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Theory in journalism studies

Introduction

Journalism studies is a multidisciplinary field of academic inquiry. As such, it employs theory from a wide range of academic disciplines and traditions, and – as its object of study changes – is in constant search of new ways of understanding what journalism is. This chapter aims at unmasking what journalism studies is through the ways in which it makes use of, and partly develops, theory. The chapter is based on three observations, which are all stated in the two first sentences above: Journalism studies is multidisciplinary, it is a field, and it employs new theory when its object of study changes. These observations require an initial discussion, in order for them not to be just taken-for-granted assumptions.

First, on multidisciplinarity: Journalism covers and shapes all aspects of society, from politics to fashion, from business to everyday life. It shapes, articulates and produces culture. It is the first account of history, and it is where history can be found. Journalism is language, rhetorics, genres and discourse. It is legitimized and limited by law. It is in industry, civil society and state. It is labour, it is management, it is commercial, non-profit and idealistic. Journalism is technology. It is media and communication. It is local and global, it is about ethics. Journalism is epistemic, as it produces knowledge about the world. In other words: Journalism is so multi-faceted that it has been studied from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, including, but not limited to, sociology, political science, cultural studies, history, language studies, philosophy, economy, management, business, communication and science and technology studies. The four volumes on *Journalism* edited by Howard Tumber (2008) illustrate this point. The volumes represent a canon of the study of journalism and therefore the legacy upon which journalism studies is build. They are dominated by texts from sociology and political science but have several classical works also from disciplines like philosophy, economy and language. This means that a person interested in delving into the classics of journalism research has to familiarize himself or herself with a diversity of disciplinary traditions and styles.

This multidisciplinarity means that journalism either can be an object of study within a range of disciplines and fields or it can be an object of study within a field or discipline that integrates perspectives from a variety of other fields and disciplines. Or it can be both. This leads us to our second assumption, which is much more debatable than the first: Journalism studies is a field. We will discuss this more in depth in the next section but let us for now recognise that the history of journalism in academia is long, while the history of journalism studies as a field is shorter. Since the turn of the millennium, journalism studies has risen as an increasingly autonomous field of academic inquiry, with its own conferences, journals and key publications, which come close to constituting a distinct "epistemic culture" (Cetina, 1999). Several books published since 2005 have been key to this process. The first (and now this second) edition of the *Handbook of Journalism Studies* (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009a) is an obvious example of such an exercise, as are titles such as *Key Concepts in Journalism Studies* (Franklin et al., 2005), *Global Journalism Research* (Löffelholz et al., 2008), *Journalism Studies: The Basics* (Conboy, 2013), *The Routledge*

Companion to News and Journalism (Allan, 2010) and the two recently published Encyclopaedias of Journalism. In addition, the two handbooks on digital journalism studies (Witschge et al., 2016; Franklin & Eldridge, 2017), have contributed to the construction process of the field.

Our third assumption, that journalism studies employs new theory when its object of study changes, is based on the many publication we in recent years have seen that specifically address the need to rebuild our fundamental understanding of what journalism is, due to the many changes mostly related to digitalization that have affected journalism since the turn of the millennium. This task is named as rethinking (Peters & Broersma, 2013), rebuilding (Anderson, 2013), reinventing (Waisbord, 2013), reconstructing (Downie & Schudson, 2009), reconsidering (Alexander et al., 2016), remaking (Boczkowski & Anderson, 2017), and even rethinking again (Peters & Broersma, 2016) what news and journalism is. Based on these book titles, it seems as if journalism studies currently is, and historically has been, preoccupied with deconstructing and reconstructing its object of study. As noted by Reese (2016, p. 3): "[U]nlike many other more settled fields, journalism research has been obsessed with the very definition of its core concept -- what journalism is."

These three observations – the multidisciplinary nature of journalism research, the construction of journalism studies as a field, and reconsiderations of the domain of journalism itself – have all affected the ways in which theory is currently understood in the field. This chapter will map the various disciplinary traditions and theories that are used and, to a certain extent, developed to understand journalism. We will supplement this mapping with an empirical meta-analysis of the role of theory in articles published in two of the central journals of the field, namely *Journalism Studies* and *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism.* Through this mapping and meta-analysis, the chapter will also address what attitude towards theory is most common in journalism studies, and we will discuss the question of *what journalism is*. The most important understandings of journalism we will discuss are journalism as a social system; journalism as a democratic force; journalism as a producer, interpreter and constructor of culture; journalism as a socio-material practice; and journalism as a post-industrial and commercial endeavour. Finally, we will argue that journalism studies, given its multidisciplinary nature, is in an anarchic state, which should be viewed as a strength, not a weakness.

On theory, discipline and field

Two clarifications stand out as necessary to make before we move on: What do we mean by "theory"? And what do we mean by defining journalism studies as a field?

