledging a transformation of race relations, as racial categories are blurred, inequalities persist (Rockquemore & Arend, 2002).

Expanding the idea that Latino journalism not only can construct social reality but may also construct a new Latino American identity for its audiences, this study uses *mitú* as a case for understanding how Latino journalism confronts hegemony and patriarchy in the

United States. Together, these theoretical strands allow for the following central research questions to be investigated:

**RQ1:** To what extent does mitú's discourse construct a Latino American identity?

**RQ2:** How does mitú's discourse challenge patriarchy and other ideological notions of hegemony?

In a contemporary context, this study not only seeks to fill an important theoretical gap in the literature, but also seeks to discuss the complexity of Latino identity and how this group is situated within broader ideological hegemonies.

## Method

To address these questions, this study relied on qualitative methods to gather a thick description and analysis of mitú's content across multiple social networking platforms and its digital publication—with particular attention to how processes of race, gender and culture are actively discussed. Through a critical discourse analysis, this study sought to understand how a Latino American identity is articulated by mitú and how its discourse contends with ideological hegemonies that are pervasive in both American and Latino cultures. This method is particularly important for this study because it views language and discourse as social practices, which allows analyses to understand the linguistic and semiotic elements of discourse in addition to the specific context in which this discourse takes place (Fairclough, 2013; Lazar, 2014; Wodak & Fairclough, 2013). As Latino American identity is articulated across multiple symbol systems, this qualitative approach allows for a better understanding of how this complex discourse is articulated. As a method that treats power and ideologies as being intrinsically connected to discourse, as they are reproduced through language and symbol systems, a critical discourse analysis allows for critiques of structural relationships to be made with a particular emphasis on how they are manifested in media content (Fairclough, 2013; Lazar, 2014; Wodak & Fairclough, 2013).

In order to obtain a comprehensive view of mitú's discourse, this analysis developed a comprehensive, cross-platform corpus. The corpus for this study was gathered in October 2019 by manually scraping all of mitú's social media content and articles from the publication's website, including: 15,603 posts from Instagram, 956 YouTube videos, 8,072 original articles from mitú's website, and a Facebook page with more than five years of content. As the multimedia content throughout this corpus relied on multimodal forms of discourse, borrowing from various symbol systems, this study's analysis considered not only textual, but visual and aural discourse as well. The following results of this analysis consider both platform specificity, as well as how discourse across these platforms contribute to mitú's broader discourse about Latino American issues.

## Findings

### Social Media, Simultaneity, and the Construction of Latino American Identity

While social media content is not entirely a part of mitú’s journalistic discourse, as a digital native publication, cross-platform use of social media is a significant part of the company’s overall messaging. In support of the publication’s mission to “engage [their] audience through a Latino POV across multiple platforms,” social media facilitate the dissemination of news and entertainment content, as well as provide a space for Latino Americans to identify cultural commonalities regardless of their national or racial ties. For these reasons, analyses of mitú’s social media content was at the core of answering RQ1 (To what extent does mitú’s discourse construct a Latino American identity?). As a part of the company’s strategy to engage audiences, on social media they are able to create news, comedy, animations and even nostalgia with multimedia content through a Latino point-of-view. Intertextual cues from popular American and Latin American cultural references, as well as an emphasis on the diversity of Latinos, contributes to the notions of intersectionality and simultaneity—that multiple characteristics can define identity, and that these characteristics can work at the same time to create plurality in how identities are articulated.

#### Guacardo—“El Aguacate Travieso”

As an anthropomorphic representation of one of the United States’ most notable imports from Latin America, mitú’s clever mascot Guacardo is far more than a naughty avocado. Videos of the cartoon character emerged through the publication’s social media accounts in early 2017, and since then he has become a symbol not only for the publication, but also for its audience. Created by Danna Galeano, a Colombian Latina and one of mitú’s animators, Guacardo is an awkward and comedic character who can often be found dancing or fumbling his way through situations. And although this animation is not directly a part of mitú’s journalistic discourse, his character contributes largely to the publication’s construction of a Latino American identity.

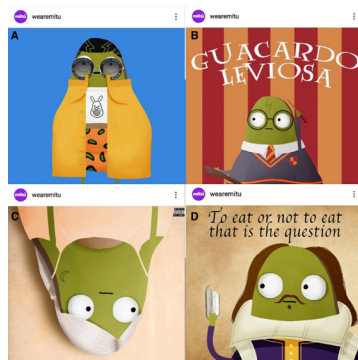


Figure 1: Guacardo interpolated into various scenes as: A) Bad Bunny; B) Harry Potter; C) Ariana Grande; and D) William Shakespeare.

Placed in the context of parodies of music videos and classic films, Guacardo's content relies heavily on intertextual cues from popular American culture. Borrowing from American entertainment, Guacardo's character can be viewed as an extended metaphor for Latino Americans' significant participation in the production and consumption of popular American culture. As seen in Figure 1 Guacardo is often interpolated into scenes lacking Latino or cartoon characters, and in many cases takes on the roles of famous characters in music, television or film. Interestingly, although Guacardo's character occasionally borrows from Mexican culture (e.g.: wearing mariachi clothing), his identity as articulated through his content remains amorphous. His character does not have a voice or accent, although the written text that accompanies his content is almost entirely in English. And unlike mitú's other content which is bilingual or refers to intertextual cues from other Latin American nations, Guacardo's character is deeply embedded in the United States context. These unknown origins of the character and missing cultural cues contribute to the idea of constructing a Latino American identity, without racial or national ties outside of the United States.

This construction of identity is most easily seen through one of Guacardo's most famous characters, as he embodies the late Selena Quintanilla-Pérez. The famous Latina American singer-songwriter was known as the "Queen of Tejano music," and since her death has become iconic not only for her music but also for the cultural legacy that she left behind (Paredes, 2009). Her life story served as an illustration of racial and socioeconomic inequalities along the Texas-Mexico borderlands, and has even contributed to discourse over American citizenship (Paredes, 2009). In addition, in the context of the United States her memory, as seen in Figure 2, has contributed to the formation of *latinidad*—or what it means to be a Latina (Paredes, 2009). Guacardo's representations of the beloved singer contribute to the embodied acts of commemoration that have helped Latina Americans articulate their own identity and helps illustrate an image of what a Latino American identity may look like.

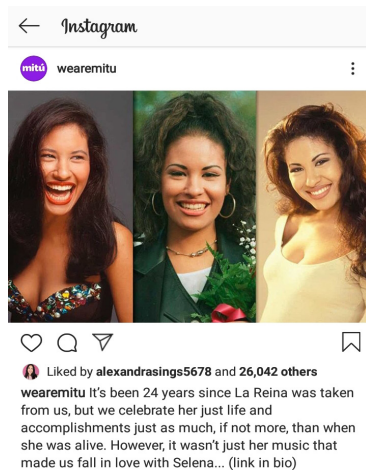


Figure 2: Remembrance post for the anniversary of Selena Quintanilla-Pérez's death.

## Cross-Platform Socials and Shared Experiences

With various levels of popularity and impact across platforms, mitú's social media presence is a critical and interesting component of the brand's overall discourse. Platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook connect readers directly with mitú's news content, as it is embedded and hyperlinked in various ways to take advantage of each platform's affordances. However, most importantly is that its social media content goes beyond just communicating the news. Each platform provides mitú with a way of engaging its target audience through culturally relevant content such as videos, parodies, comedic skits, animations and memes. Increasingly the connection between news content and that of entertainment is being made across mitú's social media platforms, working together to construct characteristics of a Latino American identity and informing this audience about issues relevant to their community.

Although the discourse on each platform appears to be distinct, with a unique composition of content, collectively they share much of the same content that is cross-posted as well as many of the same characteristics. Looking at intertextual cues used in many of the posts, it can be seen that mitú's social media discourse borrows heavily from both American and Latin American entertainment media, which is bilingual in nature. It makes reference to famous Latino icons, as well as contemporary allusions to American pop culture, and often it finds ways to combine the two. The functional outcome of this tactic is to create nostalgia for childhood, breakdown individual differences, and emphasize shared experiences amongst Latino Americans. The broader significance is that this approach articulates a distinct Latino American culture that is at once unique, but also hybridized because of its influences from American and Latin American media.

This articulation of Latino American identity through social media can most notably be seen by discourse surrounding three central topics—celebrity, comedy, and food. While celebrity representation on mitú's social media pages occasionally incorporate American celebrities of different ethnic/racial backgrounds than its core audience, often the celebrities that are highlighted are Latinos of various races and nationalities. Rather than focusing on the exceptionalism of these individuals, their celebrity is used to connect various aspects of identity such as shared national origins, to contribute to a uniform Latino American culture. Celebrities illustrate the vast presence that Latinos have in American and global entertainment industries, and where Latinos are not found, mitú creates counternarratives as to where these industries could incorporate more Latinos and celebrities of color. By "recasting" famous movie and television characters with Latinos, as seen in Figure 3, mitú creates a space for conceptualizing Latino American identity as being deeply embedded into the broader United States mainstream culture—rather than that of a minority group.





Figure 3: Recasting Game of Thrones characters with Latino actors.

As seen through the creation of its mascot Guacardo, and viral videos of competitive abuelas, comedy plays an important role in mitú's social media presence. Again, borrowing on sociocultural and intertextual cues from shared experiences and entertainment media, the comedic point-of-view that is created highlights the characteristics of the identity that mitú is constructing. Much of the comedy builds on both jokes in Spanish and in English. The two languages are often combined in a way that illustrates a generational divide—where the voice of family (i.e. mother or abuela) is in Spanish, but the voice of the youth is in English. Food serves as another anchoring concept of shared identity, but also of diversity. As each Latin American region has developed its own unique cuisines, and this culinary heritage has led to many different types of translations in the United States, mitú highlights this diversity through their posts and culture articles to illustrate the ways in which Latino American food can reflect other intersectional characteristics of a family's identity. One example, highlighting 21 different variations on Sopa de Fideo, was particularly significant for this author as it emphasized how a seemingly simple childhood staple was shared by many others throughout the United States and Latin America (Mitú Staff, 2018). So while variations may highlight diversity, mitú is shaping a broader Latino American identity by emphasizing shared experiences and culture amongst audiences—without essentializing Latinos into one homogenous group.

By creating content that can easily be shared, such as memes and funny videos, mitú is not only constructing a cogent notion of Latino American identity for young audiences, but is also providing them with a way to articulate individual identities and experiences themselves. Memes, for example, provide Latino Americans with content that is in a format familiar to non-Latinos, which allows them to share memes with their broader social networks online. Additionally, being on various platforms that each engage with different demographic groups, mitú is opening the door for cross-generational flows of content so



that youth audiences can also connect with older members of this cultural group. As important cultural markers for the creation of a shared identity, social media content serves not only to entertain, but also to engage audiences. And through intertextual cues and shared cultural values, social media content is allowing *mitú* to craft news discourse that is more relevant and significant to Latino American audiences.

### **Challenging Ideological Notions Through News**

As a form of Latino journalism, *mitú*'s journalistic discourse is unique in its approach to everyday topics—varying not only in its selection of newsworthy events but also in its framing of the news. Although the publication serves many of the same roles that traditional legacy news media have established, as a digital native publication *mitú* pushes the boundaries of American journalism and deconstructs many of the established norms and routines. For this reason, analysis of *mitú*'s website allowed for a better understanding of RQ2 (How does *mitú*'s discourse challenge patriarchy and other ideological notions of hegemony?). By establishing new categories of news that are culturally relevant and highlighting the significance of particular types of news stories, *mitú* not only speaks to a Latino American audience, but also actively shapes the identity of what this audience can be. The four major sections of news on *mitú*'s website are: Entertainment, Things That Matter, Culture and Fierce. Continuing the thread of its social media discourse, much of the news that *mitú* creates emphasizes shared experiences, interests and cultural ties amongst Latinos. But unlike other content in legacy news media, *mitú* directly confronts ideological factors that have contributed to sociocultural inequality for Latino Americans and even those that stem within this group. By naming ideologies and giving a voice to injustices that seek to divide groups along hegemonic notions of masculinity or white supremacy, *mitú* is able to speak to many of the intersectional characteristics that contribute to Latino American diversity—creating a space for simultaneity and acknowledging the diverse racial, cultural and gendered aspects of this heterogeneous audience.

### **FIERCE Articles and New Conceptions of Identity**

As one of four key categories on *mitú*'s website, described as a collection of content that is specifically created for the empowerment of Latinas, FIERCE represents a unique set of news that touches on the gendered aspects of Latino American identity. Through this collection, several important ideological conversations emerge—colorism/pigmentocracy, machismo, and LGBTQ+/Queer identity. This centrality of ideological issues can be seen in a recent article titled “You Can Thank Machismo For Our Dying Planet, Here’s Why,” where notions of machismo and hegemonic masculinity are negatively associated with the decline of some sustainable practices (Reichard, 2019). Connecting these ideologies back to recent research, which found that environmentally-friendly practices like recycling are considered “feminine,” *mitú*'s journalists highlight the significance of embracing non-binary notions of gender identity to improve sociocultural practices in the future. Another article that placed ideological issues at the forefront is titled “Cardi B’s Favorite Brand Fashion Nova Is In A Whole Lot Of Boiling Hot Water After A Model Accused Them Of Colorism” (Reindl, 2019a). As suggested in the headline, this article tackled the notion of colorism and white supremacy of clothing brand Fashion Nova because of its choices

in models and disjointed media strategy. By bringing these issues to light, mitú’s journalists are engaging their readers in deeper conversations about sociocultural dynamics, hierarchies, and how characteristics of their individual identities may intersect with concepts. By identifying and placing a central focus on ideological values, mitú is providing its audience with the language necessary to articulate their own experiences and actively question how these deeply engrained ideologies take shape in other aspects of their lives.

### **Constructing New CULTURE**

Although distinct from the articles in the FIERCE category, in that they do not solely focus on Latinas, CULTURE provides a similar emphasis on intersectional characteristics of Latino American identity and how these are articulated through Latino culture. From sharing traditional recipes from an abuela to shared experiences, this category of articles illustrates what it’s like to live in the Latino American community and the diverse factors that contribute to this identity. While the journalistic discourse in this category is diverse, tackling everyday topics of food and family dynamics, it also provides a platform for discussing social inequalities, cultural appropriation and hegemony. In particular, CULTURE articles are creating a counternarrative to that of machismo and hegemonic masculinity to discuss how new generations are combatting violence and inequalities against women and the LGBTQ+ community. Articles like “Ya Basta Con El Toxic Machismo That Has Caused Violence Against Women And The LGBTQ+ Community” touch on this topic of systemic machismo, allowing mitú’s own journalist to reflexively consider their own positionality in the conversation (Thompson-Hernandez, 2017). This article, like mitú’s others on this topic, discussed the social construction of masculinity and how this can affect young boys within the community. Additionally, mitú’s journalists gave a voice to 12 Latinos of diverse intersectional characteristics (in terms of gender identity, race, color and orientation) as they shared their own opinions on how to “undo patriarchal ways of thinking” and deconstruct hegemonic notions of masculinity (Thompson-Hernandez, 2017, para. 9).

Aside from creating a counternarrative against machismo, mitú’s journalists are actively contributing to this discourse by highlighting stories that go against hegemonic notions of masculinity. This is most clearly illustrated by a recent article titled “These Men Represented Their Country In The Mister Global Pageant And We Are Living For These ‘National Costumes’,” in which the main focus was something considered feminine—a beauty pageant (Lessner, 2019). This international pageant, however, was specifically geared towards men who represented nations from all over the world. The discourse of this article framed the men as “inspirational role models” (Lessner, 2019, para. 6). And although a Latino didn’t win Mister Global in 2019, their participation in the contest sparked significant conversation on culture. Not only did this article highlight the significance of thinking outside of a gender binary, but it also raised the question of racial/ethnic identity and the vast diversity of Latino populations. A particular focal point of the article was the competition’s “National Costume Show—a segment designed to showcase clothing that honors and celebrates contestants’ home countries” (Lessner, 2019, para. 1). Adorned in traditional cloth, feathers, gold and stones, Latinos from each nation paid tribute to the diverse indigenous peoples of their nation, often channeling tribal groups that were eradi-

cated by the Spanish colonization of North and South America. Their representations not only highlighted the rich cultural identity of Latinos, but also spoke to the ways in which characteristics that were once seen as feminine or subordinate can now have significant impacts in global discourse about identity.

### **Emphasizing a U.S. Context with THINGS THAT MATTER**

Of all the categories created by *mitú*, none is quite as informative as the THINGS THAT MATTER. As noted in the category's name, THINGS THAT MATTER highlights news that are particularly significant and relevant to a young Latino American audience. And through its coverage of recent events, THINGS THAT MATTER anchors *mitú*'s journalistic discourse to a U.S. point-of-view. Ranging from the political to the sociocultural, the topics covered in this category are diverse but ultimately always connect back to Americans or the United States. Although these articles focus the perspective that the publication presents, by dictating what issues and topics should be important to their audience, ultimately they contribute to a uniquely American point-of-view. And furthermore, to the representation of how Latino Americans fit into the broader hierarchies of power. Still, even while emphasizing a particular U.S. context, *mitú* is able to tackle significant topics such as immigration from the global South and violence against the Latino diaspora. Articles like "The Smithsonian Is Preserving A Part Of Our Most Shameful History By Exhibiting Drawings From Children In Cages" touch on a variety of these aspects, including Latino Americans' connections with migrant communities, their moral values, these individuals' positionality within the United States, and how Latino Americans can keep U.S. offices of power accountable for their actions (Cruz Gonzales, 2019).

This new THINGS THAT MATTER category also incorporates articles that would traditionally fall under the categories of: News, Politics, Features, Economics and more. However, by incorporating these various topics into one new category, *mitú*'s journalists are not only able to talk about intersectional characteristics of Latino American identity, but also about the intersectional characteristics of the news. Articles are able to touch on politics, other sociocultural influences, and economics in one large conversation. And though this can complicate the process of reporting, it allows for more complex questions to be raised and more diverse conversations to take place. Articles like "Gina Torres, The Mother Queen, Says 'Afro-Latinos don't fit into a box, they fit into all the boxes'" allow for the diversity of Latino American identity to come into question and illustrates the ways in which this identity is articulated in a sociocultural context—Hollywood and entertainment media (Reindl, 2019b). Additionally, they question patriarchy, white supremacy and social inequities directly, challenging the status quo. Through the experiences of strong celebrities like Gina Torres, articles like these in THINGS THAT MATTER not only describe the experiences of Latino Americans with various intersectional characteristics but also describe a path forward for a better future for all.

## Conclusions

In analyzing mitú’s discourse across their various social media platforms and website, this study found that mitú is able to engage audiences and provide a Latino point-of-view for their content through various symbol systems—including two linguistic systems (Spanish and English) and various types of media (e.g. telenovelas). Highlighting the intersectional characteristics that contribute to the diversity of their audience, mitú rearticulates the differences once associated with individual nationalities and races to construct a new type of Latino American identity that unifies rather than fragments. In the process of constructing this identity, mitú’s journalism and entertainment content directly confront hegemonic ideologies that have contributed to sociocultural inequality for Latino Americans. Diverging from traditional legacy news media in their approach to topics like white supremacy, hegemonic masculinity and their counterparts in the Latino community (e.g. colorism and machismo), mitú names these ideologies and challenges them to create space for simultaneity in Latino American identity and acknowledge the vast diversity of their audience.

Although the specific nature of mitú’s journalistic discourse contributes significantly to counternarratives against ideologies like patriarchy and to the construction of a Latino American identity, there are significant limitations to the publication’s approach. In particular, these limitations take shape in the form of a particular type of identity, the deconstruction of certain ideological values in lieu of others, and a unique interpretation of journalistic values.

Most obvious is the specificity of the Latino American identity that is created by mitú’s social media and journalistic discourse. With significant discourse around national identities and their contributions to a collective Latino identity, mitú focuses on immigration and shared experiences through the perspective of second or third generation Americans. Although much of the content is in a mixture of Spanish and English, mitú takes for granted that not all Latino Americans grow up with the Spanish language as part of their home. Because Spanish terms and allusions are embedded in their humor and the nuances of its storytelling, the shared experiences that mitú often refers to may not be something that newer generations may have. Much of this is particularly mediated by focusing on a young, primarily Millennial audience. However, it ignores the realities lived by many Latinos whose families may have been in the United States for three-plus generations and have assimilated to larger American sociocultural trends. Additionally, as their references often extend beyond recent events, to shared experiences and media of the past, they often touch on telenovelas, music, and Spanish-language news in a way that assumes multicultural media consumption. Beyond the barrier of language, this assumed access to diverse media content means that the Latino American identity created not only assumes particular cultural ties, but also a particular socioeconomic class.

The particular way in which this Latino American identity is articulated is even further defined by mitú’s approach in tackling ideologies. By questioning ideological values like machismo and colorism, as well as their sociocultural manifestations in the United States, mitú’s discourse on many of its topics are conveyed through a progressive and liberal

angle. Mitú challenges notions like patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and white supremacy through its coverage on important topics like immigration and Latino representation. But at the same time, mitú is coding other ideological beliefs into its Latino American identity. In particular, this can easily be seen in its coverage of immigration, politics and the Trump presidency. While acknowledging the diversity of Latino Americans' political beliefs, sociocultural binaries are emphasized in what it means to identify as a Latino American (Danielli, 2019). This, for example, is articulated in a pro-immigration stance. In a recent article about a Republican politician who was formerly an undocumented immigrant, pointed language illustrated this point-of-view when one of mitú's journalists said that "Whittney Williams, a young Taiwanese Republican ... is happy to throw Latinxs under the bus or into alligator-infested moats to score political points with a racist constituency that likely would never vote for an Asian American" (Pellet, 2019, para. 1). Even though Williams does not identify as a Latina American, this article illustrates the ways in which particular intersectional characteristics are not fully recognized as contributing to individual beliefs, and instead focuses on broader political ideologies that are coded into Latino American identity.

### **Multiplicity of mitú's Discourse**

While mitú is actively constructing the social identity of what it means to be a Latino American, the publication is also not fully conforming to another social identity—that of American journalism. By not adhering to the professional identity of American journalists or many of the well-established values (i.e. fairness, balance, and objectivity), mitú's coverage is markedly different than that of legacy news media. Many stories are secondary reporting and often author bias has a significant voice in the narrative. And while critical perspectives may help galvanize a community of like-minded individuals, it illustrates a potentially dangerous precipice for a future snowball effect. As American journalism is currently dealing with conversations of partisan bias, echo chambers and the possibility of sharing misinformation, deviation from well-established values can leave mitú's journalistic discourse open to criticism. In addition, it could also contribute to significant sociocultural ramifications if Latino Americans are only being well-informed on a narrow set of issues, through a particular ideological lens.