The word "theory" has many connotations. It can mean the opposite of practice. Theory can also be explanatory or mean something that can be tested, verified or falsified. Theory can be grand or grounded, inductive, deductive or abductive. It can be rational, critical, pragmatic or normative. Theory usually means one thing to a natural scientist and something very different to a researcher from the humanities. Social sciences, in turn, can encompass the whole spectrum.

Mjøset (2006) distinguishes between three different attitudes towards theory in the social sciences: (1) the *standard attitude*, implying an understanding of theory as accumulated knowledge based on regularities as law-like or idealized as possible; (2) the *social-philosophical attitude*, implying an understanding of theory as something that is a result of investigations into how the human mind organises knowledge; and (3) the

pragmatist-participatory attitude, implying an understanding of theory as knowledge of observable patterns accumulated in "local research frontiers" consisting of previously conducted empirical inquires of similar cases and previously developed grounded theories related to the same topic.

These three attitudes also reflect important methodological distinctions addressing the core question of any research project: What is the purpose of the research and, consequently, the role of theory in it? First, and in line with the standard attitude, *testing a theory* is a common methodological approach especially in the natural sciences that is also commonly adopted in the social sciences. It involves, in its purest sense, derivation of hypotheses from macro theories and testing them on empirical material. Concepts like validity and reliability are central in this approach. However, the approach has been criticized for treating social life as submitted to laws and ideals existing *a priori*, and hence treating empirical material merely as facts suited to verify (or falsify) law-like or idealized theories, and therefore ignoring the potential knowledge-producing powers of empirical material (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Abbott, 2004; Mjøset, 2006).

The second methodology of *relating theoretical concepts to empirical material* is typical in the social-philosophical attitude and stems from the humanities. It typically involves generating theoretical concepts suited to frame and interpret aspects of modernity. In the social sciences, popular notions like "risk society" (Beck, 1992) and "network society" (Castells, 1996) are typical examples of such diagnosis-like social-philosophical theories, which quite often also embed normative evaluations. Therefore, within this approach theory is also often understood normatively, as a way to assess the state of the empirical world against constructed ideal norms about what a good society should be like (Benson, 2008). Within the socio-philosophical attitude towards theory, empirical data are thus mostly used for the purpose of elaboration and exemplification. Theoretical concepts are generated at a macro level, remote from empirical data, and hence there is a risk of ignoring data that does not fit the concepts.

Third, *developing theory from empirical data* can be perceived as an inductive move from empiria to theory, and it is typical in the pragmatist-partcipatory attitude. This approach, also referred to as grounded theory, originates from the Chicago School of Sociology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and mostly involves generating middle-range theories. Such an attitude towards theory is, however, often criticized for being too naïve, because it might be interpreted as if it is possible to do empirical research without any preconceived concepts or ideas – as if the researcher could reduce herself or himself to a "tabula rasa" (see for example Allan, 2003). It is debatable, however, whether grounded theory is as inductive as often stated; some argue that it is best understood as a hermeneutic, abductive approach in which theory is constantly revised by new empirical material (Mjøset, 2006).

Given the multidisciplinary nature of journalism studies, we can expect to find all the three attitudes towards theory in inquiries into journalism. However, we will argue that the multidisciplinary fluidity disqualifies journalism studies as an academic discipline. Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 47) argue that an academic discipline is recognized by the existence of a structural framework that identifies the discipline – such as scholarly organizations and journals – and a specific academic culture with a shared set of theories and methodologies. In journalism studies, the structural framework has come into place (Steensen & Ahva, 2015), but a shared academic culture with distinct theories and methodologies is more difficult to pinpoint precisely because of the multidisciplinarity of the field. However, attempts at pinpointing the disciplinarity of journalism studies have been made. In her book *Taking Journalism Seriously,* Zelizer (2004) brought together the various disciplinary ways in which

journalism has been theorized, and in doing so, she established what can be viewed as an interdisciplinary research program for journalism studies. She pinpointed sociology, cultural studies, political science, history and language as the backbone of journalism studies

Zelizer is also one of the three founding editors of the journal *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*. The first issue of the journal, published in April 2000, discussed what journalism studies is and should be, and Zelizer concluded that there was some urgency related to establishing a shared paradigm of knowledge within journalism studies "before journalism itself outruns our capacity to study it" (Zelizer, 2000, p. 60). Such a call for a shared, interdisciplinary knowledge paradigm, and thereby establishing journalism studies as a distinct academic discipline of its own, can also be found in the inaugural issue of the journal *Journalism Studies*, which was published the same year, in 2000.