Collectively, mitú's discourse is a particularly interesting object of analysis because of its diverse characteristics and its central value of constructing a Latino American identity. Its direct confrontation with hegemony and ideologies, which have historically repressed this group's representation in broader journalistic discourse, brings Latino voices to the forefront of U.S. news and social media. At the same time, it connects a diverse audience into a cogent identity group, whose intersectional characteristics are embraced as a part what it means to be Latino American. But there are also challenges that lie ahead, as mitú not only defines its audience but also seeks to inform a growing portion of the American electorate. As a qualitative survey of mitú's news and social media content, this study is limited in that its analysis provides broad strokes for understanding mitú's collective discourse—identifying patterns in the style, structure and content of mitú's various multimedia products. Although various particular examples are used to illustrate patterns that emerged during analysis of this cross-platform corpus, further investigation is needed to better understand the composition of mitú's audience, how mitú is

using various media platforms for their particular affordances, and how mitú's networks intersect with various other publications and communities online. Future studies should analyze mitú's content to further understand the publication's unique news values, what roles it serves for a Latino American audience, and how the publication will articulate Latino American identity for future generations.

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## **Alternative professional journalism in the post-Crimean Russia: Online resistance to the Kremlin propaganda and status quo**

***By Olga Lazitski***

*After 2014, a new community of journalists with a unique identity emerged in Russia. The author calls it alternative professional journalism (APJ), highlighting its group autonomy and potential for public mobilization. One of the main conditions for the emergence of APJ is the development of online and digital platforms that are allowed to circumvent a number of structural constraints and attract an important politically active audience that consumes media almost solely online. This paper demonstrates how flexibility of digital settings allowed APJ to resist Putin's regime and provides an insight on the development of alternative media/journalism in a non-Western, non-democratic and non-liberal context.*

On June 6, 2019, the journalist Ivan Golunov submitted a draft of his latest investigation to his editor and headed to a cafe in downtown Moscow to meet with his friend. He never made it to the meeting. Police officers stopped him and pushed him into their car. In the process, they planted drugs in his backpack and charged him with attempting to sell a large amount of drugs. This conviction could carry a jail sentence of up to 15 years. The publisher and the editor-in-chief of *Meduza*, the online project where Golunov works, claimed that their reporter had been targeted because of his work as a journalist, noting that he already received threats. Golunov's colleagues from *Meduza* and a number of other media outlets launched a massive campaign in support of the reporter and organized protests outside police headquarters in Moscow. By June 10, the protests had

moved well beyond the community of journalists and beyond Moscow as well. Demonstrations were held in numerous Russian cities and abroad. On June 11, a Moscow court dropped all charges against Golunov (Stognei, 2019). That was a first victory over the state for the journalistic community in Putin's Russia. What makes this victory even more important is the role of a particular journalistic community that the author calls *alternative professional journalism* (APJ). Its members managed to mobilize a number of marginalized groups of Russian society that felt threatened by state repression of journalists and other citizens. In fighting for Golunov's freedom, alternative professional journalists were fighting for their right to practice their profession as they understand it.

In this article, APJ is positioned aside from mainstream journalism, but not in opposition to it. The author highlights its professional autonomy and its potential for increasing public deliberation and illustrates its power through the case of the unprecedented outpouring of public support for the investigative reporter Ivan Golunov, as well as a number of other cases in which alternative professional journalists revealed the wrongdoings of those in power.

This article argues that development of online and digital platforms, as well as the events of the Ukraine crisis of 2014 and the post-Crimean state of Putin's regime, stimulated the emergence of APJ. The crisis in Ukraine began by mass protests in Kiev against pro-Kremlin president Victor Yanukovich (Pantti, 2016). Russian state-aligned media at that time were forced to demonize the protesters and claim that the uprisings were instigated by the U.S. State Department (Pantti, 2016). Yanukovich was ousted in February 2014, and Russia lost control over Ukraine. Trying to restore control, in March 2014 the Kremlin annexed the Ukrainian region of Crimea, and in April 2014 pro-Russian separatists, unofficially backed up by the Russian military, seized the eastern Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine. Kremlin's involvement in the Ukraine crisis resulted in economic sanctions against Russia and instigated a media war between Russia and the West (Pantti, 2016).

Over the course of 2014, Kremlin propaganda intensified drastically (Pantti, 2016), trying to target both international and domestic audiences. At that time, most of the media outlets in the country, even those that usually were not heavily controlled by the Kremlin, experienced harsh censorship on a daily basis. As a result, many mainstream journalists, who could not tolerate censorship anymore, either quit journalism or formed their own online start-ups (Badanin, 2018). Badanin (2018), who launched his alternative investigative outlet, *Project*, pointed out that due to the development of new technologies major players of the Russian media market lost their exclusive hold over the audience. He described the new media that began to appear:

They are registered abroad, far from Russian control bodies; most of them are trying to work with the most active, young audience. And they all became possible—here is the paradox!—due to the fact that the Russian authorities were attacking freedom of speech. (para.6)

Badanin compares the newly launched alternative outlets with the Soviet culture of "samizdat" (or self-publishing) that helped overcome censorship and start a set of social

changes known as “perestroika.” Similarly, the new post-Crimean online “samizdat” manages to circumvent a number of structural constraints, obtain professional autonomy, and win over a very important group of politically active millennials who consume media almost solely online. Alternative professional journalists, who also operate almost solely online, challenge the state’s propaganda efforts and provide the Russian public with the counter-narrative to the official discourse. Their work revealed APJ’s influence within contemporary Russian civil society and proved that the Kremlin’s control over the media is not omnipotent, as scholars and Western media outlets often posit (Pomerantsev, 2014; Snyder, 2016).

The article argues that APJ has already reshaped the current Russian media system, contributed to the development of the country’s public spheres and pointed to the openings within Putin’s regime for civic engagement. This article examines identities of alternative professional journalists, their professional practices and relationship with the audience. The findings reveal an interesting tension between audience expectations and journalists’ role performance, as well as a gap between journalists’ role conception and role performance. The discussion of the ideological adherence of APJ to the Western norm of objectivity provides an interesting insight on the coping strategies of alternative professional journalists within the non-democratic and non-liberal settings.

This article also proposes a new interpretation of the current Russian media system, challenging the theoretical traditions of studying post-Soviet media, which either focus on the state-aligned media (Arutunyan, 2009; Vartanova, 2012) or recognize a dichotomy of state-aligned and liberal/critical media within the system (Repnikova, 2017; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018). Proposed conceptualization denies this divide by putting both state-aligned and “liberal” outlets into a group of mainstream media that are coexisting and sometimes cooperating (as in Golunov’s case, for example) with the group of alternative media as a continuum.

## Literature Review

### Russian Political and Media Systems

Many scholars of Russian journalism (Oats, 2006; Vartanova, 2012) point to the importance of relationship between the state and the media in Russia at any historical period. That relationship “has always defined the nature, main features, and conditions of the media system” (Vartanova, 2012, p. 131). Vartanova describes the current Russian media model as “statist commercialized” and argues that even nowadays “the traditional paternal character of the media-state relationship in which the media still play the role of an innocent and obedient child remains central to the Russian system” (2012, p. 142). Oats (2006) points to the long-lasting tradition of subordination of Russian people to the state and notes that regardless of the existing political regime, Russians always “see themselves as media subjects, without the rights of either media citizens or media consumers” (p. 192). This pessimistic theoretical view of the journalistic role in Russian civil society is very common. It encompasses historical perspectives that argue that Russia has never had functioning public spheres (Dolgoval, 2010) and that Russian journalists

have never been independent and never experienced freedom of speech (Arutunyan, 2009; Vartanova, 2012).

The more optimistic line of historical perspectives on the Russian media system recognizes journalists' role within the public spheres. Roudakova (2018) argues that even during the Soviet regime some Russian journalists managed to serve the public, acting as if they were a part of civil society.

Finally, a third line of historical perspectives recognizes the golden era of post-Soviet journalism that is remembered for its pluralism, critical reporting and the power to form public opinion. It produced new professional norms, values and practices, which were based on the belief in freedom of speech (Vartanova, 2012). Pasti (2005) notices that despite the political changes of the 1990s, when liberal values of objectivity and impartiality shaped the form of journalism profession in Russia, even young journalists kept the traditional Soviet concept of journalism as "a derivative of power" (p. 103). In post-Soviet society, journalists are still perceived as those in power.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the market reforms of the 1990s, print media experienced economic crisis due to the sky-rocketing prices for paper, print and delivery (Malinova, 2013). Since then, television that was free of charge became the main arena for public debate. However, it also made television an arena where financial and political groups fought for their influence. By the end of the 1990s, the majority of the mainstream media were concentrated in the hands of the so-called oligarchs who waged their information wars with the help of their media assets (Malinova, 2013). Thus, the golden era of Russian journalism was left in the past.

Malinova (2013) argues that as a result of the political and economic reforms of the 1990s, the Russian public space was reshaped in a particular configuration with the "nucleus," represented by the mainstream national/federal television channels, and the "periphery," represented by print press, radio, cable networks, online platforms and other forums with small and fragmented audiences (p. 63).

### **Hybrid Political Regime**

After Putin came to power in 2000, he gained control over almost all social institutions, including the "nucleus" of the media system. Savin, Kashirskikh and Mavletova (2018) state that "the Russian media environment is commonly recognized as substantially oppressed by the state" (p. 474). However, they argue that the mediatized era transformed the nature of authoritarian governments that monopolize access to media to use them "to promote their political messages and exclude plausible criticism" (p. 474). Contemporary authoritarian leaders prefer to avoid violence to avoid isolation from global markets, relying instead on manipulation of information. That is why they allow the islands of controlled media pluralism (Repnikova, 2017). Putin allowed "pluralism" and other appearances of democracy to exist at the periphery of the media system. In his logic, in order to control the discourse, it would be sufficient to control the media within the nucleus, since they are what the majority of the Russian population watch and trust. Kiriya (2014)

supported this logic by his data that suggests that the main public sphere in Russia is dominated by the state-owned TV-channels that push pro-Kremlin discourse and give talking points for the online news outlets.

Restoration of state control over the mainstream media resembles the Soviet past. However, as Malinova (2013) notes, Soviet media were a part of a huge ideological machine that was supposed to mobilize the population, whereas the role of the current mainstream media is, on the contrary, to avoid any mobilization. This difference is an important characteristic of the current Russian political regime that allows some openings for public participation and practices of APJ. Shulman (2014) identifies this regime as hybrid. According to Shulman (2014), Putin's hybrid regime simulates both democracy and dictatorship, neither of which exist. The main goal of the hybrid regime is to ensure the "irremovability" of power (para.6), which might be threatened by working civil institutions, influential independent media and public sphere. For that reason, the regime encourages indifference and passivity in the citizens (as opposed to totalitarianism that encourages mobilization and a particular kind of participation). That is why the dictatorial face of the regime is more of a mask. It allows autonomous private spheres (that are heavily controlled in real dictatorships), which leave openings for people to consume any media they like, as well as discuss, plan and gather in small groups within the private realm. Imitation of democracy is important for Putin's regime in order to appeal to the West and attract foreign investments (Repnikova, 2017). This cynical performance of democracy is why the government allows some media outlets to produce alternative content, but as long as their audience stays tiny and/or elitist (Savin, Kashirskikh & Mavletova, 2018).

## Conceptual Framework

### Alternative Configuration of the Media System

In the beginning of the 2000s, renowned Russian journalism scholar Yasen Zasurskii (2002) identified three models of Russian journalism. He called the first model "Soviet instrumental," explaining that within this model the media are nothing but an instrument in the hands of those in power. The second model—the model of a free press—lived just a few years and ceased to exist during Yeltsin's presidential re-election of 1996. During that election, the third model appeared. Zasurskii called it "corporate-authoritarian" and equated it to the "Soviet instrumental" because huge post-Soviet corporations that bought controlling stakes in the media treated them exactly like their Soviet predecessors. A decade later, another prominent Russian media scholar, Joseph Dzyaloshinskii (2011), developed Zasurskii's view of Russian journalism further by adding three variations of position of journalists in relation to their audiences. The first model positions journalists *above* the audience, which happens when journalists consider members of the audience as objects of ideological and propagandistic influence. The second model positions journalists *next* to the audience, which happens when journalists aim to inform the audience. The third model positions journalists *within* the audience, as its part and as members of a community who take a stance.



The current Russian media system reflects all those models and role positions. The mainstream media are mostly instrumental with the above-the-audience journalist position, which sometimes can shift to the next-to-the audience proximity. They mostly reproduce official discourses and ban any alternative ones. The mainstream group contains two subgroups: *mainstream professional journalism* and *the media of state propaganda*. The mainstream professional journalism encompasses three of the country's leading business outlets: *Vedomosti*, *RBC*, and *Kommersant* (among others). There are also two media outlets that are in a state of limbo between mainstream professional and alternative media. They are the radio station *Echo of Moscow* and the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. Some scholars consider them "critical" or "liberal" (Repnikova, 2017, pp. 189-195; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018; Vartanova, 2012). Even though they do produce alternative discourse and are critical of the regime, this article conditionally includes them in the mainstream professional category given their history, traditional media models, and belonging to the system. Both are a part of "systemic opposition" (Krashenninikov, 2019, para.1) and are used by the hybrid regime for the purposes of simulating democratic institutions. The Kremlin knows how to use them and how to negotiate with them, as opposed to the alternative professional media that do not want to play by the Kremlin's rules.

The mainstream professional media were historically the most prominent media outlets that appeared right after the fall of the Soviet Union. Back then, they introduced U.S. journalistic standards and fostered the development of many brilliant reporters (some of whom are now leading the new alternative professional media). In the course of the Putin's presidential terms, they were forced to accept the Kremlin's "light-touch" censorship policy in order to stay in business. However, they still exercise some degree of group autonomy, which is why the article uses the adjective "professional". Their relative editorial autonomy comes in exchange for loyalty on politically sensitive topics. Journalists who do not obey taboos—for example, on covering Putin's family members or his private life—usually get fired.

The second subgroup of the mainstream category is media of the state propaganda. This article does not classify them as professional journalism because they do not have group autonomy. In the core of the state propaganda there is a set of national networks (such as *Channel One*, *Rossiya 1*, *NTV* and *REN-TV*). They are free of charge and available for the entire population of the country. All of them directly or indirectly are funded by the state. The heads of those networks attend weekly meetings with the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Alexey Gromov who gives them talking points, stop-lists of the names and issues that are banned for publication and instructions on how to cover particular stories.

A group of alternative media also has two subgroups: *alternative media platforms of non-professional journalism* and *alternative professional journalism*. Non-professional alternative media are mostly pages and channels within social media (Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, VK, Facebook). They are produced by bloggers, some of whom are anonymous. The platform of Telegram messenger (which is prohibited in Russia by law until COVID-19 outbreak in June 2020) allows its users stay anonymous. Often

times, they get paid to leak compromising materials and publish quasi-investigations that benefit those who pay for the posts. The problem of the alternative non-professional platforms is an absence of personal responsibility and institutional reputation. However, in some cases alternative professional media have started first as pages in social networks. For example, the Krasnoyarsk online news project *Prospect Mira* was born as a page in VK and later grew into an independent outlet with a team of professional journalists (Labunsky, n.d.).

### **APJ Within the Media System**

By proposing a new conceptual apparatus, which is different from the terminology of the traditional Western journalism studies, this article argues that the language of the realities of Western liberal democracies, post-Soviet Russia of the 1990s and even early years of Putin's presidency does not work anymore for the hybrid regime of the post-Crimean Russia. Classification based on the sources of funding and financing (for example, divide into commercial/private, state-owned or public media) would not be helpful in the conditions of current Russian state capitalism. Many outlets in Russia are simultaneously commercial and state-owned, or private but state-aligned (influenced by the state through other means), or public and commercial (when an outlet sells both subscription and ads). The new conceptual apparatus also challenges the theoretical tradition of studying post-Soviet journalism, which distinguishes particular state-aligned and oppositional/liberal outlets within the contemporary media system (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018). This article considers them both as a mainstream type, which is in alliance with Putin's regime.

Anticipating a question about conventional terminology that most of the scholars use (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018), the article further explains why it does not call the group of journalists that has been studied "liberal," "independent," "critical" or "oppositional". First, the author does not use "liberal" because this term is ideologically loaded and wrongfully generalizes all non-mainstream journalists into a single category of those who share Western liberal values. Second, the author does not use "independent" because this term is structurally loaded and might be misleading in the cases when outlets do engage government contracts or when the origin of the investments is unclear or kept secret. In addition, most of the journalists from the sample took the term "independent" very critically, asking the researcher, "Independent from whom or what?" Finally, terms "critical" and "oppositional" are loaded in ways that deny norms of neutrality and objectivity that most of alternative professional journalists espouse.

By calling the group *professional*, this study follows Hallin and Mancini (2004) who identified three main constituents of professional journalism throughout different contexts, namely: *shared ethical norms*, *commitment to public service* rather than individual interests and presence of *group autonomy*. Mellado (2017) explains that autonomy of journalists is "contingent on the willingness and the ability of journalists to work free from any attempts to censor the press in favor of commercial, political, or managerial goals"; autonomy of journalists is an "extent to which journalists can put their professional roles and ideals into practice" (p. 1).

By calling that group *alternative*, the author distinguishes those professionals from their mainstream colleagues, but it does not put them in opposition to each other in a dichotomized way. Earlier alternative media research started by exploring different forms of alternative media in contrast to mainstream media. Pickard (2007) summarized two general definitions of alternative media: “In its most expansive and popular use, the term ‘alternative media’ includes all media that are somehow opposed to or in tension with mainstream media” (p. 12). However, more recent research rejects this dichotomy and instead champions the analysis of alternative media as a continuum (Atton 2007; Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008; Fuchs, 2010). Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008), trying to overcome the limitations of alternative vs. mainstream binaries, argue that “the definition of ‘alternative’ media should be amplified to include a wider spectrum of media generally working to democratize information/communication” (p. xi). They point out that “alternative media do not operate completely outside the market and/or the state” (p. 20), and suggest that “the identity of alternative media should be articulated as relational and contingent on the particularities of the contexts of production, distribution, and consumption” (p. xii).

Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) explain that the forms of alternative media are articulated not only in relation to the mainstream media, but also as community media, as civil society media, and as rhizomatic media, as well as “in their potential to voice ideas which are important and distinctive in their own right, that are not necessarily counter-hegemonic, but are still of significance for different communities” (p. xii). This argument is extremely helpful for understanding the power relationships and practices of APJ in the remote Russian regions where some outlets might be considered locally mainstream by their means of production, but alternative by their processes and content (for example, TV-channel *Afontovo* in Siberia). “When alternative media are situated in an antagonistic relationship with mainstream media, alternative media may find themselves in a less advantageous position,” being articulated as unprofessional, inefficient, marginal, small-scale, limited in their capacity to reach large audiences (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008, p. 20). However, mainstream media, as Atton (2007) notes, sometimes also borrow alternative media techniques, such as, for example, blogging and the use of “ordinary” people as sources and news gatherers (p. 24). Fuchs (2010) demonstrates how it might work the other way around, when alternative media also make use of mainstream strategies and structures, deploying commercial techniques and professionalized marketing (p. 183). Fuchs (2010) argues that for the media to be considered alternative, it is enough to stay on the alternative side only in the area of content (p. 183).

The category of alternative media encompasses different theoretical typologies. There are approaches (Atton, 2002) that distinguish between the process (self-managed, self-owned, collective organization, alternative distribution) and the content (critical, counter-hegemonic, alternative genres), as well as approaches that distinguish between alternative media being 1) a part of civil society, 2) an alternative to mainstream, 3) media serving the community, and 4) rhizomatic media (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008, p. 7). A number of other approaches includes a distinction between alternative content, alternative channels, alternative sources and alternative values (Rauch, 2007); as well as a relational multilevel approach that defines alternative media as counter-hegemonic

that can emerge on the macro-level of societal function, the meso-level of organizations and/or the micro-level of news content and producers (Holt, Figenschou & Frischlich, 2019, p. 862).

The most common component among all approaches is the challenge of the status quo and the production of counter-hegemonic representations (Fuchs, 2010, p. 178; Jeppesen, 2016, p. 55; Pickard, 2007, p. 12). This is the characteristic this study uses in its analysis of Russian APJ, along with the rejection of the alternative vs. mainstream binaries.

The final theoretical view is understanding of alternative media as being opposite to professional media. Atton (2007) argues that alternative media “tend not to be produced by professionals, but by amateurs who typically have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists” (p. 18). Such forms of alternative media challenge professional practices of journalism, including credibility, expertise and exclusive authority of professional journalists, as well as professional notions of objectivity (Atton, 2007, pp. 17-24). Alternative journalism, according to Atton (2003), replaces “an ideology of ‘objectivity’ with overt advocacy and oppositional practices” that emphasize first-person, eyewitness accounts by participants and anti-hierarchical forms of organization (p. 267). These practices suggest “an inclusive, radical form of civic journalism” that is opposed to elite-centered notions of journalism as a business (Atton, 2003, p. 286).

Institutionalization of objectivity and professionalization within the Western context became a necessary feature of “legitimate” journalism. Professional norms of objectivity, impartiality and detachment were embraced by the Western mainstream news media (Schudson, 2003). In Russia, on the contrary, mainstream media traditionally adopted the role of a state’s servant. The core of Soviet journalistic professionalism incorporated a robust literary tradition and encouraged journalists to express personal opinions in their articles, “responding to a normative demand of communist ideology for a journalist to be an active citizen and propagandist of the Communist party line” (Vartanova, 2012, p. 138). Even in post-Soviet times, Trachtenberg (as cited in Vartanova, 2007) argues, the Russian media system barely has anything in common with the western “tradition that sees proper functioning of the mass media as a fundamental element of civil society and of the system of representative democracy” (p. 131). In politically and culturally specific national settings (that oppose the western notion of separation of state and civil society), the idea of professionalization with its group autonomy, public service and shared norms became an alternative to the dominant perception of journalism in Russia. That is why the aforementioned elements of the Atton’s theory pointing to the alternative vs. professional binaries are not applicable for the non-democratic context of contemporary Russia. Instead, by proposing the term APJ and conceptualizing the type of alternative media that stresses its professionalism, this study hopes to provide an insight on the alternative journalism in non-Western contexts and open up a discussion about possible avenues for development of APJ.