18 years later, Carlson, Robinson, Lewis & Berkowitz (2018) made a similar attempt at pinpointing the characteristics of journalism studies, but this time as a field, not a discipline. Carlson et al. argue that journalism studies is a field within the discipline of communication, and that this field is recognized through a set of shared commitments that make up a distinct academic culture. These commitments are: contextual sensitivity, holistic relationality, comparative inclination, normative awareness, embedded communicative power, and methodological pluralism. However, these commitments are not derived from a descriptive analysis of the field. Instead, they constitute a normative framework, which identifies the assumptions embedded in journalism research. These commitments are therefore not givens, they constitute a polemic statement on what journalism studies should be. Nevertheless, we agree with Carlson et al. that journalism studies is best viewed as a field, given the shared structural framework and thereby a sense of academic community and epistemic culture, and not as a discipline, because of its lack of agreed upon macro theories of journalism and shared methodological approaches. However, since this question of to what degree journalism studies is a field or a discipline is, at least to a certain extent, an empirical question, we will in the next sections not only map and discuss the disciplinary traditions and main theories that constitute journalism studies as a field, we will also ground this mapping in an empirical investigation of theory employment within the field. Such an empirical exercise seems appropriate, as it echoes the most common attitude towards theory in journalism studies, the pragmatist attitude.

Our mapping of theories and the roles given to them in journalism studies are therefore based on a review of literature and an empirical investigating of articles published in the journals *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* and *Journalism Studies.* These two journals have been pivotal in the construction of journalism studies as a field. Hence, they constitute an appropriate avenue for studying to what degree a shared disciplinary paradigm of knowledge has emerged within journalism studies. In the analysis, we examined how explicit a role theory is given in the abstracts and keywords of the published articles, what types of theories are used and from which disciplines the publications draw their theoretical frameworks.[1] The rest of this chapter is structured around four arguments based on our analysis of these two journals:

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[1] The sample included all keywords from articles published in all volumes of the journals *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies* during the period 2000–2016, and all abstracts of the volumes of 2002–2003, 2012 and 2016.The results presented in this article are a combination of our previous study (Steensen & Ahva, 2015) and an update to it with data up until 2016. The number of analysed keywords from *Journalism* was 4297, and from *Journalism Studies* 7671, so altogether 11 968 keywords. The number of analysed abstracts from *Journalism* was 32 (2002–2003), 33 (2012) and 63 (2016), and from *Journalism Studies* 58 (2002–2003), 50 (2012) and 63 (2016), so altogether 321 abstracts.

1. Journalism studies is a field dominated by a pragmatist-partcipatory attitude towards theory
2. Even though journalism studies is a multidisciplinary field, it is dominated by sociological perspectives
3. The emerging theories within journalism studies are heavily influenced by a techno-economic discourse
4. Due to the vast amount of different theories, journalism studies is developing in a diversified rather than unified direction.

A field dominated by a pragmatist-participatory attitude towards theory

Our first argument is that journalism studies is dominated by what Mjøset (2006) identified as *a pragmatist-participatory attitude towards theory.* This implies that theory is not necessarily the starting point of academic inquiry. Even if the field is slowly becoming more theoretically aware, much of journalism research published in journals seeks to first and foremost find answers to practice-based questions that can be investigated empirically rather than through theorization (see also Löffelholz, 2008; Erjavec & Zajc, 2011).

A pragmatist-participatory attitude towards theory implies that generalization and specification are not seen as a dichotomy (Mjøset, 2006). Generalizations are grounded in specified contexts and specifications are found by comparison. This research attitude typically involves the making of typologies, which are revised as knowledge grows. Examples of such evolving typologies in journalism studies include research on news criteria (from Galtung & Ruge, 1965; to Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; and Harcup & O'Neill, 2016 and other studies), media systems (from Hallin & Mancini, 2004; to Aalberg, Aelst, & Curran, 2010 and other studies) and journalistic role perceptions and cultures (from Weaver, 1998; to Hanitzsch et al., 2011 and other studies).

Researchers who publish their work in *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies* prefer to present their research in an empirical manner. This tradition seems to favour an *empiria first and theory last, if at all* type of presentation pattern: in about a third of the abstracts we analysed, the role of theory remained implicit or hidden in how the study was summarized. In addition, about a quarter of all the examined abstracts throughout the sampled years did *not* mention any theory at all. We of course recognise that the journal article as genre does not allow extensive theorization[2], but we also believe that this empirical orientation is related to a more general adoption of the pragmatist- participatory attitude where theory-building is a bottom-up process that does not have to be explicated as a framework. Such empirical approaches have remained a central form of inquiry in journalism studies (Löffelholz 2008, 18). Historical reviews of journalism research point out that studies of journalism from the 1950s and onwards, especially in the United States, were indeed heavily influenced by empirical rather than theoretical work (Erjavec & Zajc, 2011, p. 14–17). Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009b, p. 5) connect the empirical phase of journalism studies to the ties that journalism research had to education: educators with background in practical newsroom work started to share their knowledge in academic formats.

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[2] We acknowledge that with our study based on abstracts and keywords, we can merely make conclusions only about how research is *presented*. Examining how theories are put to use in the studies, would require another review study on full articles.