## Methodology

The main objective of this study is to understand the identities, the practices and the relationship with the audience of Russian alternative professional journalists. The main research question is three-fold:

**RQ1:** Who are the people who practice APJ?

This question seeks to find out the values they share, the ideals they believe in, the role in society they ascribed to themselves and their motivation for doing journalism.

**RQ2:** How do they do their work?

This question aims to find out how do they choose stories, sources and what their working methods are.

**RQ3:** How does the audience consume and use APJ work?

This question investigates how the audience perceives alternative professional journalists, what role it inscribes to them and what it expects from them, as well as to what extent the social groups marginalized in Russia use APJ outlets as a public forum for challenging the status quo and fighting for their rights.

To answer these questions, the author uses a combined methodology that Singer (2017) called a “triangulating method” (p. 208). Current variation of this method encompasses: 1) participant observation, 2) in-depth interviews and 3) discourse analysis. This combination allows to investigate the cases through the production-text-consumption circuit and contextualize them by using a unique insight obtained during one-on-one conversations. The research focuses on two populations (journalists and audience) and draws on four key ethnographic sites.

### APJ Projects Under Examination

Some of the new APJ projects launched in recent years have already obtained huge public interest and millions of viewers; while others choose to work for a niche audience.<sup>1</sup> This research studies the operation of the online Moscow-based TV channel *Dozhd* and the online Latvia-based project *Meduza*, as well as their local counterparts *Afontovo* and *Prospect Mira* in Siberia. They are online-based; they challenge the official discourse; the government pressures them; they have found the ways to maintain their editorial autonomy; and they adapt a particular professional culture of “Western objectivity,” which is different from the culture of the current Russian mainstream journalism. In what follows, there is a brief introduction of the outlets from the APJ sample and the material conditions that allowed these alternative media to emerge.

*TV Dozhd (TV Rain)*: Its owner, Natalya Sindeyeva, is a journalist who launched it in 2010 with the financial help of her husband, Alexander Vinokurov, a businessman. At

the time, it was the only alternative to the state-controlled television. In 2014, during the crisis in Ukraine, the channel's coverage was an important counterweight to state propaganda. However, 2014 was the year when *Dozhd* was almost shut down. In 2019, it was still on the market, broadcasting almost entirely online and available only by subscription. By late 2019, *Dozhd* had about 50,000 subscribers.

*Meduza*: It was founded in 2014 by a group of journalists who resigned from their jobs at *Lenta.ru* after the owner of the outlet—oligarch and Putin ally Alexander Mamut—fired editor-in-chief Galina Timchenko. The team of journalists considered the firing of Timchenko to be an act of censorship in response to how *Lenta.ru* was covering the Ukraine crisis. They left in protest over Timchenko's firing. Later she registered a new outlet in Riga that started as a mobile application and online aggregator where news was selected in a manual mode by the professional journalists who perform fact checking and relevance evaluation. It also creates its own journalistic content, specializing in investigations and analysis. *Meduza*, however, does not reveal the name(s) of its investor(s).

*Prospect Mira*: This is a privately-owned online project in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk that also keeps the name(s) of its investor(s) secret. The uniqueness of *Prospect Mira* is in the way it appeared. On its website, the project is introduced as “the only non-standard city outlet that grew entirely from the social network.” “Evolving from the page in VK, we could keep open-heartedness of the informal web projects. We draw attention. We are not afraid to test new formats, to be ironic, to criticize or to praise,” reads the opening statement on the website (Labunsky, n.d.).

*Afontovo*: This TV channel was one of the first private regional media outlets of post-Soviet Russia. A group of media professionals founded it in Krasnoyarsk in 1992. In 2010, due to its unprofitability, the channel stopped broadcasting. In 2011, a local media businessman, Igor Yusma bought it. In 2015, due to “financial crisis in Russia,” as the owner explained, a part of the *Afontovo* team was fired. But instead of selling or shutting down his media asset, Yusma invited a team of professional journalists from another Siberian city, Tomsk. A couple of months prior to the offer, those journalists lost their TV station, *TV-2*, the most renowned regional channel in the country. It was shut down by the government in January 2015 for its unbiased position and critical reporting.

The protocol of *participant observation* focuses on the components of editorial decision-making, such as moral and ethical struggles of journalists; relationship with sponsors, sources, government officials; how the editors and owners treat sensitive topics; and how financial problems affect the performance. In some of the media outlets, besides being present in the newsrooms, control rooms and studios, the researcher also shadowed reporters “in the field” and accompanied them to informal gatherings (in the cafes, informants' apartments, etc.). Watching the ways in which members of the community interact and perform their practices illuminates not only how the discourse of professional norms and ideas got inhabited and mobilized, but also what material infrastructure is available and what constraints restrict the desired performance. Overall, the researcher observed work of the journalists over the course of one year, from June 2018 to July 2019.

Another ethnographic method used for the journalism population is *in-depth interviews*. They were semi-structured and lasted from one to three hours. The researcher conducted 31 initial interviews and multiple follow-up interviews from June 2018 to July 2019 in Latvia, Moscow and Siberia. Most of the interviewees participated in the research on condition of anonymity, so all names in the publication are changed if not stated otherwise. This method allowed the informants to reflect upon their professional practices and formulate their role conception and understanding of professional norms and values.

Finally, the audience research method has also been used. This data serves as a supplement to help analyze the main body of data. The audience population sample includes people from Moscow, Krasnoyarsk and Blagoveshchensk who consume the news products made by APJ and those who do not. The protocol of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews included snowball sampling within the following demographic groups: males/females aged 18-25, 25-45 and 45-plus. Interviews lasted from one to more than three hours and, besides questions of media consumption, touched on the issues of education, politics, social life, public participation, leisure time, and work. Overall, the researcher conducted 42 initial in-depth interviews with further follow-up conversations over the course of one year. This approach allowed the researcher to understand how the APJ content has been interpreted and who the consumers of APJ are.

## Results

### RQ1: Who are the people who practice APJ?

In response to RQ1, the ethnographic data points to two groups of alternative professional journalists. The first group is comprised of accomplished, famous professionals in their late-40s who left mainstream outlets around 2014 and found asylum in APJ projects. The second group is young dreamers in their 20s who grew up watching journalism produced by those who are mentoring them now.

The editor of *Meduza*, “Arkadii”, calls himself and his colleagues who adventurously moved to Latvia “journalists in exile.” He started his career by working for the Saratov newspapers and experiencing “all the hell, poverty and corruption” of the regional media on the 1990s. In 2002, *Kommersant* invited him to work for its regional bureau. In 2005, he moved to Moscow to work as *Kommersant*’s Moscow reporter. Seven years later, when the Kremlin-aligned billionaire Alisher Usmanov bought the newspaper, “Arkadii” resigned. His friends invited him to join *Lenta.ru*. And when its editor-in-chief was fired, he decided to retire from reporting, left Russia and became *Meduza*’s editor in Latvia.

“Yan” also abandoned the spotlight of the reporter’s position in the post-Crimean years. He worked for the mainstream *NTV* and *REN-TV*. When he resigned, he came to *Dozhd*. He recalls, “When I came to *Dozhd*, I have been more than cynical, battered and disappointed journalist. And I found my rehab here. I regained freedom, excitement, innocence and belief in my profession.”

Both “Yan” and “Arkadii” mentor young reporters who have never experienced working



in a regime other than Putin's. "Arkadii"'s mentee "Anna" received her degree in journalism from Moscow State University. In elementary school she thought that a journalist is a person that talks and writes about issues that other people are scared to talk about. In her career choice, Anna was influenced by Western culture. In her childhood, she read American novels and watched Hollywood movies where journalism was depicted as something noble. One of the films she recalls is "Erin Brockovich". She was also inspired by the work of the American investigative journalist Nellie Bly, who in 1887 wrote her expose of the brutality and neglect at the Women's Lunatic Asylum in New York City. Now "Anna" is *Meduza's* Moscow reporter. She says that it is her dream job: "If *Meduza* ceased to exist, I would not know where else to go. Now that I know how it is in the ideal world, I would not be able to compromise my professional values and ideals."

"Yan"'s mentee "Lidia", a *Dozhd* reporter, in her childhood wanted to write books and to be a detective. Journalism seemed to neatly combine both. When time to enroll in the university came, most of "Lidia's" peers chose schools of economics and public administration; "Lidia" and some of her close friends chose journalism. "We were all dreamers. We were people with ideals," "Lidia" recalls. During her first internship at the state-owned *Channel One* her dreams met the harsh reality: "It was very hard in terms of both the team and the level of freedom." Even though the state network offered good money, Lidia did not stay. In 2014, the year of Crimea crisis, she graduated. *Dozhd* became her first employer.

**RQ2:** How do alternative professional journalists do their work?

### **Group autonomy.**

In response to RQ2, the ethnographic data identifies a set of professional norm and values shared by the informants. Both groups of alternative professional journalists share the same professional ethos, particularly cherishing the value of professional autonomy. At a time when group autonomy is under serious threat, one of the ways to practice it is solidarity among group members, as happened in the Golunov case. He was backed up by dozens of other alternative professional journalists who launched online protests and organized rallies outside the police headquarters that were joined by almost 20,000 supporters. Another prominent example of the act of journalistic solidarity relates to Golunov's investigation of Moscow's funeral mafia that was tied to his arrest. When the news about his arrest first broke, *Meduza* invited Golunov's fellow media professionals and friends from other outlets to finish his work. A team of 16 journalists from seven media outlets teamed up with *Meduza*, which coordinated the collaboration. On July 1, 2019, the investigation about the Moscow funeral industry and its ties to high-ranking FSB officials (Golunov, 2019) was simultaneously published in more than 30 media outlets in Russia and abroad, including Russian mainstream media (such as *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti*) and foreign outlet (such as *The Independent*, *BuzzFeed* and *Der Spiegel*). Golunov's investigation occupied the top position on the Russian internet among all news published that day ("Rassledovanie Golunova" ["Golunov's investigation"], 2019).



In order to maintain autonomy, alternative professional journalists developed their own strategies to deal with the structural constrained. In Krasnoyarsk, alternative professional journalists constantly experience pressure from officials, who often call *Afontovo's* editor-in-chief before the broadcast with demands to change the script, re-edit the video or even ban the entire report. If the editor-in-chief argues, the authority blackmails her, threatening to impose on the outlet “all sorts of administrative pressures.” Then, she does everything to make their communication with her miserable, so that the next time they think twice before calling her with their demands. Most of the times this strategy works; and the officials call the owner of the channel directly. He lives in Spain and is often out of reach. Another way that *Afontovo* deals with the pressure is to agree to ban a story from broadcasting, but to leave it on the network’s website and social media. Officials usually care less about what is published online, taking broadcast content more seriously.

### **Role conception and role performance of alternative professional journalists.**

Mellado (2017) explains journalistic role conception as the way journalists perceive and talk about their roles and norms they are supposed to follow in their practices. It is an ideal that they are striving for. They learn this ideal concept at journalism schools or from their mentors. However, sometimes in the real-life environment journalists have to perform something different, and that is what is considered to be role performance (Hallin as cited in Mellado, 2017, p. xii). Combination of both participant observations of journalistic practices and interviews with the journalists allowed to reveal the gap between alternative professional journalists’ role conception and their everyday role performance, as well as define the main components of their identities. The study found a revealing discrepancy between the way they discursively construct their journalistic norms and the way they perform their profession. An important conflict that the data identified might be the tension between “the neutral observer and the civic activist.” These two sets of practices are not mutually exclusive and are simultaneously present in the daily routine of journalists from the sample, yet discursively they compete. Activists are ardently rejected by the alternative professional journalists as unprofessional and biased. This insistence on professionalism derives from three traditions: the U.S. normative tradition, elements of civic journalism and practices of Soviet journalism.

#### ***U.S. normative tradition.***

Commitment to the U.S. normative tradition of impartiality, active critical journalism, and public interest reporting was adopted during the short “golden era” of post-Soviet journalism (Vartanova, 2012). Experienced alternative professional journalists recall that impartiality began to break down during the presidential elections in 1996, ending the “golden era” of post-Soviet journalism. That year, journalists took a stance against the communist candidate Gennadii Zyuganov and supported Boris Yeltsin who was not capable of serving the second term due to his medical conditions. Yeltsin eventually resigned before his term expired and appointed Putin as his successor. Then journalists realized that taking

political sides and neglecting norms of impartiality during Yeltsin's second presidential elections in the long run made them contribute to Putin's regime and his attacks on press freedom. That moment in the history of Russian journalism influenced the current role conception of alternative professional journalists who reject an activist posture in the public sphere and strongly articulated their belief in objectivity. "Arkadii" learned norms of objectivity when he started working for *Kommersant*:

I am all for objectivity and impartiality regardless of what personal opinion or emotional experience I have about any issue. When I come to see a doctor, he or she does not tell me that he or she is a member of a particular political party. The doctor asks how I feel. So, I do the same. Even though we are not fans of the current political regime, but when it comes to the text, I need view points of all sides of the story. And if one of the sides refused to comment, then the refusal is also a comment. In this sense, I really like our objectivity. I understand emotions of the American journalists who took a stance and put caricatures of Trump on the cover pages. I do understand them as a human being, but I do not understand them as a professional. (Personal communication)

"Anna" claims herself as an adherent of the objectivity norm in a way it was understood and practiced by Politkovskaya<sup>2</sup>:

It seemed so cool to me how she objectively depicted both sides of the conflict. She didn't omit anything, didn't write that the Chechens were monsters; she just wrote very humanly. I like when the text is written with respect, but also with the proper skepticism. (Personal communication)

It is interesting that for her role model in terms of objectivity, "Anna" chose the journalist who was also a human rights activist. Being an activist means having a particular position and taking action on the social issues, which contradicts the detached position of a neutral reporter. Justifying her role conception of objectivity, "Anna" says:

*Meduza* just thinks that people have the rights that have to be respected. It is not something oppositional; it is humanism. If you say that in prisons and mental asylums human rights are not obeyed, you are not an oppositioner, you are just a normal human being who wants other people to be treated with dignity. It is not about politics. (Personal communication)

Denying issues of human rights as political, "Anna" tries to renounce herself from the possibility to be labeled as activist, which would oppose her role conception. Her professional practices, however, reveal traits of civic journalism.

### **Traits of civic journalism and practices of the Soviet journalism.**

These two components have several characteristics in common. In my analysis, they are related to the proximity of the journalists to their audience. Some practices of civic jour-

nalism and Soviet journalism correlate with the Dzyaloshinskii's (2011) third model of the position of journalists *within* the audience. Thus, for example, the publisher of *Prospect Mira* identifies himself as a member of the community that his outlet serves. He says, "We need to balance the negative picture, otherwise it would be impossible for all of us to stay sane. We live here and we are in this together."

The traits of traditional Soviet concept of journalism as "a derivative of power" (Pasti, 2005, p. 103) is particularly tangible in the Russian regions, where the audiences have much closer relationships with their journalists. Often times, local alternative professional journalists use their "power position" to ensure what they understand by social justice on the micro level. Consider, for example, an episode from the Afontovo's newsroom. One of the reporters, "Kira", received a phone call from viewers, old ladies who were asking that they cover a story about a stolen front door in their community. Local authorities could not install the door for several weeks, the coldest weeks of that Siberian winter. "Kira" went to the ladies and filmed the report. The day after it aired the door was finally installed. Using her position, Kira performed a trait of the Western civic journalism and re-enacted practices of Soviet journalism, when reporters advocated for their readers, viewers and listeners communicating their requests to the state and party officials (Roudakova, 2018). Kira and her colleagues also volunteer for the Krasnoyarsk search party called Liza Alert. Every weekend they look for missing people in the local forests and invite their audience to join. Some journalists participate in squads of amateur firefighters in Siberia and around Moscow.

Besides volunteering, those who adopt a civic journalism approach organize campaigns for social causes, charity events, fundraising and protests.<sup>3</sup> Engaging in advocating for community issues, alternative professional journalists act like political players. However, they still discursively insist on their adherence to the norm of objectivity and neutrality. Some of them acknowledge their occasional departure from neutrality, justifying it by their editorial mission and audience expectations. For example, "Yan" gives an interesting explanation why he decided not to publish/broadcast a report on the criminal past of Pavel Grudinin who ran for president in 2018. Yan considered it unfair to give *Dozhd* subscribers the content that they could get for free in the mainstream media that were already executing Kremlin's order to ruin Grudinin's reputation. In his opinion, it would look like the Kremlin also paid *Dozhd* to spread the propaganda message. For him it was not self-censorship or a declaration of a political position; it was professionalism, which encompasses editorial choices and understanding of the channel's vulnerability and competitive advantages.

**RQ3:** How does the audience consume and use APJ work?

### **Relationship with the audience.**

In response to RQ3, this study identified some common patterns of media consumption, namely: TV viewership is dramatically decreasing; most of the interviewees get the news through search engine algorithms (that are influenced by Russian state officials); many are getting information from social media opinion leaders; most of the interviewees do

not trust mainstream media and are interested in alternative content.

Consider, for example, an anecdote from the audience research. Tatiana, a travel agent in her 50s from Krasnoyarsk, said she rarely watches mainstream networks. Tatiana and her husband turn them on only when they want to “laugh at the facial expressions of those who are constantly on the screens” (personal communication). In March 2019, the researcher, Tatiana and her husband were in their living room watching the opening ceremony of the Winter Universiade on *Channel One*. The couple was curious why Putin’s face looked displeased and why the local governor and mayor were not in the broadcast even though they were present at the ceremony and were sitting next to Putin. Tatiana evaluated the broadcast as “ridiculous political theater” and turned her attention to her smartphone, specifically the Instagram feed and local messengers through which Krasnoyarsk dwellers share news and opinions.

The gap between state propaganda messages and real life experiences made people curious enough about alternative content that they started searching online and even producing themselves. Many people from the sample who live in the provincial towns get their news from local groups organized within chat messengers (i.e. WhatsApp) and social networks’ groups (i.e. Facebook and VK) where they also post information if they witness, hear or learn something.

The spread of social media networks and messengers contributes not only to the growth of offline public participation organized via online platforms, but also to the distribution of the APJ work. The majority of the members of the audiences of APJ from the sample primarily get APJ content by coming across the links to particular pieces in their social media newsfeed and then sharing those links further. This model of two-step flow communication (Merton & Lazarsfeld, 1948), in which opinion leaders play a gatekeeping role, also works for the less politicized audience members, who learn about the APJ work from celebrities and bloggers they follow on social media.

Satisfying audience’s needs and interests is very important for alternative professional journalists, particularly for the subscription-based outlet. *Dozhd*’s sustainability depends entirely on the number of subscribers, who are, as “Yan” puts it, “hostages of their habits,” who want to get a particular agenda. “Yan” explains, “*Dozhd* audience is charged to believe that Putin is the executioner. They want to endlessly hear that. And of course it is hard to keep the balance between what we want professionally and what our viewers expect to see.” It goes both ways. Some members of the audience blame alternative professional journalism for liberal bias, considering as such presence of both sides of the story, in which the official side usually does not sound convincing.

In the Golunov case, expectations of his supporters revealed an important conflict between journalists’ roles of neutral observers and civic activists. People who rallied, in response, hoped that the protests would extend into the public movement against police brutality. However, when Golunov was released, *Meduza* called upon the public not to attend the march that was planned for the next day. *Meduza*’s editor-in-chief Ivan Kolpakov (2019) wrote,

About the march. Our position is: we fought off the attack on our guy, thanks everyone. This is our common victory, a result of the incredible cooperation of the people. But we are not practicing activism and we don't want to be the heroes of resistance, sorry. (para. 21)

This statement caused public dissatisfaction. One of the protesters commented on Kolpakov's statement: "I read that *Meduza* doesn't do activism. Excuse me, but how come? What were those protests, petitions, duties by the courthouse if not activism?"

The fact that the public has chosen alternative professional journalists as the leaders of the public resistance said a lot about their mobilizing potential and growing influence in the public sphere. However, alternative professional journalists have been reluctant to acknowledge their active position, being scared to be blamed for their bias and political involvement. How we can interpret this observation and what implications the findings of this research might have for the future development of the Russian alternative journalism will be discussed in the final part of the paper.

## Discussion

The findings spark a set of discussion questions united by the theme of ideology of the Russian APJ. In Western contexts, scholars who study alternative media tend to align themselves with a political ideology. Pickard (2007) argues that alternative media can be right-wing. Fuchs (2010) insists that alternative media must have leftist social justice goals. Neither of these ideologies would make sense in contemporary Russia, where political right and left mean something completely different from the Western understanding of those concepts. Left is associated with the Communist past, party censorship, Stalin's purges and economic hardship of the periods of stagnation. Right is often understood in connection with the liberal reforms of the 1990s, privatization and oligarchy. None of the sides of the Western political spectrum has even slightly positive connotation in the Russian settings. As the findings demonstrate, alternative professional journalists strongly reject the idea of being in opposition to the current regime or being Putin's critics. Thus, the question of APJ ideology can not be discussed through the lens of the traditional Western theoretical tools. Instead, the author argues that the ideology of Russian APJ is "objectivity."

The norm of objectivity that the Russian alternative professional journalists worship came from the U.S. normative tradition, where objectivity entails "writing and organizing the material so as not to express or suggest a preference for one set of values over another" (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987, p. 46). It also means writing "not what journalists think, but what their sources say" (Sigal as cited in Manoff & Schudson, 1986, p. 8). Schudson (1978) explains that objectivity meant that "a person's statements about the world can be trusted if they are submitted to established rules deemed legitimate by a professional community" (p. 7). Thus, objectivity in Western tradition is tightly connected to the professional group autonomy. Moreover, my informants were reluctant to talk about those issues from the critical standpoint and were defensive when I was trying to challenge their belief in objectivity.

Alternative professional journalists religiously believe in the norm of objectivity that they almost never fully experienced, but have been always striving for. This idea reminds them of the dawn of the post-Soviet journalism and gives them hope that professionalism (in the way they imagine it) is achievable. Alternative professional journalists shield themselves by this discourse of objectivity that serves them as a way to separate their professional group from the mainstream journalists who adhere to a different model; a way to discursively position themselves outside of the system, not in opposition to it (not as counter propaganda with another political charge). Aside from making them feel hopeful and good about themselves, the ideology of objectivity also serves as a way to protect themselves by avoiding accusations of activism and biases against the regime that might attack them at any time.

In the course of the last couple of years, the Kremlin tried to obtain control over the Russian segment of the internet. In 2019, the government passed the “sovereign internet” bill and implemented laws about “fake news” and decried “blatant disrespect” of authorities, making it easier for the government to block websites critical towards public officials (“First Russian,” 2019). In addition, after people felt empowered by Golunov’s release, the state became more violent towards protesters and organizers, who now get not only severely beaten by the police, but also arrested and imprisoned for voicing their position in public (“Massovye zaderzhaniya” [“Mass arrests”], 2019).

The gap between discursive commitment to objectivity and the role performance of the elements of civic journalism might be a reaction to the state’s attempts to scare journalists and activists and discourage public participation. It might be that for the same reason, out of the instinct of self-preservation, alternative professional journalists, who won the important battle over media power in the summer of 2019, decided to strike the flag, recede and worship objectivity.

## **Conclusion**

In the post-Crimean years, technological advances and political conditions of the Putin’s regime contributed to the emergence of a community of APJ that operates almost solely online and perceives itself as a marginalized social group. APJ demonstrates that the current Russian media system is not entirely controlled by the Kremlin and that flexibility of digital settings allows resistance against the rigid structures of the regime that employs traditional mainstream media to reinforce its power hierarchies. By moving their operation online, alternative professional journalists managed to spill online activism into the offline reality of the streets of Russia, where shadows of possible social change became more distinct. However, alternative professional journalists did not accept the role of civic activists given to them by the public. Their refusal to lead a resistance, ignited by them, opened up debates about journalistic activism and its ethical components. By this denial, alternative professional journalists distinguish themselves from the propagandists who are far from being objective. However, claims of alternative professional journalists’ commitment to the norm of objectivity are not fully consistent with their role performance, which also includes some traits of the Soviet journalism and the Western conception of civic journalism that alternative professional journalists actively deny as present in their

practices. Discrepancies between role conception and role performance, and justification of those discrepancies by the discourse of professionalism serve as a strategy to manage pressure from the state and circumvent structural constraints require further analysis.

By examining APJ practices in the digital environment and the ways that they reconfigured power relations within the society, this article makes a theoretical contribution to the studies of alternative journalism (Atton, 2003; Jeppesen, 2016) in non-democratic regimes and the development of public spheres in non-Western contexts. It challenges the taken-for-granted theories about Russian journalism (Arutunyan, 2009; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2018) by offering a new interpretation of the post-Crimean media system, in which APJ plays a very special and promising role, though currently it still occupies the periphery of the media system.

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## Notes

1. Some of the APJ outlets appeared recently are *Project* (<https://www.proekt.media/>), *The Bell* (<https://thebell.io/en/>), *MediaZone* (<https://zona.media/>), *Colta* (<https://www.colta.ru/>), Open Media (<https://openmedia.io/>), *VDud* ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMCgOm8GZkHp8zJ6I7\\_hluA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMCgOm8GZkHp8zJ6I7_hluA)).
2. Anna Politkovskaya was a Russian journalist and human rights activist who reported on political events in Russia, in particular, the Second Chechen War. On October 7, 2006, she was murdered in the elevator of her apartment building. Those who ordered the assassination are still unknown.
3. Within a variety of the alternative media in Russia there are several projects that openly position themselves as civic journalism. However, they are not in the current sample. The most prominent and successful civic journalism projects are *Takie Dela* (<https://takiedela.ru>) whose motto when they launched in 2016 was “We will bring back a subject into journalism” and *MediaZona* (<https://zona.media>). They organize fundraising and charity events.





## #MarchForOurLives: Tweeted teen voices in online news

***By Kirsi Cheas, Maiju Kannisto and Noora Juvonen***

*In February 2018, a school shooting in Parkland, Florida led to a new student movement advocating for stricter gun laws. This article examines whether and how Generation Parkland has transformed public discussion on gun violence through Twitter activism. This article argues that in most media, the social media activism of Generation Parkland was taken seriously. However, the ideological biases of the news media have continued to affect coverage and play a role in the framing process, and there are still generational power hierarchies that shape the mediated voice of Generation Parkland.*

A growing number of teenagers are questioning the ability of politics to change things, and they are increasingly willing to use their voices to enact social change. Young people have often been at the forefront of social movements, but in 2018 they dominated social media conversations and news coverage, forcing politicians to respond (e.g., Pimentel, 2018). Social media was their most potent organizing tool and a way for them to get their angry voices heard. However, the coverage of their tweeted voices in online news has been entangled in multiple power hierarchies between consumers and professional journalists, citizens and politics, and different generations and ideological orientations.

In February 2018, a mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, led to a new student movement—March For Our Lives—advocating for stricter gun laws. This article examines how Generation Parkland has reframed public discussion on gun violence through Twitter activism. On the one hand, this article analyzes the ways in which the use of tweets in online news has challenged the existing power hierarchies; on the other, it examines how journalistic practices and ideologies

at the same time shape the sourcing and framing of news on youth activism. More specifically, the research questions of this article are: 1) How did Parkland youth use social media to get their voices heard? 2) How did the tweeted teen voices become subject to ideological divisions shaping the coverage in different online news media? 3) How were intergenerational power hierarchies negotiated in the coverage of Generation Parkland?

The concept of generation is used in this article because it has important implications for the activism of the Parkland students, including their experiences and skills and attitudes, especially in the use of social media. The researchers use Generation Parkland as an analytical concept even though Parkland youth don't call themselves this.

A social generation paradigm has gained increasing currency as a method in analyzing young people's relationship with the life course (e.g., Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Even though there is also considerable criticism of generational research (e.g., Burnett, 2003; France & Roberts, 2014), the researchers found the concept of generation useful in capturing the combination of experiences, skills and attitudes that identify the driving forces behind the Parkland activism. The concept of Generation Parkland provides a means to define Parkland activists by their place in the life cycle and by their membership in a cohort of individuals born at a similar time. This concept locates Parkland youth within specific sets of technical, social, cultural and political conditions (Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Generation is commensurate to the different socialization experiences of individuals; generations exist as specific collective identities (France & Roberts, 2014). According to the Pew Research Center, anyone born from 1997 onward is part of Generation Z (Dimock, 2019, para. 5). What is unique for Generation Z is that social media, constant connectivity, and on-demand entertainment are largely assumed (Dimock, 2019). These new generational categories, like the Generation Z, describe the relationship between young people, the Internet, and politics (Bessant, 2014, p. 6).

According to Seemiller and Grace (2019), members of Generation Z see violence all around them. Whether online, in their schools, or in their communities, many have a sense of fear and anxiety for their own safety and the safety of others (Seemiller & Grace, 2019, p. 30). Theoretical development of Generation Z is still a work in progress, and it has limitations such as recognizing the influence of power, especially in different social contexts. However, the anxiety and exposure to incessant violence associated with the Generation Z does capture the experience that is central to Generation Parkland. Even to such an extent that many of the Parkland students have identified themselves as part of a "mass-shooting generation," referring to their experience of having lived their entire lives in the shadow of mass shootings and in anticipation of them. By calling themselves a mass-shooting generation, they reframe the larger gun debate along generational lines. Through its elaboration of the concept Generation Parkland, this article contributes to the broader theoretical concept of Generation Z, clarifying specific ways in which this generation's experiences of violence are communicated, and situated in relation to hierarchies between different generations in public debates.

Twitter enabled the Parkland students to participate in U.S. gun debates without third parties, such as media outlets. In doing so, the youth were able to destabilize established, generational power hierarchies. This article examines whether and how journalists were willing to use the tweeted frames of Generation Parkland in the coverage. Journalists must increasingly consider the values that elevate news stories in online environments, where readers happen upon news incidentally, and how these values might differ from traditional journalistic ones (Hermida, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2017). The degree to which the emergence of Twitter as a news source has affected the gatekeeping function of journalism has been of particular interest to researchers, as the role of Twitter has morphed over time (Groshek & Tandoc, 2017; Russell, 2019; Xu & Feng, 2014). In their study on the uses of the #Ferguson hashtag in the aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown, Bonilla and Rosa (2015) pointed out that social media participation allowed protestors to contest mainstream media frames that vilified young shooting victims. Through participation in social media campaigns, activists could draw attention to the discussions about U.S. gun culture and structural violence toward Black people that the media was sidestepping.

In their study of the Parkland youth's activism, Jenkins and Alejandro Lopez (2018, p. 8) offer a similar view into the disruptive effect of the social media strategies used by March For Our Lives: "Social media offers American youth a 'no permission necessary' means of routing around traditional gatekeepers who limit what can be said and thus what can be done." In conservative rhetoric, open discussions about gun legislation are often framed as indecorous and disrespectful to victims, but in the case of the Parkland shooting, networked forms of protest allowed students to circumvent common media narratives and focus attention on legislation (Duerringer, 2016; Jenkins & Alejandro Lopez, 2018). This article examines how alternative frames constructed by Generation Parkland and expressed through Twitter managed to counter and replace media frames that have traditionally dominated coverage of school shootings in online journalism.

The research demonstrates that even though the voice of the Parkland youth has certainly been recognized and included in the online media, many news outlets have used it to support their own ideological frames rather than providing space for the critical frames of the young people. In other words, this article suggests that even though tweeting has given new possibilities for Generation Parkland to participate in the public debate, there are still generational power hierarchies, which are articulated through dominant frames imposed upon the frames promoted by the Parkland youth. Ultimately, this analysis at the intersection between social media and news media draws lessons for the future of journalism on how the use of tweeted teen voices can help journalists to create inclusive, intergenerational, and ethically sustainable coverage.

The research in this article builds on the premise that social media can provide a valuable tool with which young people can promote their views in the news. However, this tool is not powerful enough to overcome the ideologies shaping the production of news. Hence, the research investigates how the tweeted teen voices became subject to ideological divisions across online news media.



Another premise of the research is that young people constitute a marginal group with less possibilities to get their voices heard in the mainstream media than older generations, whose representatives have had the chance to establish positions and power in society. Therefore, the research examines how intergenerational power hierarchies were negotiated in the coverage of Generation Parkland. This study explores these questions:

**RQ1:** How did Parkland youth use social media to get their voices heard?

**RQ2:** How did the tweeted teen voices become subject to ideological divisions shaping the coverage in different online news media?

**RQ3:** How were intergenerational power hierarchies negotiated in the coverage of Generation Parkland?

## Method

In this study, online news articles produced and published by different media in the U.S., as well as tweets integrated in these online news articles were analyzed. The core sample consisted of online news articles published by the *Miami Herald*, *The New York Times*, CNN, Fox News, and Breitbart News. While the first three news outlets have been characterized as leaning toward the political left, with their audiences representing more or less liberal views, Fox News has been regarded as promoting more conservative perspectives. Further along the spectrum, Breitbart News supports alt-right views (See AllSides Media Bias Chart, 2019; see also Mitchell et al., 2014).

The keywords used in the initial search on these sites were “Parkland school shooting” and “March For Our Lives,” specifying a time period between February 14, 2018 (the day of the shooting) and February 28, 2019 (to also include coverage on the one-year anniversary of the shooting and its aftermath). The findings were organized by relevance rather than order of appearance. The final core sample was narrowed down to a total of 280 news articles on the basis of stratified sampling, giving greater emphasis to those news sources that had produced more coverage (*Miami Herald*, *The New York Times*, Fox News, CNN) than media which had produced a smaller amount of coverage, such as the *New York Post* and the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*. Inclusion of the *Sun-Sentinel*'s coverage in the sample is important, given that in April 2019 it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in the category of Public Service for its Parkland-related reporting. According to the Pulitzer Prize board, the prize was given to this local newspaper for “exposing failings by school and law enforcement officials before and after the deadly shooting rampage at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School” (Pulitzer Prizes, 2019, para. 1). The *Sun-Sentinel* sample consists of “the most relevant coverage concerning the Parkland shooting,” according to their editorial board. For the *Sun Sentinel*'s archive, the findings were organized based on relevance (rather than chronological order) and the researchers analyzed the most relevant coverage. The *New York Post* places greater emphasis on entertainment than the other media analyzed here, thus allowing the research to take into account how this aspect was also manifested in the coverage

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of the March For Our Lives movement. According to the AllSides Media Bias Chart, the *New York Post* has right-leaning coverage, similar to Fox News, whereas the ideological leaning of the *Sun-Sentinel* has been debated. This sample, encompassing 30 news articles from each source, 60 in total, is more limited than the core sample of 280 articles in total. However, even this limited sample is sufficient to reveal the fact that tweets did not play a substantial role in their coverage.

After completing the collection of samples, a systematic coding scheme was developed to analyze how the voices of the Parkland youth and their tweeted frames were used in online coverage of the Parkland shooting. According to Merry (2020), framing is an especially important approach in the study of gun policy and related discussion (p. 16). Frames can be defined as persistent patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusion (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). According to Goffman (1974), definitions of social situations develop in accordance with frames of understanding. By framing, politicians and other social actors use journalists to communicate their preferred views on issues to a wider public, while journalists both use their sources' frames as well as superimpose their own frames upon those of their sources in the process of producing news (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010, p. 1). In this article, deductive and inductive approaches to frame analysis were combined with frame analysis. Through a deductive approach, a number of dominant frames that have been found in mainstream news coverage concerning school shootings could be identified, such as "Culture of Violence," "Public Health," "Constitutional Rights," and "Guns Don't Kill, People Do" frames (e.g., Callaghan & Schnell 2001, Merry 2020, Steidley & Colen 2016). Melzer (2009) argues that the National Rifle Association's (NRA) success in blocking gun control legislation is attributable to the fact that the organization began to systematically frame threats to gun rights as threats to all individual rights and freedoms (p. 224). Through an inductive approach, the research examines how the Parkland youth constructed new critical frames, reaching beyond and countering these dominant frames. All the frames were identified by specific keywords, catch phrases, and other expressions identified during initial close reading of the sample, before proceeding to systematic coding of the whole news sample. With the help of the NVivo software, all the frames were coded vis-a-vis frame sponsors and type of source (i.e., journalistic interviews, tweets, or other sourcing practices).

To detect nuances in the coverage, the research differentiates between those Parkland students promoting stricter gun laws and more conservative students, who defended gun rights, the voices and views of other social actors with "anti-gun" and "pro-gun" stances, including the parents of the Parkland students, school staff, local and national politicians and representatives of interest groups like the NRA, which is one of the most influential interest groups in U.S. politics. All these potential frame sponsors were identified with a specific code.

Additional data was gathered via the free Twitter API, focusing on the accounts of 24 students affiliated with the #MarchForOurLives movement, using the March For Our Lives official website as a source for these accounts. This data allowed the research to compare the tweeting activity of the Parkland student activists against the online news coverage; with the NodeXL Pro program, up to 3,200 tweets posted from each user

between January 1, 2018 and February 22, 2019 were gathered. These tweets were analyzed quantitatively focusing on the peaks of tweeting activity.

Another important source material used when analyzing the voices of the Parkland student activists were books written by the students: *Glimmer of Hope* (Winterhalter, 2018) and *We Say #Never Again* (Falkowski & Garner, 2018). Through these books, this study was able to capture their authentic voice and the message they were aiming to deliver through social media.

## Findings

The research demonstrates that the voice of the Parkland youth has been included in all of the online media analyzed. Hence it can be said that Generation Parkland has a voice that is taken into account by other generations in gun-related public debates. However, the research found that many news outlets used this voice to back their own ideological frames rather than allowing the original frames of the young people to come forth. This tendency to use the voices of the young activists to support the established positions of the news outlets could be detected on both sides of the left-right political spectrum.

As to the first research question “How did Parkland youth use social media to get their voices heard?” this study found that the Parkland youth engaged actively on Twitter and used social media to channel their criticism directly at those policy makers who they held responsible for gun-related misbehavior. They formulated a uniform message around the need for stricter gun control, centered on their specific generational experience of gun violence, which individual activists then echoed in their tweets. With their online and offline activities, the Parkland student activists succeeded in prolonging the life of the Parkland story in the news cycle. This differs significantly from the typical ways in which the media have responded to incidents of school shootings.

As to the second question, “How did the tweeted teen voices become subject to ideological divisions shaping the coverage in different online news media?” the study found that when the tweeted voices were incorporated in news texts, journalists framed the tweets in ways that caused their original context to get lost, and the youth’s frame was subjected to more powerful frames imposed by the journalists and their other sources, such as politicians or representatives of the NRA. News outlets also appeared to pick out tweets from those youths whose political views correlated with the outlet’s, excluding tweets from students who held opposing views.

As to the third question, “How were intergenerational power hierarchies negotiated in the coverage of Generation Parkland?” the study found that news outlets were eager to include the voices of Generation Parkland in their coverage. In their core message, the Parkland students emphasized their authority to speak on the subject of gun violence due to their personal experiences with it, and the notable number of tweets from Parkland students quoted in various outlets suggests the news media recognized their authority as well. However, the Parkland activists also became victims of conspiracy theories spread on right-leaning media outlets, which undermined the activism of

Generation Parkland and questioned the students' ability to operate on their own.

### **Tweeted Teen Voices Shaping the Media Coverage**

Generation Parkland, born in the early to mid-2000s, tend to intuitively understand how to deploy social media to demand action on gun violence, and they know how to disseminate their message on social media in real time, using platforms that are familiar to them. Unlike the survivors of the 1999 Columbine school shooting, who came of age before the era of social media, or the survivors of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, who were too young to speak out at the time, Generation Parkland is characterized by having both the means and the skills to share their message independently. Indeed, the Parkland youth have made it a point that the media should not own their narrative; it is their story, and thus it should be told by them and not by anyone else (Kasky, 2018).

During the first few days after the Parkland shooting, several students from Marjory Douglas High School formed a group and started to formulate their joint message: the U.S. needs stricter gun laws to prevent similar incidents from happening again. Following a series of mass shootings in the United States in recent years, there has been interest and attention in new legislation but this has led to almost no action, despite numerous polls showing widespread public support for measures like strengthened background checks and the banning of certain types of high-capacity gun magazines and military-style assault rifles. The NRA opposes most proposals to strengthen firearm regulations, and it is behind efforts at both the federal and state levels to roll back existing restrictions on gun ownership. Through their efforts to reach beyond the ideological debates shaping coverage on school shootings in the mainstream media, the Parkland youth constructed a critical #NeverAgain frame. While adopting influences from other commonly used "anti-gun" frames advocating restrictions to gun laws, the #NeverAgain frame built directly on the experiences of Generation Parkland, placing the Generation's lived experiences and trauma at its center. Their #Never Again frame challenged the common frames that limit discussion to issues like mental health and the Constitution. Instead, they addressed the value of the experiences of the youth who had been involved in the shootings, and they argued that no other young people should ever again have such experiences.

Students from the March For Our Lives group reflect on the role of social media in their movement in *Glimmer of Hope* (Winterhalter, 2018). According to John Barnitt, Sarah Chadwick and Sofie Whitney, social media has given a platform to say what they want to say and reach millions of people: "We always had a voice, but now we had an audience" (2019, p. 46). Their posts on social media soon led to hundreds of media inquiries, and the students were pushed into the spotlight. Chadwick describes seeing President Donald Trump's tweet in which he offered his condolences, thoughts, and prayers directly after the Parkland shooting. This made her so angry that she tweeted that the students didn't want thoughts and prayers, they wanted policy and action. That was one of the first tweets that went viral, receiving around 300,000 likes.

Another angry voice that soon went viral belonged to Emma González, who gave a

speech at an anti-gun rally on February 17, 2018, where she confidently declared that theirs is going to be the last mass-shooting generation. The frames sponsored by the NRA and right-wing politicians such as the Constitutional Rights and Guns Don't Kill, People Do frames were claiming that tougher gun laws do not decrease gun violence. By countering these frames with the phrase "We call B.S.," Gonzalez introduced the #NeverAgain frame and its potential to shake traditional approaches to gun violence through the lived experience of Generation Parkland. Calling for young people in favor of stricter gun control to take action and speak out against school shootings, González gained over a million followers on Twitter with her strong message. Wang et al. (2016) found that the tweets with powerful social messages had the ability to go viral and were helpful in making a networked social movement more prominent.

The Parkland activists found a clear target for their anger; they criticized the NRA and politicians who had accepted money from the group and thus lent it support. Twitter allowed the students to address representatives of the NRA and other politicians and policymakers directly, which they also did without fear. For instance, on February 23, Chadwick tweeted: "We should change the names of AR-15s to 'Marco Rubio' because they are so easy to buy." This was a day after another Parkland activist, Cameron Kasky, had asked Senator Rubio (R-FL) if he would continue to take campaign donations from the NRA. Because Rubio's answer at the town hall did not satisfy the activists, they continued the discussion on Twitter, directly addressing Rubio and further challenging him on his non-committal answer.

Social media was not just a channel for expressions of anger. Parkland activists used it as a means to coordinate activities and as a platform for messages of resistance and hope for change. The school shooting in Santa Fe on May 18, 2018 and other mass shootings after Parkland triggered reactions from the Parkland students. They sympathized, but also expressed that they were fighting on behalf of these new victims, strengthening the #NeverAgain frame by backing it up with lived experiences of more and more school shooting victims of their generation. People were also contacting the Parkland activists through social media, asking how they could donate and contribute, and what the students were going to do next (Jenkins & Alejandro Lopez, 2018, pp. 7–8; Whitney & Duff, 2018, p. 18).

Analysis of Parkland news coverage reveals that peak media attention on the shooting coincided with the Parkland youth's peak activity on Twitter. The duration of the coverage and tweeting activity are also linked. (See Figures 1 and 2). In other words, their tweets and other social media posts shaped the news media's coverage of the Parkland shooting.