Furthermore, previous studies from the broader field of mass communication research also indicate an adherence to a pragmatist-participatory attitude. Bryant and Miron (2004, p. 664) found that in 1806 randomly sampled articles from *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication* and *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* published 1956–2000, only 32 percent "included some theory". Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) found the same to be true in about 31 percent of articles published in 1980–1999 in ten major mass communication journals in the United States. This suggests that journalism journals are in line with the research culture of the journals from the broader field of communication research.

The pragmatist- participatory attitude can also be seen as a willingness to stay in touch with the practice that is examined. The relationship between researchers and journalists has been uneasy: journalists have even resisted the study of their work environment (Zelizer, 2009, p. 34) and interpreted research results as unfair criticism or over-theorization that does not resonate with the realities of the craft (Erjavec & Zajc, 2011, p. 26). Hence, the tendency to underline the empirical aspects of research can be interpreted as a sign of a field that takes a pragmatic attitude as a starting point in order to better serve the community of journalists.

The *empiria first, theory last* tradition is of course also linked to the inherently multidisciplinary nature of the field that creates a situation where there is a lack of journalism-specific macro-level theories that would require authors to automatically acknowledge them as the starting point of their studies. The well-known models that can be seen as classical *journalism* theories*,* such as gatekeeping (White, 1950), agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and news value (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) theories, are middle-range theories that theorize the individual-organizational level of journalism or explain specific aspects of journalism (Löffelholz 2008, p. 18).

However, our investigation of abstracts published in *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies* also indicates that there were more direct mentions of theories in the later years than in the early stages of the journals. This implies that researchers of journalism have become more prone to tie their work to theoretical argumentation also in journal articles. It seems fair to assume that the growing number of academic monographs and edited volumes pointed at in the introduction of this chapter, and which urge for new ways of understanding journalism, have contributed to a theoretical awareness also in journal articles.

Multidisciplinarity with sociological emphasis

Our second argument is that *even though journalism studies is a multidisciplinary field, it is dominated by a sociological emphasis in its theorization*. Journalism research has been noted to have strong ties with the social sciences. Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch (2009b, p. 6), for example, point out a clear "sociological turn" in journalism research in the 1970–1980s. Likewise, Reese (2016, p. 4) talks about a "shift to a sociology of news" where research became more interested in journalism as social practice than the preceding research that was preoccupied with questions of processes of journalistic communication and its effects on the public. The sociological turn brought with it questions of "power, control, structures, institutions, class, and community" (ibid.). In our journal analysis, we find that sociology appeared as the strongest background discipline of journalism studies, followed by political science and cultural as well as language theories. In the following sub-

sections, we will address the main theories of journalism stemming from these disciplinary traditions.

Journalism as a social system

Sociological perspectives imply that journalism is understood as a kind of *social system in which certain roles are performed and practices undertaken.* Rühl (2008) describes this societal approach to journalism as one that focuses on macro conceptions, such as systems and social roles, and uses these to understand the relationship and difference between journalism and other forms of public communication. A range of social system related macro theories has been used to explain and explore what role journalism plays in societies, why it matters and what makes it different from other forms of communication and other parts of society. Luhmann's **theory of social systems** can help explain journalism's position in a society by how it differentiate itself from other social systems and creates boundaries of meaning (Görke & Scholl, 2006). Bourdieu's **field theory**, in which journalism can be understood as a sub-field of the field of cultural production, has been used to analyse the connections between journalistic organisations, practices, products and professionals on the one side and larger social systems of power, economy and politics on the other (Benson, 1999, 2006). Like field theory, **new institutionalism** is a social system theory that mediates "the impact of macro-level forces on micro-level actions" (Ryfe, 2006, p. 137). Analysing journalism as an institution means analysing the presuppositions and tacit knowledge that guide journalistic practice across newsrooms, news organisations and other journalistic organisations.

Central to these theories is that they from a macro perspective provide explanations and questions for how an institution/field/system like journalism function and develop in societies through analysis of how individual behaviour coincide with larger, cross-organisational structures. As such, social system theories provide frameworks for analysing interplays between mental structures (norms, values, ideals), material structures (economy, technology) and agency in journalism. We find ways of analysing the same interplay also in middle-range theories like **organisational theory** and **hierarcy of influences theory**. The difference is that such theories do not aim at explaining societies on a macro level. Organisational theory provides a framework for understanding how various kinds of organisations are configured and reconfigured by internal and external structures, and by the actions of different kinds of professions and labour that are part of the organisation. Organisational theory has been applied in journalism studies to analyse for example how specific beats, like science journalism (Lublinski, 2011), develop. News production studies also take news organisations as their starting point and analyse how agency and mental and material structures shape how news is produced. Based on extensive ethnographic research, news production studies became a popular way of analysing journalism as meso and micro social systems during the 1970s (see Becker & Vlad, 2009 for an overview). Such studies were important to illuminate that news is something that is constructed based on certain routines, and they produced some of the best-known middle-range theories of journalism, like the theory of **news values** (see for instance Harcup & O'Neill, 2016) and the **gatekeeping theory** (see Shoemaker & Vos 2009).

Recognising that journalism has become increasingly independent of news organisations and influenced by all kinds of structures and agency on macro, meso and micro levels, the hierarchy of influence theory introduced by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) provides a model of the levels that influence journalism: from the macro social systems, via

social institutions and organisations to the micro levels of routine practices and individuals. Similarly, **practice theory** (Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki, 2001) opens up pre-defined conceptions of organisations and delves deeper into the interplay between the mental and material structures, and the agency, that both restrain and facilitate (professional) practice. Practice theory has been used to analyse how activities, materiality and discursive reflexivity connected to journalism shape what journalism is and why it develops as it does, preferably without preconceived ideas on who the key agents are, what they produce and within what kind of organisational framework journalism operates (Ahva, 2017).

The increasing uncertainty as to where journalism is to be found, who produces it, how various groups of professionals and amateurs participate and cooperate in its coming into existence, has made social system theories that do not take macro-societal perspectives as its starting point more popular. Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) is one example of such a social system theory with no preconceived ideas on who and what shapes the social system, which has gained traction in journalism studies in recent years (see Primo & Zago, 2015 for an overview and a more elaborate discussion below).

In our journal analysis, we find examples of all the above-mentioned theories. Almost a third of the abstracts and an equal share of the 20 most popular keywords drew from sociology (keywords like "professionalism", "globalization", "practice", "role", "news values", "newsroom", "community", "values"). A third of the abstracts referred to **professionalism**, which makes it the single most popular sociological framework in journal articles. Professionalism has been applied as a theoretical framework in journalism studies in three main ways. First, there are historical analyses of how news work and its forms have professionalized over time and whether this occupational culture can be described as a profession (e.g. Carey, 2007). Second, there are studies that focus on examining the professional ideology or culture of journalism: its core values and norms that mark the value-based boundaries of the field (e.g. Deuze, 2005). This tradition is also typically interested in the sense-making and positioning of journalists themselves: how they view the norms and surroundings that guide and impact their work and roles, also in a comparative fashion (e.g. Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017).

Third are the studies that focus on the legitimacy and jurisdiction of professional journalism as a societal agent, its distinct practices and roles in relation to other professions or political, economic and cultural fields (e.g. Waisbord, 2013). However, the theoretical framework of professionalism has also been criticized for limiting the domain that is seen as a valid information source about journalism and hence potentially omitting the role of participating non-journalists in the construction of journalism (Ahva 2017).

Journalism as a democratic force

The second most common disciplinary framework in journalism studies according to our journal analysis is political science. Keywords typical to this framework (like "election", "democracy", "public relations" "politics" and "public sphere") dominated at the beginning of the new millennium but declined towards 2016. Overall, these keywords indicate that the political science tradition sees *journalism as a democratic force that shapes public discourse.*

Democracy theories provide typical starting points for journalism studies and enable us to understand the role that journalism plays as a facilitator of the public sphere and how it covers issues that require public attention. Within this framework, we can identify various

approaches. The so-called **procedural or competitive democracy theories** have for a long time framed journalism studies and guided the researchers' attention towards the role that journalism plays in providing information to citizens as voters between the elections and the ways in which politicians compete over power in the public sphere (Strömbäck, 2005). While this tradition is still strong, the **participatory and deliberative democracy theories** (ibid.) became more prominent in the 1990s. These models invite us to examine and assess whether journalism enables or restricts civic agency and reasoning beyond the moment of voting and the role of public discourse in the formation of the political culture (e.g. Ettema, 2007). As a more middle-range theory developed within communication studies, **agenda setting theory** (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) provides a framework for analysing how journalism shapes the public sphere and consequently the ways in which we, as the public, understand the world. Priming and framing are core concepts within agenda setting theory and provide tools to analyse what and how issues gain importance in the media and thereby in public and political discourse. Refining agenda setting theory, theories of **second level agenda setting** (Ghanem, 1997) and **inter-media agenda setting** (Danielian & Reese, 2009) provide frameworks for analysing 1) how the media discuss issues that have already made the agenda (second-level agenda setting) and 2) how certain media (like elite newspapers) influence what other media should have on their agenda (inter-media agenda setting).

There are long, historic ties between journalism and democracy/public sphere theories. A free, independent press which facilitates a public sphere in which ideas and politics can be disseminated, debated, critiqued and shaped has been considered a cornerstone for democracy ever since the age of enlightenment, in which catch phrases like Thomas Jefferson's "information is the currency of democracy" began to dominate the democracy discourse (Zelizer, 2013, p. 463). Such links between journalism and democracy was directly articulated in the theory of journalism as the "**fourth estate**", in which journalism is prescribed a role as a guardian of democracy and as a mediator between public opinion and the governing institutions of a state (Boyce, 2008). The fourth estate theory and similar theoretically assumed links between journalism and democracy are normative theories, which prescribe what role journalism *should* have in a society and what a democracy *should* be like. Embedded in such normative theories is the notion that journalism is a prerequisite for democracy and vice versa; journalism and democracy are so intertwined that the one cannot exist without the other.