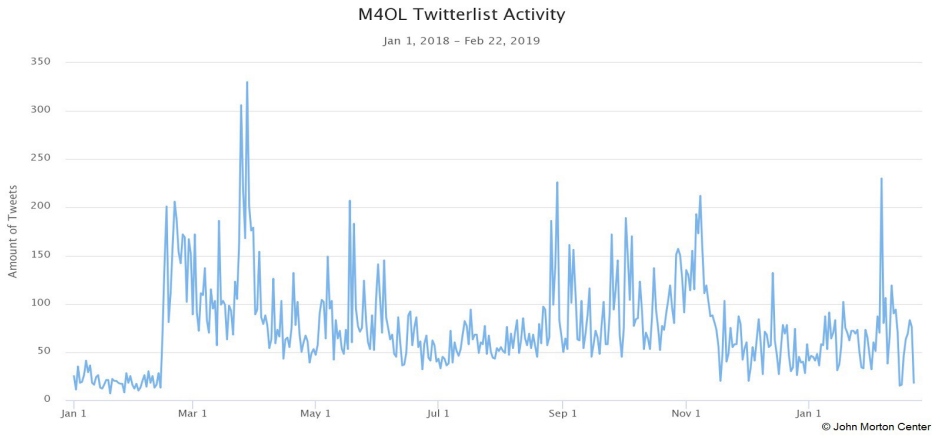


Figure 1. The peak tweeting activity of the #MarchForOurLives activists.

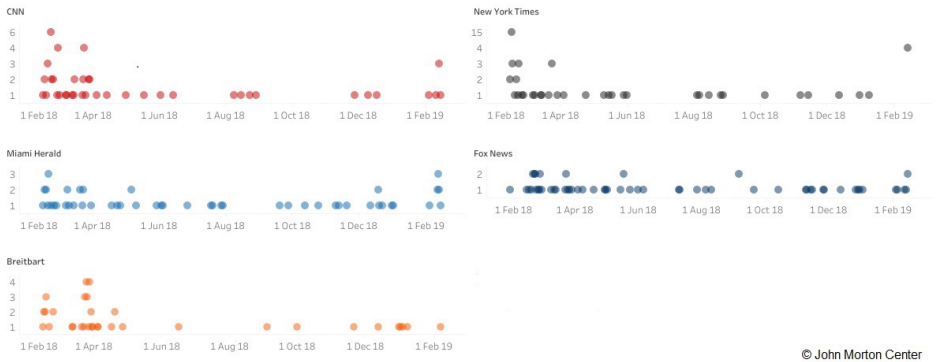


Figure 2. Timeline of the news coverage related to Parkland shootings.

The peaks reflected in Figures 1 and 2 reflect the Parkland shooting (February 14) and its monthly anniversaries; another school shooting in Santa Fe, New Mexico (May 18, 2018); primary elections in Florida (August 28, 2018) and U.S. midterm elections in November. However, most of the peaks are connected to the activities of March For Our Lives movement, including the March For Our Lives demonstration in Washington, D.C. (March 24, 2018), the M4OL YouTube announcement (April 3, 2018), the National School Walkout (April 20, 2018), the Road to Change tour announcement (June 4, 2018), and the announcement of the Glimmer of Hope book (September 6, 2018). By the time the March For Our Lives protest took place in Washington, D.C. on March 24, 2018,

the movement had gained millions of followers online and offline, reflected in 880 sibling events organized throughout the United States and around the world.

With their online and offline activities, the Parkland student activists succeeded in prolonging the life of the Parkland story in the news cycle. This differs significantly from the typical ways in which the media have responded to incidents of school shootings. A school shooting typically evokes a reaction sequence of a sudden moral panic but just as quickly the event is buried or fades away (Cohen, 1972, p. 9; Lindgren, 2011).

Likewise, The Trace, a non-profit organization that covers firearms issues, found that the Parkland shooting commanded more attention than previous attacks; in the three months following it, news articles mentioned gun control-related terms 2.5 times more than after previous mass shootings (Nass, 2018). A clear majority of the students' tweets quoted in the sample of online news articles combined their lived experiences with sophisticated demands for more gun control, showing that through the #NeverAgain frame, the students were able to bring attention to many aspects of the gun control debate. The tweets covered a wide range of issues, including appeals to politicians and the NRA, calls for action, and debates about legislation from conservative proposals to stopping school violence to the repeal of the Second Amendment implying pre-existing right to keep and bear arms. Usually, coverage of most mass shootings is quickly eclipsed by other news. According to The Trace, two high-profile events sparked by the attack—a student walkout on March 14 and the March For Our Lives rally on March 24—attracted a large volume of media attention, pushing the coverage rate above the initial peak (Nass, 2018). In the research material, there is a similar peak in the Parkland students' tweets used in online media coverage (see Figure 3).

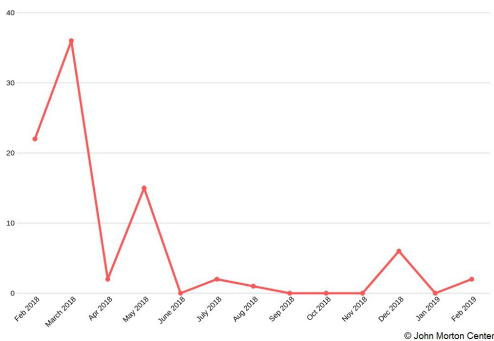
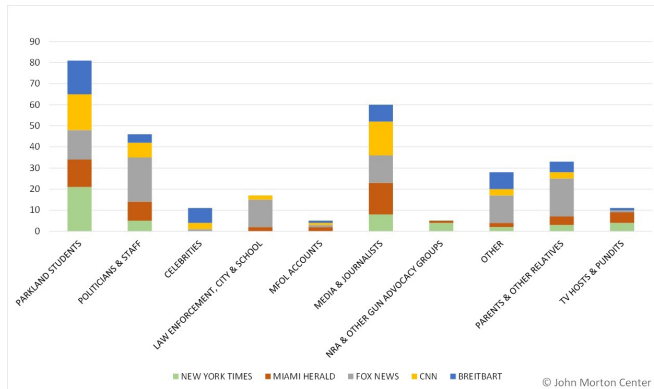


Figure 3. Number of the Parkland students' tweets per month used in online media coverage between February 14, 2018 and February 14, 2019.

Looking at the different tweet sources included in the online news coverage, one can see that the share of tweets by the Parkland students was substantial. In the coverage of *The*

*New York Times*, CNN, and Breitbart News, the students' tweets had the highest share (see Figure 4). In particular, *The New York Times*, CNN, and the *Miami Herald* were explicit about their goal of letting the Parkland youth tell their story in their own words; for this reason, they turned to Twitter.



**Figure 4.** Tweets from different sources in online Parkland coverage.

Note MFOL stands for March For Our Lives.

Studies show that when journalists gather information through Twitter, they tend to still rely mostly on the accounts of other media outlets, law enforcement officials, and other established sources of information. Journalists show reluctance in using the Twitter accounts of private citizens as sources. (Moon & Hadley, 2014; Wallsten, 2015). In addition, according to journalistic ethical codes, reporters should use heightened sensitivity when dealing with juveniles (SPJ Code of Ethics, 2014): young people should be given the chance to be heard but journalists should be aware of their vulnerability, since juveniles may not be able to recognize the ramifications of what they say (Foreman, 2016, p. 218).

Taking into consideration the journalistic tendency to rely on official news sources, it is remarkable how clearly the voices of the underaged Parkland students were heard in news coverage. They also inspired and enabled other teen voices to be heard as well. The *Miami Herald* published stories in collaboration with The Trace, assembling a team of more than 200 children and teenagers to research and write short portraits of every underaged victim. This way, over time, the #NeverAgain frame was sponsored and expanded in collaboration between different sectors of Generation Parkland. This leads to a more detailed discussion of how the tweeted teen voices became subject to ideological divisions shaping the coverage in different online news media.

### Ideological Divisions in Tweets

In addition to the March For Our Lives movement, other students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School became active after the shooting. Among them was Kyle Kashuv,



a conservative student who became an advocate for gun rights. On Twitter and in his many public talks, Kashuv claimed that it is the people who are the issue, not guns. This way, through their lived experiences, voices representing Generation Parkland also contributed to the traditional ideological frames in the school shooting coverage such as the “Constitutional Rights,” and “Guns Don’t Kill, People Do” frames (Callaghan & Schnell 2001, Merry 2020; Steidley & Colen 2016). These conservative frames also became significant through contributions from some parents of the Parkland kids, especially Andrew Pollack, father of senior Meadow Pollack, who was killed in the shooting. It is hardly surprising that Kyle Kashuv and Andrew Pollack were frequently quoted in conservative Fox News and alt-right Breitbart News coverage of the Parkland shooting and its aftermath, whereas the young student activists of March For Our Lives, advocating for stricter gun laws, were cited and their causes promoted more frequently in the more liberal press (i.e., CNN, *The New York Times*, and the *Miami Herald*). Likewise, Fox News and Breitbart News regularly featured Kashuv’s and Pollack’s tweets (see Figure 5), whereas the tweets by Sarah Chadwick, Cameron Kasky, David Hogg, and other representatives of the March For Our Lives movement were more frequently included in the more liberal press.

As the previous section notes, *The New York Times*, CNN, and the *Miami Herald* explicitly emphasized the importance of respecting the authentic narrative of the Parkland youth, recognizing the traditional media’s limitations and turning to Twitter to hear their real story. In this sense, journalists did not want to impose any ideological perspective. Instead they made an effort to hear and to understand the voices of the students. Nonetheless, the fact that they wanted the story of March For Our Lives activists rather than that of Kyle Kashuv, and that the conservative media was interested in Kashuv’s views rather than those of the March For Our Lives activists, reflects persistence of the traditional ideological boundaries. At the same time, the primary purpose of the use of the #NeverAgain frame in the liberal press seemed to be to ridicule competing media who were ignoring or downplaying the frame, rather than placing primary emphasis on this frame’s potential to transform the gun debate.

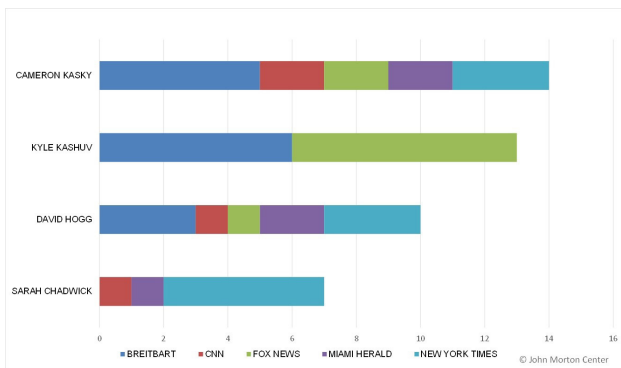


Figure 5. Different students’ tweets in online news outlets.

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Some cases may appear to be exceptions, but a deeper analysis shows that they are not. For instance, on April 5, 2018, Breitbart News published an article titled “Black Parkland Students Feel Ignored by Peers, Media” (see Nolte, 2018). The story, building on the HuffPost’s interviews with Black students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, describes:

The black Parkland students held a press conference last week. Tyah-Amoy Roberts, a black student who spoke at the press conference, told Refinery29, “We feel like people within the movement have definitely addressed racial disparity, but haven’t adequately taken action to counteract that racial disparity.” She said that March For Our Lives organizers did not invite her to any of their meetings, adding, “They’ve been saying, but they haven’t been doing.” The students were also angry at the media for focusing on everyone but the black students. (Nolte, 2018, para. 4-5)

At first glance, one might think that Breitbart News is actually concerned about the fate of Black Parkland students. However, as it is known to promulgate alt-right views, a much more likely explanation is that the criticism is actually directed at the liberal media, given its focus on the anti-gun students in the spotlight of the March For Our Lives movement.

Journalists also openly reflected on their own work and shortcomings. For instance, *The New York Times* story titled “Reporting on a Mass Shooting, Again” (see Symonds & Brooks, 2018) emphasized that even though mass shootings occur quite regularly, the newspaper’s journalists are cautious to avoid routines that would make coverage of shootings sound too similar. This story also addresses the newspaper’s critical approach toward biased sources on social media: “Twitter, especially, can be a fruitful source of details—but also a dangerous one, susceptible to being clouded by misinformation, both unintentional and not.” (Symonds & Brooks, 2018, para. 10) Thus, while the newspaper acknowledges the importance of following Twitter to understand the specific message of the Parkland activists, it also expresses awareness of the fact that tweets by policymakers and other actors often reflect biased views and must be treated with caution.

Some of the tweets incorporated in the coverage did not seem relevant for the Parkland activists’ cause. Instead, they were used in the news for other purposes. For instance, when David Hogg, one of the principal activists in the March For Our Lives movement, did not get accepted into college, he was mocked by Fox News host Laura Ingraham. Hogg posted a tweet urging advertisers to boycott Ingraham’s show, forcing Ingraham to publicly apologize to him. CNN then interviewed Hogg in its “New Day” broadcast, with host Alyson Camerota shouting, “What kinds of dumbass colleges don’t want you?” By claiming that any college that did not accept Hogg was “dumb,” the CNN host offered support to Hogg’s efforts as an activist and the March For Our Lives movement. At the same time, CNN claimed distance from Fox News, which had mocked Hogg for not being accepted to these colleges. Other media, including Breitbart News, leveraged the rivalry between CNN and Fox News by drawing attention to the traditional ideological divisions between these different media—and away from gun reform and the original

frames that the March For Our Lives movement was trying to advocate for.

### Generation Parkland and Intergenerational Power Hierarchies

This final section of the article discusses whether the different media took Generation Parkland seriously in their coverage of the school shooting. In all of the media analyzed, the parents of the March For Our Lives founders and other active parents at Marjory Stoneman Douglas School were regularly interviewed. However, in articles focusing on March For Our Lives, the actual chance to speak was predominantly given to the students themselves. The media that most frequently gave a voice to parents rather than their children was the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*. As a local news outlet, it focused more on the investigation of those found guilty of misconduct—such as the authorities who did not enter the building to protect the kids, even when hearing an active shooter in the building—and local politics rather than the national debate on gun politics, in which March For Our Lives was involved.

In most media, the young age of the Parkland students did not undermine their credibility, and their Twitter and other social media activism was also taken seriously, as manifested in the various tweets integrated within the news coverage. In terms of all the tweets included in the coverage of the Parkland shooting and its aftermath, the tweets of the students had the biggest share at 27% (see Figure 6). However, it is important to point out that the March For Our Lives account represented only 2%. Individual voices like stories and opinions fit better with journalistic narratives and attract more media attention. The messages of grief of the parents mainly included political messages rather than personal grievings. Overall, the media seemed ready for Generation Parkland to claim their space in the news.

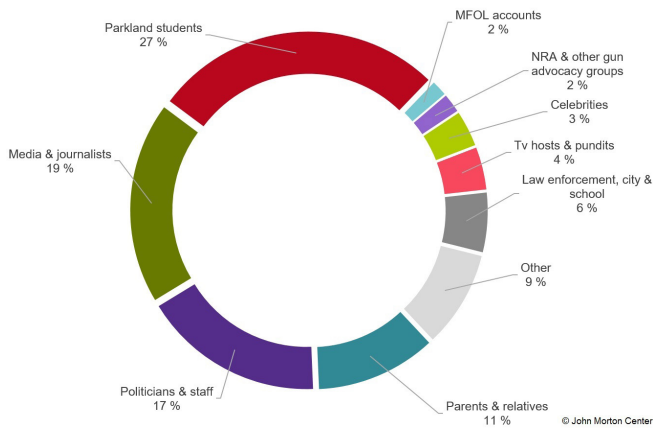


Figure 6. Percentage of tweets from different sources used in online media coverage of Parkland.

There were also some pessimistic stories, however, which seemed to paint the goals of the Parkland students as idealistic and unrealistic. On the anniversary of the school shooting on February 14, 2019, the “year after” reportage by many media addressed the unmet goals, arguing that many of the expectations for Generation Parkland had been too high. For instance, in its story titled “Parkland: A Year After the School Shooting That Was Supposed to Change Everything” (see Mazzei, 2019), *The New York Times* interviewed students and others who pessimistically stated: “I haven’t gone back to school because I haven’t seen a change” (Mazzei, 2019, para. 14). It is nonetheless worth noting that these stories did not ridicule the March For Our Lives movement or suggest that they should stop. Instead, many of the news articles gave support for the Parkland students’ continued fight, listing the accomplishments that they had achieved. A column published in the *Miami Herald* on March 21, 2018 recognized the failings of older generations, titled: “May the Parkland kids forgive us for failing them so miserably” (Pitts, 2018, para 1).

The most radical form in which the capacity and authenticity of Generation Parkland were underestimated was expressed by Breitbart News, which repeated the false claim that the Parkland youth were not even students but “crisis actors” exploiting a tragedy to question the nation’s gun laws. According to such conspiracy theories, the March For Our Lives activists were puppets who had been manipulated and coached by the Democratic Party and gun-control advocates. Claims were made that liberal forces in the FBI were trying to undermine President Trump and his pro-gun, pro-Second-Amendment supporters. Such theories were provoked by the remarkable public-speaking skills of many activists, such as David Hogg, which enabled them to make compelling arguments.

Conspiracy theories represent a way to create a credibility gap between Generation Parkland and its predecessors. As Breitbart News described March For Our Lives, “A movement sparked by the shooting deaths of 17 people at Parkland High School in Florida morphed into an adult-led anti-Second Amendment protest using the March For Our Lives teens to register voters” (Star, 2018, para, 1). Connections between media’s treatment of Parkland students and other youth activists, such as 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg, would be a thought-provoking line for possible future investigation. Breitbart News’s portrayal of the Parkland students as political puppets can be compared to the treatment of Thunberg by many conservative media outlets, which has included suggestions that the adults around the teenage activist are manipulating her for political gain.

While using Twitter to participate in political debate, the Parkland activists were exposed to negativity and belittling by both social media and online media outlets. Delaney Tarr describes the position of March For Our Lives student activists: “We’ve been propelled onto the national stage, where we are open to a level of criticism that no teenager should face. We are treated simultaneously like adults and children, neither respected nor understood” (Tarr, 2018, p. 23). Alfonso Calderón, one of the co-founders of #NeverAgain, expressed how the expectations leveled toward their generation are very hard:

I know that politicians have always screwed up,” he explained. “They have always said the wrong thing at the wrong time, and they’re still been taken seriously, time and time again, instead of being disavowed or disqualified for even holding an office after saying ridiculous statements. Meanwhile, my generation is - for example, Emma González, she’s an inspiration to us and she’s working for us, but, if she were to say something that was non-factual, you know she would be highly scrutinized by literally everybody, including the President. (Witt, 2018, para. 14)

Social media, which for teenagers is a common means to relieve stress, has turned into a new type of pressure for student activists, who feel that their every move is being monitored and that there are people waiting for them to make a misstep (Tarr, 2018, p. 23).

Many media outlets were explicit about their goal of including the voices of the Parkland students in their articles, and the large share of students’ tweets quoted shows that the voice of Generation Parkland was given weight in media coverage. However, generational hierarchies revealed themselves especially in conspiracy theories that questioned the ability of young activists to act on their own. The relationship between younger and older generations was recognized when the media portrayed the failings of older generations in building a better world for youth to live in. The Parkland students’ reflections on how their activism was received in the media show they are keenly aware of generational tensions that cause them to be treated as children while simultaneously facing intense pressure and scrutiny around their activism.

## Conclusions

Regardless of the background of the youth behind an anti-gun movement like March For Our Lives, conspiracy theories would probably abound. However, it is true that the founders of the March For Our Lives movement do come from a relatively wealthy area: in 2017, Parkland had a population of 28,900, the median household income was \$131,525 (compared to the U.S. national average of \$59,039), and Parkland’s poverty rate was 3.4% (compared to 12.3% nationwide) (DataUsa, 2017). While the liberal media have taken the students’ arguments, tweets, and speeches quite seriously, others have expressed suspicions about their educational advantage. Future research could advance this question by examining the possibilities for students with less privileged backgrounds to advocate stricter gun laws across traditional and social media. Do other youth activists pertaining to the Generation Z have similar possibilities as Generation Parkland to challenge the power hierarchy of generations?

There have been expectations that digital journalism would be more democratic, transparent, novel, and participatory than earlier news technologies. But as Zelizer (2019) has observed, expectations of democratic access and sharing for all have been unevenly realized in digital technology. The use of Twitter in news can contribute to more multi-voiced coverage and intergenerational dialogue, but only if the challenges related to the structural inequities and the questions of journalistic ethics are taken into

consideration in the use of tweeted voices in the coverage. When using tweeted voices, it is important to recognize the way the tweets produce stories: Instead of being told by individuals to clearly defined audiences, stories are told collectively, although not necessarily collaboratively, by large numbers of users. Through such collective actions, and the influence of elite users with a large number of followers, tweets can transform news coverage, but do not necessarily make it democratic and provide access to users with less social capital (Sadler, 2017).

This study has shown that the Parkland students' use of social media, Twitter in particular, has significantly shaped the media coverage concerning the Parkland shooting and its aftermath. They have had their voices and tweets quoted in leading national media such as CNN, *The New York Times*, and the *Miami Herald*. Their tweets and messages have also shaped the news agenda, leading journalists to formulate headlines and story angles recognizing the students' determination and permitting space and attention to their lived experiences on the matter. Other aspects that have often dominated the news, such as comments by politicians and authorities, have been reduced to secondary importance in comparison to the message of the students.

This said, the ideological biases of the media examined here have continued to affect coverage and play a role in the framing process, despite the voices of the Parkland students receiving a substantial share of space in online news. For instance, the more liberal sources CNN, *The New York Times*, and the *Miami Herald* systematically cited the Parkland activists pushing for more gun control, whereas the more conservative Fox News and alt-right Breitbart News frequently interviewed more conservative activists, critics of the March For Our Lives movement, and pro-gun parents. The alt-right and conservative media also explicitly expressed doubts about the credibility of the young activists. In this way, the media have not gone beyond their traditional ideological boundaries. Even when granting space to Generation Parkland, the media's positions have remained clearly liberal or conservative. For this reason, there was a strategic advantage and rationale to the students' use of social media as their primary means of communication, which allowed them to stay true to their own voice rather than having it filtered by mainstream media gatekeepers with their respective agendas.

It can be asked how influential the online activism of the Parkland students really was. Theories about so-called "slacktivism" posit that the use of social media for activism creates an illusion of engagement, discouraging participation in activism in offline environments (Morozov 2012). Jenkins and Alejandro Lopez (2018) argue, however, that although social media creates superficial engagement, it also makes it possible for youth to build strong social ties and generate shared perspectives, increasing the likelihood of offline action. As Gerbaudo writes, "contemporary forms of protest communication, including activist tweets, Facebook pages, mobile phone apps, and text messages revolve to a great extent precisely around acts of choreographing: the mediated 'scene-setting' and 'scripting' of people's physical assembling in public space" (2012, p. 40).