Such normative theories of journalism (and democracy) have been criticized for a number of reasons. First, they cannot explain how and why journalism exists in semi- or non-democratic societies. Siebert, Peterson and Schram (1956) addressed this problem as they provided a categorisations of how journalism functions in various political systems expressed as **the four theories of the press**: the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet-totalitarian. However, the four theories of the press did not provide an escape from normative theory, as it was discursively embedded within a libertarian logic that clearly ranked the four categories along an axis from good to bad (Nerone, 1995). Several revisions of the four theories of the press and alternative models have since been suggested, all of which are based on some degrees of normativity (see Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2010, chapter 1, for a review).

Moreover, normative theories linking journalism and democracy tend to disregard that journalism is not the only channel through which trustworthy information can flow through a society and a public sphere marked by diversity of opinions can be established. Blogs, social media, citizen journalism and other information channels have democratized

public speech, and Zelizer (2013) has therefore, and for other reasons, suggested it is time to put democracy theory to rest in journalism studies. Zelizer (ibid) also notes that journalism as much has been biased, partisan and connected with governance as it has been free and independent. Furthermnore, journalism is much more than hard news related to politics and democracy. Commercialisation and tabloidization has pushed journalism more towards the entertainment industry while at the same time making it more dependent on market forces, while forms and genres like lifestyle journalism (Hanusch, 2014), sports journalism (Boyle, 2006) and feature journalism (Steensen, 2018) promote other social functions of journalism than those related to politics and democracy.

Journalism as cultural production and discourse

Like social and political science theory, cultural theory occupies a position among the top disciplines that influence journalism studies according to our journal analysis. Reflecting the last point above about the diversity of journalism beyond issues related to politics and democracy, the cultural analysis of journalism argues that it is more fruitful to view journalism as broad-spectrum cultural production.

Analysing journalism through the lenses of cultural theory implies questioning what is presupposed in journalism, figuring out how journalists view themselves, trying to understand the diversity of journalism and connecting journalistic practices and products to questions of power, ideology, class, ethnicity, gender, identity, etc. The cultural analysis of journalism is interested in how journalism intersects with everyday life. How audiences perceive and interact with journalism is therefore important to cultural studies of journalism. In the words of Hartley (2009, p.47), the cultural analysis of journalism is interested in the "moment at which media production becomes communication and culture – the moment of the use in the circumstances of everyday life".

Keywords belonging to cultural theories, such as "identity" and "culture", entered the most popular keywords in 2014–2016 in our journal analysis. The named theories within this framework were also the most diverse in our study. They ranged from **feminist theory** (recently discussed and developed for example in North, 2009) to **cultural or affective public sphere theories** (e.g. Papacharissi, 2015) and **myth theories** (e.g. Eko, 2010). The cultural perspectives underline the role and significance of for example emotions (vs. rationality) and storytelling (vs. reporting) in journalism and connect everyday life with structural and power-related questions.

There is a strong connection between the cultural analysis of journalism and **critical theory**, especially related to neo-Marxism and the Frankfurter school of thought. This implies an ambition to unmask the social and ideological power structures embedded in journalism and to uncover the discrepancies between journalistic self-perception and "metajournalistic discourse" (Carlson, 2016) on the one hand and the actual expressions and meaning production systems of journalism on the other. Hence, language-based traditions of studying journalism is closely related to the cultural ones. The field of **semiotics**, in which text is understood as not only written language, but also as still and moving images, body language, etc, has been important in recognising journalism as visual culture and the diversity through which journalism produces meaning. Language studies increasingly also emphasise the social and cultural situatedness of journalistic texts, which requires that the studies of text are informed by material and contextual dimensions, too (Richardson, 2008, p. 2).

The most common frameworks within language-oriented perspectives on journalism are **discourse theory** (recently discussed and developed for example in Kelsey, 2015), **narrative theory** (e.g. Johnston & Graham, 2012) and **genre theories** (Marques de Melo & Assis, 2016). From these, discourse theory is the most popular according to our journal analysis. There are various approaches within the umbrella of discourse theory, but Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is perhaps the most widely used and influential in the field of media and journalism studies. CDA looks into the dialectical relationship between discourse and the social systems in which they function to expose how language and meaning are used by the powerful to oppress the dominated, so that the approach could be said to have an emancipatory trajectory (Pöyhtäri, 2014, p. 95–96). For example, van Dijk (2009, p. 193) has underlined that a major dimension in discourse analytical studies of journalism is the ideological nature of news: the approach can help in examining the expression and reproduction of ideology in news, the axiomatic beliefs underlying the social representations shared by a group. He furthermore points out that the role of discourse in reproducing racism, nationalism and sexism should be more carefully studied in the future.