Only four days after the shooting, the Parkland students announced their plan to organize the March For Our Lives rally on March 24, 2018, inviting people to join

the movement. The fact that they were able to attract 800,000 people to the event in Washington D.C., in addition to countless sister demonstrations, suggests that their social media activism did increase offline action as well, engaging people who wanted to protest against gun violence and support action to prevent future school shootings. The Parkland youth's Twitter activism highlighted the stagnant nature of narratives around mass shootings and caused journalists to engage with the lived experiences and political opinions of school shooting survivors. Despite some negative coverage by conservative and alt-right media, most journalists allowed the voices of the activists to come through in a positive or neutral light.

The findings of this research draw lessons for the future of journalism. The use of tweeted teen voices can help journalists in their efforts to create inclusive—and in some ways intergenerational—coverage. However, a great deal still remains to be done before fully intergenerational and ethically sustainable coverage is achieved. Given that teens clearly have things to say, they need to be taken seriously as full members of the democratic society. Future research is needed to continue to address big themes such as ideological divisions and generational hierarchies that have been raised by the research in this article.

This study built on news coverage produced and published within a year of the Parkland shooting. Future research should examine more current coverage about the March For Our Lives movement and whether and how tweeted voices have become more voluminous or silent over time.

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## Send her back: News narratives, intersectionality, and the rise of politically powerful women of color

**By Carolyn Nielsen**

*This narrative analysis examined intersectionality and systemic awareness of racism in news coverage of President Trump's tweet telling newly elected congresswomen of color to "go back" to the countries from which they came and the subsequent Trump rally chant of "Send her back!" targeting Rep. Ilhan Omar. It looked across Traditional, Explanatory and Journalism 3.0 coverage. It found coverage broke with the neutrality norm in labeling the attacks as racist, but failed to acknowledge intersectionality. Only Traditional coverage provided systemically aware narratives about discrimination. Explanatory and Journalism 3.0 failed to fulfill their promised to provide context and audience-centered narratives.*

U.S. President Donald Trump's tweet telling four newly elected women of color in Congress' most diverse freshman class should to "go back" to the countries from which they came challenged journalists to produce coverage that contextualized his sentiments and to explain what this meant not only for those individuals, but also what it communicated to Americans who shared their identities. Trump directed his July 14, 2019 tweet at a group of women popularized in the news as "The Squad" (Sullivan, 2019): Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Massachusetts, the first African American woman elected to Congress from that state; Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York, who is Latina and, at 29, the youngest woman ever elected to Congress; and the first two Muslims elected to Congress, Rep. Rashida Tliab, D-Michigan, the first Palestinian American representative, and Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minnesota, the first Somali American representative (Center for American Women and Politics, 2019). Pressley, Ocasio-Cortez, and Tliab were born in the United States. Omar is a naturalized citizen and one of 29 members of Congress born outside the United States (Harrington, 2019). The tweets read:

So interesting to see “Progressive” Democrat [sic] Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world (if they even have a functioning government at all), now loudly and viciously telling the people of the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run. Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how it is done. These places need your help badly, you can’t leave fast enough ... (Trump, 2019)

Three days later, at a North Carolina rally, Trump singled out Omar, misstating that she had expressed admiration for Al-Qaeda and claiming she “looks down with contempt on hard-working Americans” (Flynn, 2019, para. 12). The crowd began chanting, “Send her back!” The second time that chant erupted, Trump paused his speech for 13 seconds and waited silently as the chanting amplified (Morin, 2019). The following day, Trump told reporters he had tried to stop the chant. “I disagree with it,” Trump said. “I wasn’t happy with that message... I didn’t say it, they did...” he said, referring to the crowd (Morin, 2019). But the day after that, Trump changed course in what *The Washington Post* called “part of a renewed attack on four minority congresswomen whom he has targeted as un-American” and praised the chanting crowd as “incredible patriots” (Wagner & Itkowitz, 2019).

Video of the rally dominated news coverage and ignited debate among pundits about whether the chant was racist. News coverage that had previously touted the barrier-breaking 2018 election that sent a record number of women of color into the halls of power now had to tell the complex stories of the bias they faced. The bias was not new. Since the campaign trail, journalists have documented Trump’s bigoted, essentialist attacks on many groups, including women, African Americans, Muslims, and immigrants from what he, during a meeting on immigration policy, called “shithole countries,” giving the examples of Haiti, El Salvador, and African nations, and adding that the United States should encourage more immigration from Norway (Davis, Stolberg & Kaplan, 2018). Norway is 83% white and 77% Christian (CIA Factbook, 2019). As a female, African American, Muslim immigrant from Somalia, Omar’s identity made her the only member of the squad whose identity positioned her at the intersection of each of those forms of oppression. How journalists, whose coverage has largely overlooked intersectionality (Ward, 2017) and the ways in which it multiplies bias and exclusion, explained this to audiences would help shape larger understanding (Van Dijk, 1991).

This study sought to explore coverage using narrative analysis (Kitch & Hume, 2008) and the lenses of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995; Hancock, 2016) (most often dealing with, but not limited to, race, gender, class and sexual orientation) and Critical Race Theory (Delgado, Stefancic, & Liendo, 2001) to interpret whether the coverage showed intersectional oppression, whether coverage labeled the tweet and the chant as racist, and whether the events were portrayed as interpersonal attacks or as endemic of larger, systemic racism. By stretching the sites of investigation beyond legacy news outlets,

this study sought to broaden journalism scholarship as the field has expanded to include news outlets that position themselves as embracing different values and offering something missing from legacy news coverage. It examined coverage of the “go back” tweet and the “Send her back!” chant in the Explanatory journalism of Vox, which promises to deliver context beyond daily events (Fink & Schudson, 2014), and the Journalism 3.0 reporting of BuzzFeed, which describes itself as putting the interests of the audience first in deciding what to cover and how to cover it (Shontell, 2012; Whittaker, 2004). This study compares their coverage to legacy, or Traditional journalism, which values a just-the-facts, elite-driven approach to chronicling events (Schudson, 2012; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Providing historical context and privileging the voices of lived experience help illuminate how bias manifests in larger, sometimes invisible systems of power rather than singular bad actors (Apollon, Keheler, Medeiros, Ortega, Sebastian, & Sen, 2014).

### **Intersectionality Largely Missing from Journalism, Scholarship**

News media play an essential role in how people understand those who are not like themselves (Saeed, 2007; Van Dijk, 1991). However, news narratives often fit people’s identities into singular, tidy boxes, and ignore aspects of identity outside of race and gender (Nielsen, 2013; Leung & Williams, 2019; Meyers, 2004; Meyers & Goman, 2017; Ward, 2017). This type of coverage flattens the consequences of bias rather than multiplying them and portrays one facet of identity as more significant than another (Hancock, 2007). Similarly, mass media scholarship has largely not attended to intersectional identities and has tended to focus one aspect of identity such as race, gender, class, or sexual orientation (Nielsen, 2012; Vardeman-Winter, Tindall & Hua, 2013).

Although intersectionality entered the scholarly literature in the 1990s, it has yet to be widely applied in journalism scholarship. Intersectionality describes the “simultaneous and interacting effects of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and national origin as categories of difference” (Hancock, 2007, p. 64). Intersectionality seeks to encompass the ways in which people are marginalized by more than one facet of their identities; that may also include religion—in this case, Islam, which has been regularly distorted, stereotyped, othered, and labeled as dangerous (Saeed, 2007). Intersectionality has been cited as the most important contribution to contemporary feminist scholarship (McCall, 2005). Categorizations that focus on one aspect and position the dominant group as the norm (male, or not; white, or not), distort identity (Crenshaw, 1995). For example, workplace reports often categorize the number of women and the number of “minorities,” which fails to accurately represent women of color. News narratives have tended to give primacy to race or gender (Gershon, 2012) or may mention both, but address them separately, failing to consider the multiplier effect (Hancock, 2007). An intersectional approach examines multiple facets of identity and how they work together.

Intersectionality addresses whose stories are told and how they are told. For example, the #MeToo movement rose to prominence in news coverage in 2018 after it was popularized by a white actress talking about assault and harassment. This ignored and negated the contributions of African American activist Tarana Burke, who started the movement 11 years earlier, but earned almost no news attention (Leung & Williams,



2019). Similarly, lack of coverage of missing and murdered indigenous women has been brief and scant (Gilchrist, 2010) compared to the voluminous coverage that has led to the coining of the term “Missing White Woman Syndrome” (Sommers, 2016). News narratives have tended to focus on aspects of identity, particularly race and gender, separately (Chmielewski, Tolman, & Kincaid, 2017; Cooky, et al, 2010; Meyers, 2004; Meyers & Gorman, 2017). As foundational scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw described, “The intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (1995, p. 40). When news media call attention to or emphasize one group, it communicates to audiences who and what is most important.

### **News Narratives Ignore and Question Bigotry**

When it comes to reporting on bigotry, journalism has a well-studied history of ignoring it or producing narratives that question it or reinforce stereotypes by overrepresenting African Americans as perpetrators in crime stories (Dixon & Linz, 2000), framing Muslims as dangerous “others” (Alsultany, 2012), and describing immigrants from Latin America in terms of infestation (Santa Ana, 2002). News narratives have largely addressed racism and other forms of prejudice in terms of individual beliefs and actions, rather than as something baked in to discriminatory systems of power, institutions, and policies from education to workplace to policing (Apollon, et al., 2014).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides an important lens with which to examine news narratives because it maps well onto the journalism field norms. Critical Race Theory recognizes racism as part of everyday life, a given, and not something aberrant (Bell, 1992; Essed, 1991). “Givens” are the opposite of newsworthy. CRT understands that objectivity and neutrality are questionable constructs that favor dominant group perspectives (Odartey-Wellington, 2011); both objectivity and neutrality are long-held journalism values. CRT asserts that stories told from the perspective of people living the oppression have the power to invalidate stereotypes (Delgado, et al., 2001; Matsuda, 1996). Journalism scholarship has shown those are the voices most often missing from coverage, including in coverage of politics (Zeldes & Fico, 2005). CRT posits that whiteness is treated as normative and people of color are described in terms of what they are not (Delgado, et al., 2001). This phenomenon of othering is well documented in journalism scholarship (Heider, 2010). CRT explains racism as institutionalized rather than interpersonal. News coverage has frequently portrayed racism as something that takes place in interpersonal encounters rather than something larger and manifest in systems of power. Coverage that is not systemically aware minimizes the impact of bias (Apollon, et al., 2014).

Contemporary coverage of racism has often treated it as an open question and adopted a “some say it was racist, others say it wasn’t” approach (Nielsen, 2020). In spring 2019, the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual, U.S. journalists’ primary resource for language guidance, made a significant update to its entry on race. It told journalists to stop using hedge words such as “racially insensitive” or “racially charged,” and provided this example, “Mississippi has a history of racist lynchings, not a history of racially motivated lynchings” (Brito, 2019, para. 5). CBS News attributed the change to a rise in major news stories about racism and said, the AP “said journalists should call an incident

racist if it is such, rather than tiptoeing around the word” (Brito, 2019, para. 1). Whether coverage was labeled as racist would signal whether coverage recognized racism as endemic to everyday life and not something surprising (Essed, 1991). Thus, whether news narratives mirrored the public debate and followed entrenched coverage patterns or followed the updated Associated Press changes was important to this analysis of whether news narratives were systemically aware.

### **Political Coverage Differs for Women of Color, Immigrants, Muslims**

A longitudinal body of work has documented substantial differences in news coverage of political candidates from marginalized groups, but most of these studies have focused on a single dimension of identity (Gershon, 2012). Studies comparing coverage of white female and male politicians have found new coverage focuses on male candidates’ issues positions and female candidates’ personalities and appearances (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose, & Weber, 2013; Harp, Loke, & Bachmann, 2016; Meeks, 2012). Coverage of male candidates of color has tended to focus on racial issues (Hatley Major & Coleman, 2008; Schaffner & Gadson, 2004). A significantly smaller and more recent body of scholarship has examined coverage women of color in politics. It has found that female candidates of color received the most negative news coverage (Gershon, 2012; Ward, 2017) including a focus on whether they would use their power to show bias against white people (Nielsen, 2013). Few studies have compared coverage of politicians’ immigration narratives, although a comparison of news coverage of Supreme Court Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Samuel Alito found that little attention was paid to Alito being the son of Italian immigrants, but the fact that Sotomayor was from Puerto Rico (a U.S. territory) received much attention (Everbach, 2011). A growing body of research is documenting Islamophobic bias in news narratives about Muslim politicians, including one that found news coverage of Omar focused significantly more on her faith than did news coverage of Tliab. The study posited this may be due to the face that Omar wears the hijab, a visible symbol of her faith, while Tliab does not (Bashri, 2019).

To put this in context, there has been little opportunity for journalists to cover women of color and/or Muslims in Congress. Women of color represent only 8.8% of the 535 members of Congress. The 2018 freshman class included the highest number of women of color ever elected, with 4% of the Senate and 9.89% of the House (Center for American Women and Politics, 2019). Fourteen members of Congress (2.6%) are foreign born, with most of them from Europe and Latin America, and two from African nations (Pew Research Center, 2019). Less than half of one percent (0.37%) of Congress is Muslim, with Omar and Tliab the first Muslims elected. Given the changing face of politics, how journalists cover these stories beyond barrier-breaking election night stories is important in terms of showing that an election does not mean the end of bigotry.

### **Explanatory and Journalism 3.0 Promise Something Different**

Journalism scholarship has largely defined the field monolithically. Most studies consider only legacy, or Traditional journalism, which values coverage that is detached, “neutral,” event-driven, and dominated by the voices of elites (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards,

& Rucht, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). News organizations based in other values systems have been labeled niche or alternative (Atton & Hamilton, 2008). However, as digital technologies have removed cost and production barriers and allowed new players to enter the field, it should not be assumed that emerging news organizations embrace Traditional values. This study compared coverage in Explanatory journalism, represented by Vox, and Journalism 3.0, represented by BuzzFeed (Ferree, et al., 2002; Nielsen, 2020), which are both built on the promise of providing the audience with something different than Traditional coverage, represented in this study by *The Washington Post*.

Explanatory journalism goes beyond chronicling daily events to more critically examine the histories, systems, and outside influences surrounding them. It strives to be more “assertive” and moves away “from cautious, formulaic, cut-and-dried conventional journalism” (Fink & Schudson, 2014, p. 9). This type of journalism is not new, but having a news organization, born-digital Vox, claim its mission is devoted entirely to producing this type of coverage is new. Explanatory journalism is a reporting style found within Traditional journalism, although not in daily coverage, because it clashes with long-held Traditional field norms. As James Carey wrote:

Explanation in daily journalism has even greater limits. Explanation demands that the journalist not only retell an event but account for it ... However, the canons of objectivity, the absence of a forum or method through which evidence can be systemically adduced, and the absence of an explicit ideological commitment on the part of the journalists renders the task of explanation radially problematic, except under well-stipulated conditions. (1997, p. 162)

In Traditional newsrooms, Explanatory journalism has most often been recognized as in-depth, longform coverage, rather than contextualizing daily coverage. This is reflected in the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, described as journalism that “illuminates a significant and complex subject” (Pulitzer Prizes, n.d.). In defining explanatory journalism in 1984, “... the [Pulitzer] Board signaled that the explanatory report’s primary topic should be a developed, unified subject, not simply issues” (Forde, 2007, p. 230). This study operationalizes Explanatory journalism in the broader terms of Fink and Schudson (2014) as providing context behind the daily events coverage, “It shifted from what politicians said to the political context in which they said it, implicitly or explicitly contending that the strategic or political context helped explain the politician’s policy pronouncements and other statements” (p. 6). Conventional stories focus on “who-what-when-where” stories and singular events whereas contextual stories provide deeper insights into other news and provide historical context (Forde, 2007). These definitions mirror the way Vox describes itself as:

... a general interest news site for the 21st century. Its mission is simple: Explain the news ... We live in a world of too much information and too little context. Too much noise and too little insight. And so Vox's journalists candidly shepherd audiences through politics and policy, business and pop culture, food, science, and everything else that matters. (Vox, n.d.)

In the context of the "go back" tweet and the "Send her back!" chant, Explanatory coverage would be expected to explain intersectionality, call out racism, and to go beyond "who said what" to examine the history of those phrases and to recognize how they might ripple out more broadly and systemically.

Journalism 3.0 leverages social media to monitor what the "everyday people" in the audience are talking about and report on those issues by centering their voices (Robischon, 2016; Shontell, 2012; Whittaker, 2004). These values are at odds with traditional newsrooms in which editors decide the news agenda, often based on what politicians are talking about, and reporters rely on elite sources (Schudson, 2012; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). BuzzFeed's "About" section explains:

Our mission is to report to you: We cover what you care about, break big stories that hold major institutions accountable for their actions, and expose injustices that change people's lives... We focus on reporting breaking news quickly and accurately and breaking down what the internet is talking about—from new memes to new forms of digital deception—in the language of the internet itself. (2018, para. 1)

In addition to these promises, BuzzFeed is an ideal site of investigation for this study because in 2014, author Ta-Nehisi Coates said BuzzFeed was producing the best journalism about racial issues (Coates, 2014).

In this study, Journalism 3.0 coverage would be expected to explore intersectionality, to directly label the tweet and the chant as racist, and to focus more broadly on how people of color, Muslims, and immigrant communities were affected by the statements as words that targeted them.

Traditional journalism is found in the print and online versions of legacy newspapers. It is known for its belief that journalists can be neutral storytellers (Borger, VanHoof, & Sanders, 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). This devotion to neutrality casts doubt on the existence of racism (Schudson, 2003; VanDijk, 1991). Traditional reporters are detached observers who see their job as to chronicle events that are happening within the halls of power and most of the sourcing centers on elites (Ferree, et. al, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 2012). *The Washington Post* is the exemplar for Traditional journalism in this study because it covers Congress as a primary beat and serves as a key national news source on national politics.

Thus, Traditional journalism coverage would be expected to ignore intersectionality, question racism, and to focus primarily on events and what elites were saying about them. It would also be expected to characterize racism in terms of interpersonal interactions rather than manifest in systems.

## Methodology

This study examined news narratives of President Donald Trump’s July 14, 2019 “go back” tweet and the July 17, 2019 “Send her back!” chant in three different national news sources from the day of the tweet and for a month after the rally. It used narrative analysis to compare coverage in Explanatory journalism, represented by Vox, Journalism 3.0, represented by BuzzFeed, and Traditional journalism, represented by *The Washington Post*. Narrative analysis takes note of the events and anecdotes in stories, how the story unfolds (including language used) and characterization of key players and how they interact with others (Kitch & Hume, 2012).

Narrative analysis was the best method to capture the initial events and explore how narratives unfolded. It is also well suited for comparative work because it looks for commonalities or differences in major themes to reveal values in coverage. Using this method, the researcher interprets connotative and denotative meanings, paying close attention to what manifest content suggests as a preferred meaning for the audience. This analysis followed the model of Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) of holistic-content reading, or reading the material and noting recurrent contexts to identify patterns that repeated or did not (Reissman, 1993). Articles were then compared across news outlet to answer these questions:

**RQ1:** How did coverage across the three news sources address intersectional identities/focus on multiple aspects of identity?

**RQ2:** Did coverage across the three news sources question whether the tweet and the chant were racist?

**RQ3:** Did coverage across the three news sources portray the tweet and the chant in terms of interpersonal or systemic racism?

**RQ4:** How did Explanatory and Journalism 3.0 coverage compare to Traditional coverage?

The study analyzed content from three nationally oriented publications. Vox and BuzzFeed are digital only. *The Washington Post* publishes online and in print. This study used only online news articles and focused on news organizations’ values rather than publication platform as the key point of difference. Vox labels itself as Explanatory journalism seeking to deepen understanding beyond events. It was launched on April 15, 2015 by founders Ezra Klein, a former *Washington Post* columnist, former *Washington Post* reporter Melissa Bell, and Matthew Yglesias who was a staff writer at *The Atlantic Monthly* and Slate. In 2017, Vox reported 29 million monthly unique visitors (Golis, 2017).

Vox's mission is to distill complex policy issues elites are talking about in ways the audience can understand. BuzzFeed, launched in 2006 by Huffington Post co-founder Jonah Peretti, was initially largely run by bots and known for featuring cat videos. BuzzFeed has claimed more than 5 billion monthly visitors across the many platforms it uses and devotes significant resources to news coverage (Robischon, 2016). BuzzFeed News launched in 2012 and now employs more than 400 reporters in 12 countries compared to *The Washington Post's* 16 foreign correspondents in 13 countries (Robischon, 2016). *The Washington Post* is the country's leading newspaper for coverage of national politics. Founded in 1877, the *Post's* website is accessed by 66 million unique visitors each month (*The Washington Post*, 2017). The *Post*, which had been family owned for 80 years, was purchased in 2013 by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who pledged to allocate significant resources to the *Post's* online endeavors. Additionally, the *Post* has twice won the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting and four times been a finalist.

The articles from all three news organizations were accessed using Google search strings and Boolean logic with keywords "go back" and "Ilhan Omar," then filtered by publication dates (i.e. site:vox.com AND "go back" AND "Ilhan Omar"). The search began with "go back" to capture how the story began with the president's tweet. (NewsBank and Nexis Uni do not index Vox or BuzzFeed and those news organizations' websites don't offer advanced search functions). Only staff-written news articles longer than 300 words were included because news briefs are not intended to have the same depth or complexity as news articles. In sum, 33 Vox news articles, 18 BuzzFeed news articles, and 50 Post news articles met the criteria and were analyzed. The unit of analysis was the article, including the headline. The disparity in the number of articles in each publication was not considered a limitation because the qualitative analysis focused on the dominant narrative aspects within each publication.

## Findings

This analysis revealed how coverage across all three news sources failed to address intersectionality, but did specifically call out and label racism. Only Traditional journalism coverage represented the tweet and the chant as systemic rather than interpersonal racism. Although Vox and BuzzFeed promise to provide context and cover issues as they relate to their audience, in the coverage of this event, *The Washington Post* came closest to providing that type of coverage.

### Intersectionality Ignored

RQ1 asked how coverage across the three news sources addressed intersectional identities. This study found that intersectionality was largely ignored. Vox coverage did not address intersectionality as Explanatory journalism would have been expected to. Rather, it relied on false equivalencies, for example, between Rep. Ilhan Omar and the "Lock her up!" chants targeting former Secretary of State and Trump 2016 presidential rival Hillary Clinton, who is white, Christian, U.S.-born and a former cabinet member and first lady. Other articles compared the "Send her back!" chant to Trump's tweet disparaging the home district of the late Rep. Elijah Cummings as "rat infested." Cummings was

an African American man, Christian, U.S.-born citizen, and venerated civil rights icon. Vox coverage selected one aspect of Omar’s identity, only gender or race, and did not explore the multiple ways her identity made her a target of bias.

BuzzFeed coverage primarily focused on race. A few articles looked at race and gender without exploring how they multiplied bias. A July 18, 2019 article headlined, “Before They Failed ‘The Squad,’ Democrats Failed Other Women of Color,” used examples of African American women who had faced bias in politics, such as former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, but did not explore the narratives intersectionally and focused on race:

Since the women of the Squad arrived in Congress—both through their elections and in their actions in chambers—they have helped shift the national conversation about race, in large part by taking it directly to the public via Twitter. Instead of having white-dominated media play referee between party leaders and white suburban voters, they’ve shifted the political conversation into something far more complicated. This includes calling out the spectrum of the way race influences politics: from the banality of everyday racism to the structures of white supremacy, both in policy and in narratives. (Dominguez, 2019, para. 15)

Like Vox, BuzzFeed coverage falsely cast the tweet and the chant as equivalent to bias against then-presidential candidate Julián Castro, who is Latino, Cummings, and the “Lock her up!” chant aimed at Hillary Clinton. Vox and BuzzFeed coverage were similar in their approaches to covering intersectionality.

*Post* coverage also focused on one facet of identity, primarily race, but was the only coverage to address xenophobia and Islamophobia. Gender was present in *Post* coverage to a lesser degree. *Post* coverage avoided the false comparisons to white women and men of color. Thus, *Post* coverage expanded the understanding of oppression to include faith and immigration status, but did not consider how they come together intersectionally to multiply oppression.

### **Racism Called Out**

RQ2 asked whether coverage across the three news sources labeled the tweet and the chant as racist or questioned whether they were racist. This study found that coverage produced by all three news organizations explicitly labeled them as racist. Whether the tweet and chant were labeled as racist was important to show whether coverage broke with the longtime practice of “that some say was racist” coverage that upholds “neutrality” and thus reinforces the belief that racism is questionable. Coverage that explored the context and history behind the rhetoric would have been systemically aware. All coverage labeled the tweet and the chant as racist, but there was also nuance in each outlet’s coverage in terms of systemic awareness.



Vox coverage described the tweet and the chant as “racist,” but most often portrayed them as directed at “liberal female” or “Democratic” Congresswomen, which focuses the attacks on personal political stances rather than marginalized groups. An article headlined, “New Polling Indicates Republicans Actually like Trump More Following Racist Tweet Controversy,” published hours before the July 17 North Carolina rally focused on a “Was that racist?” poll. The article reported:

...93 percent of Democrats and 68 percent of independents found the tweet offensive, while only 37 percent of Republicans did, according to the poll, which was released on Wednesday. Meanwhile, 57 percent of Republicans said they agreed with Trump’s tweets, while only 7 percent of Democrats did. (Kim, 2019, para. 4)

“Offensive” is not the same as “racist” although the article’s narrative conflates the terms. Agreeing with the tweets does not negate them as racist. The story also reported that the president’s approval ratings dropped 2 percentage points, focusing the “damage” on the president’s political power. Only one Vox article provided context when it covered the “long-used racist trope” Trump has leveraged against immigrants from Mexico and the Nation Football League’s Colin Kaepernick, who kneeled during the national anthem. Additionally, Vox used “racially insensitive” (a term labeled as problematic in The Associated Press Stylebook’s 2019 update) only once to describe words used by a fellow journalist. *The New York Times* deputy Washington editor Jonathan Weisman was demoted after he posted “a string of racially insensitive tweets” in which he suggested Democrats including Omar and Tliab weren’t really from the Midwest (Rupar, 2019, para. 5). Although the narrative was the same as Trump’s Vox coverage described Weisman’s words as “racially fraught territory.” (Rupar, 2019, para. 7)

By contrast, BuzzFeed coverage consistently labeled the tweet and the chant as racist and also referred to them as “white nationalism,” thus associating them with a dangerous political movement rather than Trump’s individual beliefs. Although this showed how Trump’s words might activate racist individuals, it did not show systemic awareness.

*Post* coverage described the president’s tweets and the crowd’s chant as “racist,” “historically racist rhetoric,” “racist and gendered,” “racist and xenophobic,” and “racist and Islamophobic.” Some *Post* coverage presented counter claims from conservative sources, which furthered the “racism as questionable” narrative. Only *Post* coverage reported that Twitter said the president’s words did not violate the company’s hate speech policy:

Researchers who study hate speech and harassment on social media, as well as activists who monitor how the platforms handle such issues, said that in Twitter’s first important test of its new policy, it had failed. (Timberg et al., 2019)

*Post* coverage also pointed out that the president’s words could have violated federal anti-discrimination laws. In a July 17, the *Post* reported that the president’s tweet used “language that the government uses as an example of workplace discrimination.” This



also represented systemic awareness. The reporter wrote:

Telling immigrants and people of color in the United States to “go back to their country” or “go back to where they came from” is such a well-worn, racist trope that has persisted throughout the country’s history, that the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission cites it in its guidelines for immigrants’ employment rights ... (Epstein, 2019, para. 3)

Overall, *Post* coverage showed how racism was not a question and was larger than interpersonal racism. This is significant because the *Post* coverage broke with Traditional patterns of questioning rather than calling out racism. This represents a dramatic shift away from questioning or downplaying racism, a practice that had become so commonplace that The Associated Press Stylebook’s change to writing about racism made headlines.

### **Traditional Coverage Shows Systemic Awareness**

RQ3 asked whether coverage across the three news sources portrayed the tweet and the chant in terms of interpersonal or systemic racism? Most coverage represented interpersonal racism, but Traditional coverage showed the highest degree of systemic awareness.

Vox coverage primarily portrayed the tweet and the chant as events targeted at individuals rather than part of systemic racism. Even when Vox coverage broadened beyond events to look at larger issues of racism, these were covered in terms of Trump building support for his 2020 presidential bid. Only one Vox article published several weeks after the tweet and headlined “Trump’s Latest Tweets are About Silencing Women of Color in Congress,” explored systemic racism and pointed to studies that showed women of color in Congress are “routinely silenced, stereotyped, and excluded, and often had their authority challenged” (Chittal, 2019, para. 24). The July 15, 2019 article explored how stereotypes and implicit bias inform the types of roles the majority sees as appropriate for women and how women are treated when they aspire to more (Chittal, 2019). This article represented the ideals of Explanatory journalism, but it was an exception in the coverage.

BuzzFeed coverage primarily focused on the ripple effect of Trump’s racist rhetoric and less on bias in systems of power. For example, BuzzFeed reported that Trump “incited” the crowd (Hernandez, 2019) whereas Vox coverage simply reported that the “Send her back!” chant happened. BuzzFeed coverage provided that type of context in this article headlined, “Trump’s Supporters Chanted ‘Send Her Back!’ as the President Attacked Rep. Ilhan Omar,” was posted within hours of the July 17 rally, it featured contextual elements not often seen in breaking news stories about events:

Since launching his attack against the four congresswomen—all women of color—Trump has doubled down on the comments even after Congress approved a resolution Tuesday condemning his tweets, saying they had “legitimized and increased fear and hatred of new Americans and people of color.” (Hernandez, 2019, para. 5)

*Post* coverage showed the most consistent systemic awareness from the perspective of people experiencing fear. This included extensive sourcing of immigrants who were people of color feeling afraid since Trump took office and narratives about the danger of Trump’s rhetoric in spreading violence, fascism, and white nationalism. *Post* coverage tied events together to show contextual patterns such as in this July 19, 2019 article headlined, “Trump Vows Congresswomen ‘Can’t Get Away With’ Criticizing U.S.:

Trump’s shift Friday was reminiscent of how he responded to the deadly clash between white nationalists and protesters in Charlottesville in August 2017. He initially denounced the bigotry and hatred, then issued a stronger statement calling the racism practiced by hate groups “evil,” but the next day he spoke of “very fine people on both sides.” (Wagner & Itkowitz, 2019)

*Post* coverage also sought to expand the definition of The Squad to mirror how its members see themselves:

“This is the agenda of white nationalists,” Omar said. “[Trump] would like nothing more than to divide our country on race, religion, gender orientation and immigration status, because this is the only way he knows he can prevent the solidarity of us working together across all of our differences...”

“Our squad is big,” [Pressley] said. “Our squad includes any person committed to building a more just and equitable world.” (Sonmez & Bade, 2019, para. 8)

This example shows racism as systemic and broadly defined in *Post* coverage, and to a lesser degree in BuzzFeed’s coverage, but not in Vox coverage. Vox’s Explanatory coverage did not provide the context it promised and instead fell into problematic Traditional coverage patterns. BuzzFeed’s Journalism 3.0 coverage showed larger danger to people of color, but did not interrogate systems of power.

### **Differences by News Source**

RQ4 asked how Explanatory and Journalism 3.0 coverage compared to Traditional coverage. Explanatory journalism, represented by Vox, a news organization that describes its mission as explaining complex issues to the audience, did not address intersectionality, did call out racism, but provided little context about why it was problematic or how it manifest outside of the two events. Its coverage focused on how politicians were aligning

themselves after the president's tweet. Most of its coverage chronicled events and political alliances. Journalism 3.0 coverage, represented by BuzzFeed, is characterized by a focus on what the audience is talking about in the ways the audience is talking about it, or how political issues manifest in everyday life. This study found BuzzFeed's coverage addressed how the tweet and the chant put immigrants/people of color at risk, but did not address intersectionality and positioned discrimination in terms of interpersonal racism. The *Post's* coverage did not ignore racism, sometimes questioned whether statements were racist by providing "the other side," and was not intersectional, but did address more aspects of identity than other coverage. *Post* coverage was the most systemically aware because it provided historic context and explaining bias beyond the level of interpersonal interactions, such as in the workplace.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored news narratives covering racist attacks made by the president of the United States and his supporters toward members of Congress in the nation's most diverse freshman class. Trump specifically called out Rep. Ilhan Omar, an African American, Muslim woman born in Somalia, whose identity puts her at the intersection of multiple forms of bias. Looking at the Explanatory journalism of Vox, the Journalism 3.0 of BuzzFeed, and the Traditional journalism exemplified by *The Washington Post* yielded mixed findings across three questions. It found that news coverage across all three models of journalism is still struggling to accurately portray identity, that all outlets' coverage called out and directly labeled the tweet and the chant as racist, and, rather surprisingly, that Traditional journalism provided the highest degree of systemically aware coverage.

News coverage that focused mostly on race, and to a lesser degree gender, as Explanatory and Journalism 3.0 coverage did particularly when making false comparisons with bias toward white women and African American and Latino men, ignores the complexities of intersectional bias and gives primacy to one aspect of identity (Hancock, 1997). Although Traditional coverage addressed xenophobia and Islamophobia, it did not address how these forms of bias work together, which does not further understanding of intersectional oppression (Hancock, 1997). The concept of intersectionality, published in legal scholarship more than two decades ago (Crenshaw, 1995), is still absent from news narratives. This is particularly problematic because mass media significantly inform how people in the audience understand those different from themselves (Saeed, 2007; Van Dijk, 1991). The coverage's failure, across types, to explore that multiplied oppression minimizes the very real impacts and preserves the problematic status quo.

Another key finding of this study was how news coverage, across models, called out the tweet and the chant as racist absent any modifiers such as "racially insensitive." This was particularly compelling in Traditional coverage because direct descriptors push against the norm of neutrality. (Some articles in *The Washington Post* that labeled the tweet and the chant as racist also offered comment from sources claiming they were not, which reinforced the norm of neutrality, but most of the coverage did not engage in this type of debate.) The labeling of racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia as such is important in acknowledging that these things exist without question in everyday life and are not

aberrant (Essed, 1991).

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this study found Traditional coverage broke with typical “just the facts” event coverage (Forde, 2007; Schudson, 2013) to provide coverage that was more systemically aware than that found in Explanatory or Journalism 3.0 coverage. Traditional coverage included historical context about how the slur has been directed at people of color, current context about hate speech regulation on Twitter, and delved into federal non-discrimination policies for workplaces. Journalism 3.0 coverage showed the wider impacts of the tweet and the chant in terms of activating white nationalists and showing the effects of racism on “everyday people,” particularly women of color who talked about how the president was inciting racists and how they felt unsafe; but it positioned racism in terms of a spreading movement of interpersonal violence without a focus on how discrimination also affects things such as hiring, housing, and educational opportunities. Journalism 3.0 coverage stopped short of providing the level of systemically aware coverage that has the power to shed light on larger forms of oppression (Apollon, et al., 2014). Explanatory coverage was not Explanatory beyond a single, in-depth piece. Rather, it adhered to Traditional norms of political coverage—despite Vox’s promise of providing context and “insight” amid the “noise.”

In sum, this study showed Explanatory journalism practicing problematic old patterns of “horse race” political coverage, found Journalism 3.0 somewhere in the middle because although it foregrounded the voices of lived experiences, it was only marginally systemically aware and provided little context, and showed a shift in Traditional journalism coverage. *The Washington Post* most represented the aspects of Critical Race Theory with the strongest potential to dismantle racist thinking: showing racism as an everyday occurrence, allowing people who live the issue to discuss it rather than focusing on those who talk about it theoretically, showing how racism manifests beyond interpersonal interactions and into systems of power (Apollon, et al., 2014; Delgado, et al., 2001; Essed, 1991). That Traditional journalism showed more systemic awareness in this context is significant for the future of coverage of racial issues because such coverage has the potential to cast doubt on accepted stereotypes (Delgado, et al., 2001; Matsuda, 1996) that serve to regularly reinforce oppression.

This study examines one flashpoint in political communication, but it indicates a need for future research to investigate news narratives about intersectionality generally and in political coverage specifically. As more digital news organizations emerge in the rapidly expanding news ecology, many of them are making promises to differentiate themselves from the old ways by providing something different or missing from Traditional coverage. Both practitioners and scholars should avoid taking those promises at face value. Similarly, Traditional coverage should not be presumed to be inescapably stuck in its ways. Future scholarship would benefit from continuing to look beyond the now-outdated print-vs.-digital delivery platform and explore the values at the heart of the coverage. This study showed news organizations have made little progress in understanding or addressing intersectionality. It contributes to a small but growing body of research examining intersectionality. More journalism scholarship using an intersectional lens and other critical theories, such as CRT, is necessary to understand whether there is evolution in

news coverage or whether audiences are consuming old values in new packaging.

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## Participatory journalism and the hegemony of men

*By Mark Poepfel*

*This study takes a Critical Studies on Men (CSM) approach to review digital participatory journalism literature in the interest of improving the ways people of different gender categories relate to one another in the industry. The concepts of boundary work and reciprocity are unpacked to see how they might foster challenges to the hegemony of men. Merely introducing participatory projects is not enough to bring gender balance, but herein are identified ways in which norms of male dominance might be broken down and where they might be given up freely if it means protecting other more useful journalistic norms.*

This paper takes a Critical Studies on Men (CSM) approach to a review of the journalism studies literature on participatory journalism to pursue in a somewhat broad, exploratory manner the following theoretical question: If participatory journalism practices continue along current trajectories, do they offer opportunities to build alternatives to structural patriarchy in global journalism, or might we expect them more so to reify white, male, Western and Northern dominance? The specific concept under CSM applied here is that of the hegemony of men—the idea that men as a social category within a system of socially constructed genders use the position afforded them by assumptions associated with this category to wield power over people in other gender categories (Hearn, 2017). There are different types of hegemony, of course, but what makes the hegemony of men most interesting in an international perspective is its pervasiveness. It cuts across all sorts of other social categories and boundaries. If alternatives to the hegemony of men can be found in digital participatory journalism, a set of relatively new structures of meaning making being developed around the world, perhaps there is hope for finding better balances of power between gendered categories. On the other hand, opening up journalism routines and norms to participatory practices in digital spaces may merely expose more citizens to the patriarchy of the news media systems already in place, and the journalistic field may open itself up to even more influence from misogynist trolls.

Planned participatory journalism projects often promise to include the views of subaltern communities, those who are “otherized” in reference to the dominant patriarchy because of race, class, gender, and geography, but these projects do not always accomplish what they have promised, and there exist forms of “dark participation” that spread misinformation and disinformation in service to the worst elements of the patriarchy to mass audiences (Quandt, 2018, p. 36). For participatory journalism to reach its promise of serving inclusive communities (Ayerdi, 2005), it must serve to challenge and provide balance against the established news patriarchy, which fails in many ways to provide socially responsible information to mass audiences.

Participatory journalism as it is most often discussed in the journalism studies literature is deeply intertwined with digital communication technologies. Physical world collaborations between professional journalists and audiences exist, of course, but what is possible in digital networks is potentially exponentially larger and more complex (Robinson, 2011). Whether users engage with already published news content, which is more common, or they participate in the production of news, most of the interactions are in the digital realm. “In common usage in many corners of the industry, ‘engagement’ signifies using digital tools to track audience interactions and push out content to them” (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018, p. 1220). From this surface level of digital engagement to the more collaborative projects on the other end of the participatory journalism spectrum (Nip, 2009), most of the points of contact where the news industry and the rest of society interact are in online spaces.

This paper focuses on the potential for using digitally networked connections between citizens and journalists to push back on the established patriarchy in the news business. Additionally, suggestions are made for future research in the context of critical feminist theory via an application of this relatively obscure concept of the hegemony of men, which places most of the responsibility of change on men down to the individual (Messerschmidt, 2018, p. 68).

### **The Patriarchy**

All around the world there are examples of patriarchies at work in the field of journalism (Edstrom, 2013; Lobo, Silveirinha, Torres da Silva, & Subtil, 2017; van Zoonen, 1998). Edstrom (2013) found that gender parity in newsrooms in Nordic countries did not translate to content (p. 48). Lobo et al. (2017) noted that normative concepts of masculinity continue to dominate newsroom culture in Portugal. “Despite the increasing number of female journalists in newsrooms, women are still seen as outsiders by their male colleagues. This happens because journalism practices are deeply rooted in a male-centered professional culture” (p. 1149). Adding some nuance, van Zoonen (1998) notes that the hiring of more women in newsrooms, particularly in the United States, has created a numerical balance between gender categories; however, during the same time frame changes in news norms followed trends associated with a switch to “market-driven journalism” (p. 46). This is described as a perversion of the hopes and expectations many women had for the field in previous decades when they fought to make it more gender balanced. Thus, van Zoonen (1998) explains:

As is clear, most traditional news journalists, women and men alike, despise the consumer orientation and look down on its practitioners with ill-concealed contempt. In this they are in the good company of other political and intellectual elites. Partly, this contempt has good reasons; the increasing popularization of news and information certainly has its problematic aspects and one can indeed wonder—with the critics—what the democratic merits of human interest and sensationalism are. Moreover, female journalists who expressed a need for more ‘human interest’ and compassion or emotions in the news a decade ago will not in their wildest nightmares have thought it would come to this. On the other hand, it is not only the popularization of news that is on trial in these debates; implicitly it is women and femininity as crucial components of this popularization as well. In our patriarchal societies most things women do and like are not valued very highly, and the contempt for market-driven journalism should surely be seen as part of this general patriarchal scheme. (p. 46)

In this way, women journalists, and women as a gender category in general, are being made scapegoats for sensationalism and trends toward market orientation. It is a hallmark of Western patriarchy to suggest that the decline of ethics in one of its key institutions is related to the feminization of the field rather than the destruction of a moral compass in light of myriad variables. Even when they outnumber men and see deep changes taking place in newsmaking spaces that were once hostile to them, it is as though women cannot “win.”

What would an ideal newsroom with balance between gendered categories look like? Inferring from the authors cited above (Edstrom, 2013; Lobo et al., 2017; van Zoonen, 1998) as well as Allan, Branston, & Carter (2002), there would be equal representation in newsrooms as relates to gender groups in a given population. Those newsrooms would be free to reflect the local, regional, and national culture in ways that are congruent with all types of gender groups. Those newsrooms would also be free from sexual harassment and other forms of patriarchal degradation that have forced women to act as “one of the boys” to get along in the workplace, and news content would be socially responsible (van Zoonen, 1998, p. 33), engaging and human-interest-oriented without being sensationalistic or cloying.

Looking for potential pathways to build these types of news systems, it makes sense, out of all aspects of journalism studies research, to focus on participatory journalism because participatory practices have been shown to be disruptive forces in the field (Carlson & Lewis, 2015). Many of the stated goals of participatory journalism mirror those listed above (Singer et al., 2011), although this is not to say that participatory practices are necessarily disruptive or effectual. Suffice it to say if structural change is going to happen in the global news field, digital spaces made for participatory collaboration are potential points of influence. On the other hand, continuing to invite citizens to participate in journalism in deeper ways might create an opportunity for the patriarchy established in the journalistic field to be transferred to participants, and it may create a nexus where patriarchies in broader society and in journalism join forces. This has already been seen where gender-based troll crusades on social media were picked up by mainstream, or



malestream, news organizations via the appropriation of social media trends. As the adoption of extreme, reactionary male-dominated agendas becomes more commonplace in the mass media, the tendency of mass market news to give voice to anti-social and anti-feminist elements of the patriarchy online is observed (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Mortensen, 2018).

As research into participatory journalism continues, in any given case study that takes critical feminist theory and the hegemony of men into account, much will depend on the newsroom, the community, and the participatory practice in question. Thus, this discussion proceeds with equal parts trepidation and cautious optimism. If the line of inquiry into “dark participation” has taught us anything it is to mistrust the blind optimism we had about participatory journalism in practice in the early 2000s (Madrigal, Alexis, 2012; Quandt, 2018; Westlund & Ekström, 2018). The discussion in this paper centers on two core concepts in the participatory journalism studies literature: Included are boundary studies (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Coddington, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Singer, 2015; Wolfgang, 2018) and reciprocity in participatory practice (Carlson & Usher, 2015; Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014) a defining feature of social life that has long been considered a key component in the formation and perpetuation of vibrant communities. In recent years, scholars have applied the concept to improve our understanding of the social dynamics of online communities and social media. Much has been written. Still, the function of and potential for reciprocity in digital news is only beginning to be realized.