Thus, combined together, the disciplinary perspectives of culture and language regard *journalism as a form of cultural production that shapes us and our world through discourse.*

Emerging theories take inspiration from technology and economy

If the above discussed threesome – sociology, political science, cultural and language studies – provides the relatively stable theoretical backbone to the multidisciplinarity of journalism studies, the *perspectives of technology and economy are the booming newcomers.* This is no surprise, given the prevalent discourse around the crisis of journalism: the financial crisis, for one, centred around the question on how to make journalism a profitable business in the digital age; and the technological crisis over how the practices, products and proliferation of news work is dramatically changing due to digitialization. Therefore, the techno-economic discourse (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008) has emerged as a strong sense-making category for newsroom management as well as scholarship.

Our abstract analysis indicates that the share of economy as a background discipline rose from zero to five percent, and technology from three to six percent in 2000–2016. Therefore, among the smaller disciplines, economy and technology are the perspectives that have increased their share the most. It also seems that such perspective have a stronger impact than other perspectives. Based on analysis of citation metrics, we found that articles framed within a techno-economic discourse were more likely to get cited than articles framed within any other disciplinary traditions.

Journalism as a socio-material practice

The increasing role of technology is reflected in our journal analysis as the emergence of new keywords, such as, "computational journalism", "materiality" and "visualization". On the one hand, technology as a background discipline appears as one that can be adopted in order to re-examine certain traditional aspects of journalism (such as visualization) or to update popular journalism-related middle-range theories, such as gatekeeping (reworked

into gate*watching*, see Bruns 2005). On the other hand, the technological perspective has brought entirely new theoretical input to the field. For example, science and technology studies (STS) is one of the most important new fields to have influenced theorization of journalism in the digital age (Ahva & Steensen, 2017). **Socio-technical theories**, such as Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT), have gained ground in journalism studies, especially since the publication of Boczkowski's seminal book *Digitizing the News* (2004), which paved the way for understanding the interplay between technology, materiality and social practice related to the production of (online) journalism. However, perspectives like ANT are as much methodological approaches as theories, and they have therefore been criticized for lack of explanatory powers (Benson, 2017).

Nevertheless, the keyword "network" has in recent years emerged as a booming newcomer in journalism studies, as have spatial keywords related to "ecosystems" and "landscapes". Reese (2016, p. 10) refers to "the ecosystem shift" in theories of journalism and connects this to the emergence of digital platforms that have made some of the classical conceptual categorizations invalid. This technological perspective thus seems to regard *journalism as a materially defined practice.*

Journalism as post-industrial business endeavour

Our analysis of journal article keywords points to an interesting shift in how economy/business/industry-related perspective are framed in journalism studies. The keywords within this branch that were popular in 2000–2013, such as "media industry" and "economic theory", vanished from the most popular keywords by 2014–2016 and were replaced by a variety of more flexible, individual-focused and business-related conceptualizations, such as "sustainability" or "entrepreneurialism". This shift is connected to a situation where the journalism industry as a clearly demarcated branch within the media industry needs to be rethought – as proposed by the notion of "post-industrial journalism" (Anderson et al., 2012). This rethinking of journalism as industry and business involves a move from journalism as organisational enterprises to individual entrepreneurship.

The emphasis on individuals becomes explicit, for example, in how the notion of entrepreneurial journalism has been recently discussed and theorized. Here the discourse is centred on how individual journalists can (and should) reinvent themselves as independent entrepreneurs by starting a company outside of legacy news organizations. Hence concepts and theories from management and business studies, such as "business model canvas" (Singer 2017), are applied to address how journalists can see change and disruption as business opportunities (Briggs 2012). This indicates that the perspectives of economy and business perceive *journalism as commercial endeavour* that pertains to changing structures as well as individual activities.

The long tail of theories

Our fourth argument is that the *story of theory in journalism studies is very much a story of the long tail*. This means that while the field has matured and become more theoretically aware, the sheer number of theories applied has also increased. In our journal analysis, we found 116 different theories mentioned in the abstracts of the three volumes 2002/2003,

2012 and 2016 of *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies*. In 2016 alone, we found 58 different theories in the 126 articles.

Only a few theories were clearly more popular than others, like professionalism and democracy theories, but most of the theories were mentioned only once. Examples from the long tail include varied frameworks such as **ideational theory, cultural chaos theory, cumulative prospect theory, theory of voice,** and **cartography**. This situation resonates with Bryant's and Miron's (2004) analysis of the role of theory in mass communication journals in 1956–2000. In the 1806 articles they analysed, 604 different theories were identified, most of which were referenced only a few times.