This study seeks to explore these questions: Where might the hegemony of men in the practice of journalism be vulnerable to changes brought on through the establishment of regular participatory practices in digital spaces? Where might patriarchies in journalism and in society be reified? And what might this mean for participatory journalism practice and scholarship?

After an explication of the concept of the hegemony of men under the Critical Studies on Men framework, this article briefly examines these questions.

### **Hegemony of Men**

The concept of the hegemony of men comes from the CSM theoretical framework. Critical Studies on Men falls into a group of gender studies approaches including, “Feminist scholarship ... as a general critique of gender relations,” “Gay scholarship ... [which] may or may not provide a critique of men,” and “Men’s responses to feminism ... usually distinct from gay scholarship ... varying from anti-feminist to pro-feminist” (Hearn, 1997, p. 49). CSM stands a bit apart from these other approaches. It falls in the pro-feminist camp and seeks to counter the habit in the social sciences of taking men as a gendered category for granted except in cases where the men are othered in relation to race (e.g. research on Black men may separate these men for criticism) or social class (e.g. research on homeless men may incorporate gendered critiques) (Hearn, 1997). Men, particularly white men, are often presumed to have and exercise agency, and though men are often the subjects of critical scholarship, the criticism does not usually come in terms of their gender category (Hearn, 1997, 2004, 2017). Men are critiqued as power

brokers, professionals, communicators, key players in institutions but not simply as men, members of a group whose power and authority need to be interrogated. “Thus each of the existing conventional academic disciplines can be subject to a process of critically studying men there” (Hearn, 2017, p. 57). “CSM thus refers to that range of studies that critically address men in the context of gendered power relations” (Hearn, 2004, p. 50).

Narrowing that range to the concept of the hegemony of men is relatively straightforward. Previously referred to as “hegemonic masculinity,” it had to do with the power men wield and the power of masculinity to establish and enforce social norms broadly as well as internally in the minds of men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 829).

A culturally idealized form, it [hegemonic masculinity] is both a personal and a collective project and is the common sense about breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained. While centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, not all men practice it though most benefit from it. (Donaldson, 1993, p. 645)

Donaldson notes how hegemonic masculinity tends to be normalized in mass media (1993, p. 644). For example, it shows up in sports journalism textbooks, which may explain in part why this subsection of the journalistic field has been so fraught (Hardin, Dodd, & Lauffer, 2006). At any rate, the focus on “hegemonic masculinity” has faded for some scholars in favor of discussing the “hegemony of men” because of the limitations of the disembodied concept of masculinity (Hearn, 2004). As a cultural ideal “masculinity” is powerful, but it is an abstraction without human agency, faults, failings or responsibility.

Men (as a social category), on the other hand, hold and wield power and grapple internally with the expectations of masculinity. Hearn (2004, 2017) is a major proponent of the study of the “hegemony of men” and states: “The hegemony of men seeks to address the double complexity that men are both a *social category formed by the gender system and dominant collective and individual agents of social practices*” (Hearn, 2004, p. 59, emphasis in original). Thus when we critique the hegemony of men, it allows us to question individual choices and thought processes. It is fair and just to question those with social agency about how they wield it.

Masculinity is defined differently across cultures, but men in various socio-cultural contexts almost all benefit from the hegemony of their gender group. Hearn (2004) writes that this forces us to reconceptualize cultural hegemony: “[A]ny rigid, monocultural notion of hegemony is now, rather paradoxically, to be treated with great caution, indeed probably dismissed” (p. 64). Let us not debate which type of hegemonic power matters most but instead recognize that the ubiquity of the hegemony of men makes it a worthwhile framework particularly when we are discussing what to do about the patriarchy in journalism. As a branch of feminist critical theory that puts much of the responsibility on men to answer for and to alter the direction of their gender group, the concept of the hegemony of men is a useful complement to contemporary feminisms.

Each subsection that follows begins with a description of a concept from the participatory journalism literature. Then, the concept of the hegemony of men is introduced as a problem that might be lessened or worsened by the practices and phenomena associated with each participatory journalism concept. It is possible to challenge normative patriarchal structures and practices in newsrooms because they are not essential for getting socially responsible journalism done. The goal of this paper and the ultimate application of theory here is not to blow up the already fragile institution of socially responsible journalism but to ask if participatory practices might open opportunities to challenge the harmful tendencies of patriarchies in mainstream news observed the world over.

### **Boundaries**

The study of “boundary work” in the journalistic field in the context of participatory journalism deals with ways that news professionals negotiate their power to set news agendas (Carlson & Lewis, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2014). At question is who is a “real” journalist, what should that mean, and how might participatory journalism threaten, or enhance, the authority, control, and responsibilities that professional journalists hold dear (Carlson, 2015). Boundary studies also provide terms for understanding how power might be shared through networked participation (Carlson, 2015), but hope for these opportunities must be tempered by knowledge of the history of the profession.

In *Boundaries of Journalism* (Carlson & Lewis, 2015), Carlson notes that there are two ways of conceiving boundaries in any professional field (2015). One is as demarcation between those with knowledge, authority, and jurisdiction to police the space from within versus those without, and the other describes a boundary more as a membrane with locations where interactions can take place (Carlson, 2015, pp. 5-7). Carlson draws attention to “boundary objects”—objects that can carry different meanings for different subjects depending on which side of a boundary they are on (2015, pp. 6-7).

For example, digital social networks are boundary objects for journalists working to engage with audiences. For journalists, Facebook, Twitter, etc. are most often used as information gathering tools (Weaver & Willnat, 2016). There may be a collaboration of sorts when journalists co-opt amateur content, but the primary use of social media fits into well-established norms. For web users, social media platforms could be a means to bypass traditional news outlets and interact directly with newsmakers, or users might take to social media to attempt to shape how news topics are framed (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). For consumers, social networks can also be their primary way of learning about the news (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012), which undercuts journalists’ ability to place news items in context. As boundary objects, social media platforms are perceived differently by professional journalists as opposed to consumers.

This concept of boundary objects can extend to participatory journalism projects. For news organizations, these can be outreach tools, performative exhibitions of community concern, but they may also be sincere efforts to seek out citizen agendas, citizen input, crowdsourcing help, and/or ideas for social solutions (Rosenberry & St John, 2009). For citizen participants, these projects can be an opportunity to be heard and to try to lever-

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age the reach of journalism to influence those with institutional power. As Borger and van Hoof (2014) put it, "In short, participants in Project Hyperlocal considered themselves Public Relations (PR) agents who generated exposure for a cause or interest in their immediate context" (pp. 717-718). In other words, journalists often prefer to use the news merely to inform while citizens may expect to use participatory news to persuade. In the examples Borger and van Hoof studied (2014), these two definitions of the boundary object were so much at odds that the projects failed. Journalists in at least one case approached the relationship as "transactional, while participants expected it to be interactive" (Borger & van Hoof, 2014, p. 722). If change is to come in the patriarchal structures of news at its boundaries through participatory projects, more interactive, i.e. reciprocal projects will likely have to be built/sought out.

There is more to come on reciprocity below, but first, a prescription: To disrupt patriarchies in journalism, network connections, as points of influence, should be strategically targeted to increase the influence of women on both sides of the perceived boundary. The role of men in this regard is to assist and encourage women on the professional side of the boundary as well as amateurs seeking to influence news agendas. Additionally, men on social media need to get out of the way. They need to curtail the kinds of practices in social media that would have them chastised in in-person settings such as interrupting women or co-opting their ideas. In practice this requires vigilance in looking for opportunities to influence news agendas, and it means, on the amateur side, having messages and messengers available at a moment's notice to speak on the issue or issues of the day. Digital social networks are spaces of constant churn. In terms of participatory projects, citizens should seek to influence the nature of projects and not accept those that are primarily transactional.

It will not be easy to work across boundaries. The other half of Carlson's (2015, p. 5) thesis is that professionals police their borders and enforce their authority. Professional journalists have bound up their ethical standards with practices that tend to benefit status quo patriarchies (North, 2009). Journalists express concern that digital participatory platforms undermine their efforts to carefully gather information, verify it, and present it in ways that are interesting, meaningful, and as accurate as possible (Singer, 2015). Unlike other boundary threats to the field, e.g. from pseudo-journalists who present opinion as though it were fact, from corporate pressures on news agendas, and from political actors who subvert longstanding news structures (Gutsche Jr., 2018), most participatory practices in news organizations are subject to journalists' influence (Carlson, 2015). Journalists have the power to appropriate and/or amplify citizen news content (Usher, 2016). Journalists craft participatory projects and can institute training programs for citizens to engage with (Rosenberry & St John, 2009; Wall, 2017). In these contexts, journalists are careful to define and maintain boundaries between what they do and what citizen contributors do.

Though it will not be easy to influence the nature of participatory projects, there is a potential paradox that might make men in journalism more willing to rethink gender norms the more tightly they attempt to control the boundaries of participation. At the same time many men are fighting to preserve patriarchal structures in journalism they must also

work to defend other news norms. If they are forced to choose between fighting for the power to hold authorities accountable and the ability to shape public opinion in the era of social media incursions, the time may be ripe to strike at the root of patriarchal structures and behaviors in newsrooms.

Though many journalists are reluctant, often journalists working on participatory projects are have demonstrated an openness to change and a willingness to negotiate boundaries (Rosenberry & St. John, 2009). If negotiations about gender norms in newsrooms take place on their “turf” in a setting where individual men may feel less inclined to be defensive about their authority, we may see change. Men who show openness to questioning patriarchies may be sought out and contacted through participatory projects as a way of working across boundaries rather than attempting to break through barriers.

A good test of this in practice would be to introduce the expectation that participatory journalism projects treat organized women’s groups as co-equal participants in news-making. Many participatory journalism projects involve community collaborations and partnerships with organized groups (“Gather,” n.d.). A push to treat women’s organizations not as radical partisans but as real partners would test journalists’ commitment to the ethic of participation (Lewis, 2012). One problem with participatory projects is that often citizens are not as interested in civic participation as journalists had hoped (Borger, van Hoof, Costera Meijer, & Sanders, 2012; Domingo et al., 2008; Poepsel, 2017), but this is not an issue for many women’s groups who are well organized, constantly fighting for recognition and fair, contextualized, issues-based coverage. Perhaps holding news organizations to the standards they claim to espouse about openness in projects where they feel their boundaries are relatively safe would help make better gender balance possible.

The downside of this idealistic approach is that it grants journalists a mechanism to maintain their hegemony. Actor-network theory suggests that individuals acting as agents within networks will create “obligatory points of passage” that deeply influence who may engage with the network and how they must engage (Domingo & Le Cam, 2015). In the case described in depth by Domingo and Le Cam (2015), journalists tended to favor polarizing voices and those who play by the rules, so to speak. The ethic of participation is still under negotiation. Terms such as “engagement” are still being defined in the academic literature (Nelson, 2018). If anything, research findings, across more than 120 studies of participatory journalism, according to Engelke (2019), show a 50/50 split between studies showing journalists remain in control over news production versus those that show shared power or mixed results. The responsibility then lies with individual men in positions of power as actors in journalistic networks to accept greater levels of participation and to change the normative rules of mainstream news organizations so that the input and context provided by participatory partners is not lost to ritual, habitual hegemony.

### **Reciprocity**

Journalism studies scholars (Borger et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2014) introduced reciproc-

ity theory to this research field in order to provide a framework for discussing the inherent value of news participation in digital social networks (see also Holton, Coddington, Lewis, & De Zúñiga, 2015). If journalists and editors in positions of power ask what the point of participatory projects and platforms might be, some answers can be found in real-world social networks. Lewis et al. (2014) identified direct and indirect reciprocity as well as short-term and sustained forms as essential to understand. Direct reciprocity is similar to a quid pro quo. Two people or groups share goods, work, or information in trade. Indirect reciprocity is arguably more interesting because it is based on trust.

In a group with sustained reciprocity, an individual might contribute something to the group with the expectation that the contribution will be reciprocated in some other form at some future date. Inherent is a more general sense that members of the group care for one another. Establishing a sustained form of indirect information reciprocity is a goal (stated or not) of many participatory journalism projects. To foster this type of reciprocity is to foster deep community connections (Lewis et al., 2014). Done right, it literally builds communities around shared news. In this instance the only onus on men in news is that they recognize and take part in normalizing reciprocal sharing of information in communities. It is easier said than done, though, because exclusivity is often used as a marker of added value in news and as an example of journalistic prowess. Getting the “scoop” is baked into the culture of news reporting and is easily connected to expectations of masculinity norms that men should be competitors striving always to win. Sustained reciprocity will become more plausible in participatory journalism settings when men are empowered to see news as a service through which trust is built between them and their communities and less so as a competition between them and other journalists.

Research on reciprocity in news has looked at how journalists and audiences can connect to crowdsource the news or to disseminate stories via Twitter (Lewis et al., 2014). Crowdsourcing is an interesting form of reciprocity because participants contribute time and knowhow often with little more than the expectation that a meaningful well contextualized story might be published. Reciprocity may be used to challenge established news norms. The Change Makers’ Project in Australia, developed by college journalism students, employed innovative approaches to reciprocity to counter fake news and build sustainable community relationships:

A demonstration of how this kind of reciprocity is applied in the Change Makers’ Project rests in the use of informed consent. Under the guidelines set up by the community and the journalists, no story is published in the Change Makers’ Project without the informed consent of the community partner participants. This approach challenges traditional journalistic practice but is part of growing trend in journalism to give story participants agency over their own stories. (Downman, 2017, p. 9)

In sharing agency, we can see potential for countervailing the historic tendencies of the hegemony of men in news. Is it accurate to argue that all circumstances of shared agency in mainstream news reflect the potential for gender balance countervailing the

hegemony of men? Arguably yes if only because that hegemony is so widespread and baked into the structures of newsmaking and meaning making in societies. It is not the existence of reciprocity but the focus on it that offers a potential means to disrupt the hegemony of men.

Again, perhaps it is overly optimistic to express hope, but when reciprocity can serve as a goal and thus a force pulling journalists to change how they relate to news users in order to build sustained systems of trust, it shows promise for influencing other norms. Purposeful, applied reciprocity can be used to foster the preservation of other journalistic norms besides patriarchal ones such as adherence to verification practices and the commitment to providing communities with news they need to make democratic decisions. Thus, it can be conceived of that men in positions of power in the journalistic field might trade gender-based norms of authority, influence, and control over women in exchange for the preservation of other more essential norms. Scholars, journalists, and students need more examples and more deeply articulated arguments for this type of normative triage. If the most successful approaches to sustained reciprocity in participatory news, in any context, not just gender balance, were more widely understood, it might be easier to conceive of ways to displace structures of male hegemony and replace them with systems of communication that value different gender groups more equally.

This is not to say that men in places of power in the field of journalism deserve deference or to be gently persuaded rather than forcefully persuaded. After years of sexual harassment, gender-category based favoritism in the workplace, and routinely taking higher salaries than women with equal or greater talents and responsibilities, men might expect a workplace revolution. Hegemony is not often relinquished without the use of force, but perhaps individual men (including all those who identify as men) in all sorts of roles in the news industry will see that a trade-off of norms done in the context of promoting reciprocity and negotiating the boundaries of digital journalism might be in everyone's best interests. Locations of digital participation may be good candidates for engaging with men who are willing to negotiate improved gender norms in the field. They may be persuaded to relinquish gender-based hegemonic power to preserve more socially responsible, viable, trust-securing norms. This much is posited in the context of boundary studies and reciprocity in participatory journalism. Responses, critiques, and challenges are welcome. After all, journalism is nothing if not an exchange of ideas.

## Discussion

This paper asks if a better gender balance might be struck in the field of professional journalism in part through avenues established by digital participatory journalism, known as a disruptive force in the industry. Patriarchal structures in place in the journalistic field do not serve women as a gender category well (Allan et al., 2002). Women who work in the industry and who rely on it for accurate and fair representation in politics and other fields that rely on public opinion are right to challenge the hegemony of men in the industry. Under male dominated communication structures too many awful things have gone on for too long within the industry and without. Participatory journalism in digital networks puts news users in direct contact with journalists and opens up the potential for deeper



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levels of mutual influence. Recent history has shown that this influence can be quite negative (Quandt, 2018), but there are hopes that men will take individual responsibility for their roles in patriarchal structures and that they may be influenced to change the journalistic field. Boundary studies tells us where that might happen. Reciprocity theory tells us how it might happen and be sustained.

This paper argues in both theoretical contexts that the field of journalism is undergoing such substantial changes in normative structures and practices that men may be persuaded to drop their defenses of gender-based norms in favor of fighting to preserve other norms. This paper also argues that those other core, substantial and socially responsible norms such as covering news accurately, taking multiple stakeholders' viewpoints into account in every story, challenging those in power so they be held to account, and collaborating meaningfully in digital spaces might be aided by dropping norms tied to male hegemony. If the greatest challenge in the future of digital journalism is building and maintaining trust, it makes sense to do away with patriarchal structures that have proven to shatter people's faith in the field.

Globally, men benefit from powerful social structures that privilege their work, their opinions, their bodies, and their approaches to building societies and attempting to solve social problems. The large-scale, corporate news media generally privilege those who are already privileged (Braithwaite, Ferrier, Sinha, & Outrich, 2016). That is to say they uphold the status quo. This benefits men as a category and as individuals, which makes it more insidious when the patriarchy defends horrible men behaving horribly. By the same token though Messerschmidt (2018) indicates that individual men have the agency and authority to choose to promote masculinities that are not detrimental to society. Redefining the balance in power between men and women in the news industry is also about redefining the discourse about men and women. It matters for those who work in the journalistic field and for public opinion shaped by it. The power of men must be questioned, and the news industry is an essential locus of power (Allan et al., 2002; Hearn, 2017).

What this paper argues is that the concept of boundary objects gives us a frame for thinking about places where individual men might be engaged with to refute the hegemony of men (Carlson, 2015). They might engage with women's groups in a fair manner. They might refuse to allow women to be paid less than men for the same work in the journalism industry. Why would they do so? Reciprocity theory explains how it is conceivable that men must do this in order to create systems of sustainable reciprocity and trust in the field (Ardèvol-Abreu, Diehl, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018; Borger et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2014). We do not know all there is to know about the future of the business of news but we do expect that maintaining and re-establishing trust with audiences will be essential (Belair-Gagnon, Nelson, & Lewis, 2019; Nelson, 2019). Men could be persuaded to drop patriarchal power structures if it is shown that it helps sustain industry viability, again with the added benefit that it allows us to focus on fighting the myriad other attacks on professional values.

Critiquing patriarchies "*from a male perspective*" is potentially quite powerful because it



can turn the agency of male privilege against itself (Allan et al., 2002, p. 123, emphasis in original). It also gives men actions to take in terms of self-assessment, change, and behavior modeling. Hegemony is a synonym of “power,” and it takes power to disassemble structures built to house, wield, and protect privilege. What makes it so important that the hegemony of men be countered in the news industry, to reiterate, is the ripple effect. This is the idea that by changing the news industry one can change the dynamic where those in power and those meant to hold them to account are, in terms of gender, following the same set of rules, privileging the same groups and endangering the future of civilization for all of the broad social ills that continue to go unaddressed or that are addressed only after the damage to people, the global economy, the planet has already been done.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A major limitation of this study is that it only identifies in very general terms opportunities for reshaping gender balance in the news field. The news industry is undergoing a massive paradigm shift (Vos & Moore, 2018). Changing news patriarchies through limited participatory projects in the hopes of reshaping society seems like a longshot if the goal is to have a lasting global impact on how the news industry is shaped and how it frames global policy discussions about gender issues and everything else. That being said, we are not always aware of social tipping points when we are living through them and it makes sense to continue to develop a rhetoric of change and to look for tangible opportunities to affect change. The problems wrought by the hegemony of men are too great not to seek every opportunity for substantial, sustainable change possible.

Another more practical limitation is that participatory projects are not happening in every news organization. They are particularly limited if they are being done at all in major mainstream news outlets (Wall, 2017, p. 139). Sustainable reciprocity and trust will likely need to be demonstrated in participatory projects before they are adopted in the largest and most powerful news organizations. This does not mean that there are no opportunities to leverage digital participation with global news organizations in the interest of seeking gender balance in the news industry, but it will take much more than finding sympathetic men in existing participatory news projects and working with them to change the way women are treated and talked about in newsrooms and by newsmakers. Rather, existing global women’s groups may seek to influence participatory journalism via its tendency to co-opt social media content. One could argue that this amounts to attempting to beat social media and message board trolls at their own game. In this area, enlisting men to engage in these platforms and to fight rhetorical battles may be helpful. Men seem to have a way of “winning” internet discussions that seem pointless but that are taken by male-dominated news organizations to be important. To influence the men who are not apt to join the fight against male hegemony, rhetoric and persistent dialog could bring success. If this type of influence is possible, it will have been done at the social media boundary object, and it will be up to journalists engaged in the cause of replacing patriarchies to create dynamic, sustained discursive forces.

The opportunities for future research in the area of the intersection of critical feminist the-

ory and participatory journalism are numerous. First we need further study of boundary objects as points where the journalistic field may be influenced by outside pressures. It is established that these are areas ripe for influence, but how and to what extent the news industry can be influenced is an open question. We also need research that takes into account the influence of financial structures, which are also usually patriarchal in nature and which can greatly limit change in the journalistic field. Scholars also need to identify successful ways in which women have been empowered in the news industry so that those conditions and routine practices can be enhanced and implemented around the world. We need future studies of boundary maintenance and reciprocity in participatory journalism studies to incorporate questions about the power and role of gender identity. In other words, gender balance issues can factor into all sorts of studies on reciprocity in participatory journalism if it is made a priority for leaders in the research field.

## **Conclusion**

Generally speaking, gender has not been identified as an important variable in the success or failure of participatory journalism projects. How much does the gender identity of journalists, of citizen participants, of news managers, etc. influence the nature and success of participatory projects? This is a good question to ask at the intersection of critical feminist theory and participatory journalism. And it may be essential to ask in the context of creating sustained reciprocity in news outlets of all sizes. If participatory projects do not aid in sustaining the field, it may not matter how useful they are in fostering better gender balance. On the other hand, sustainable reciprocity, trust, audience engagement, and the financial future of the industry seem bound together. "Solving" any piece of this puzzle puts us that much closer to creating a journalistic field that works for and that represents all of society, not just those privileged by patriarchies.

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