The long tail of theories prompts the following question: Is it at all possible to build a unifying knowledge paradigm for journalism studies, and is such a paradigm necessary? As our analysis reveals, the questions asked by journalism scholars are close to being outnumbered by the theoretical approaches used. From a classical perspective on the nature of disciplines, in which a shared knowledge paradigm is considered important, one might therefor argue that because journalism is described and analysed through so many different academic languages, it runs the risk of resembling the cacophony at the biblical tower of Babel. Consequently, one might ask: Is the shared knowledge paradigm only a distant fata morgana that each and every journalism scholar gaze at from the isolation of their own theoretical islands?

For a number of reasons, we would advise against asking such questions. First, a shared knowledge paradigm does not necessarily mean a fixed and stable set of theories. It could instead, as proposed by Carlson et al. (2008), be understood as a shared set of commitments, which constitute a shared way of knowing as an epistemic culture. Second, the pragmatist-partcipatory attitude towards theory has a strong foothold in journalism studies, and even though this attitude does not represent a shared knowledge paradigm, it represents an agreement that empirical material is the nave around which theories circle. This does not necessarily mean that theory plays a *subordinate* role in journalism studies. Rather, if the pragmatist-partcipatory, grounded theory inspired attitude is understood as Mjøset (2006) suggests, it means that theoretical knowledge is essential in the construction of a "local research frontier", meaning the accumulated knowledge established by previous grounded research on the same area. Such an approach implies that theoretical constructs are constantly negotiated by empirical material. Hence, theories emerge, and disciplinary resonance may need to be searched, from various directions, not just from the traditional ones.

Such an attitude towards theory is perhaps a fruitful path for journalism studies, which object of study is in a constant flux. Deuze and Witschge argue along these lines as they observe that journalism is a profession in a "permanent process of becoming" (2017, p. 13), which requires of journalism studies to have a constantly evolving toolkit of perspectives from which to understand this process.

In fact, instead of resembling the tower of Babel, one could argue that the magnitude of theoretical perspectives and the consequent lack of a shared knowledge paradigm fits well with Feyerabend's (1993, p. 9) notion of the perfect state of science: "Science is an essentially anarchic enterprise: theoretical anarchism is more humanitarian and more likely to encourage progress than its law-and-order alternatives."

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have painted a picture of what theory looks like in journalism studies. We structured our examination on four arguments based on an analysis of articles published in *Journalism* and *Journalism Studies* from 2000 to 2016. This examination pointed at general trends in the use of theory and gave us a backbone to map the families of theories in journalism studies more broadly.

As a summary, we can say that journalism studies is a vivid and maturing multidisciplinary field, which tries to capture a constantly moving object by asking new, empirical questions guided by an increasingly larger pool of different theories and frameworks. At the same time, theoretical awareness of the field seems to be on the rise.

Journalism studies is strongly rooted in the sociological research tradition and also heavily shaped by the political science and cultural and language studies traditions. It is understood in numerous and sometimes competing ways but is most often viewed as some kind of social system, as a democratic force, as cultural production and discourse, and increasingly also as a socio-material and commercial practice.

Moreover, journalism studies has strong ties to normative and critical theories, and there is a rising awareness especially related to the role of normative theory in journalism studies. For example, Carlson et al. (2018, p. 15) argue (normatively!) that normativity is a key characteristic of both journalism and journalism studies that should be recognised, embraced, critically scrutinised and made transparent:

> A commitment to normative awareness can manifest itself as a form of reflexivity that examines both the explicit and implicit assumptions that show up in the data and analyses of researchers. Such awareness can also result in a critical stance that challenges the effects of journalism's normative commitments on news.

In the first edition of this handbook, Zelizer argued that journalism studies was "at war with self" and dominated by "a slew of independent academic efforts taking place in a variety of disciplines without the shared knowledge crucial to academic inquiry" (2009, p. 34). It seems that not much has changed, but we do not necessarily agree with the presupposition embedded in the above quote related to the necessity of a shared knowledge paradigm. We believe that journalism studies is well served by a constant search for new approaches and new perspectives from a variety of disciplines. This means that journalism scholars should not lament such a theoretical anarchy but embrace it. Even though most of the innovative theoretical endeavours that come out of this anarchic state might bear no mark on the field, the ones that do, can push the field in new and fruitful directions.

However, continuous search for theoretical innovation may promote new theories over old ones simply because they are new and not necessarily because they are better. There is, therefore, a potential normativity in such a theoretical anarchy that favours the new and unknown over the old and familiar. Journalism scholars should be aware of such a potential bias and not disregard the knowledge accumulated by previous intellectual inquiries into journalism. At least, there should be reflexivity in regard to the specific disciplinary traditions that authors locate themselves within.

Even though we salute the current state of theoretical anarchy in journalism studies, we recognise that the field is in almost constant need of shared meeting places, both physically, typically in conferences, and intellectually, in the form of edited volumes and monographs that aim at pulling the various theoretical threads together. This is what makes

journalism studies an interpretive community while at the same time making visible what a vibrant, evolving field it is.

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