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# Journalism Education

Journalism Education is the journal of the Association for Journalism Education a body representing educators in HE in the UK and Ireland. The aim of the journal is to promote and develop analysis and understanding of journalism education and of journalism, particularly when that is related to journalism education.

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Editorial

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Editorial

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# Articles

All papers in the Articles section are peer reviewed and discuss the latest research in journalism and journalism education. These are intended to inform, educate and spark debate and discussion. Please join in this debate by going to [www.journalism-education.org](http://www.journalism-education.org) to have your say and find out what others think.

## Looking at future and seeking alternatives: An exploratory case study on the uses of Team-Based Learning in journalistic ethics pedagogy in the United States

**Mohammad Delwar Hossain, University of South Alabama and Julie M. Estis, University of South Alabama**

### Abstract

This study examines the impact of Team-Based Learning in teaching journalistic ethics with a focus on the United States. TBL is a paradigm shift from course concepts conveyed by the instructor to the application of course con-

cepts by students. This instructional strategy has revolutionized pedagogy in different fields by achieving high levels of cohesiveness in small groups in a classroom setting. The current project will extend the existing knowledge on the role of TBL in journalistic ethics pedagogy. This is a mixed-method study using both TeamUSA Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) pre/post-course surveys and in-depth interviews to conduct the study. The findings show TBL helped journalistic ethics students in collaboration and critical thinking. Both collaboration and critical thinking are important methods journalism students use to deal with daily issues related to media. Hence, the findings of the study will help improve the pedagogical approach of journalistic ethics in the future.

### Introduction

Several studies have found alternative pedagogical approaches (e.g., Team-Based Learning, cooperative, cumulative and problem-based learning) in mass communication classes engage students (Han & Newell, 2014), improve academic performance (Tsay & Brady, 2010), enable students to produce context-dependent answers (Kilpert & Shay, 2013) and help first-year journalism students (Wright, 2012).

Han and Newell (2014) examined the role of Team-Based Learning (TBL) in a mass communication theory class and found this pedagogical method better engages students in the class. Particularly, TBL improved group knowledge over individual knowledge. The author acknowledged this method “enhances their (students’) ability to perform critical and creative evaluations of the role and influence of mass media in the society.”

Tsay and Brady (2010) found involvement in cooperative learning is a strong predictor of students’ academic performance. TBL is a unique and distinctive form of instruction. This method is a specific small group-based instructional method and can produce a wide variety of positive educational outcomes (Michaelsen, 2004). TBL fosters an engaging learning environment to enable students to acquire knowledge by creatively solving issues related to respective disciplines. TBL encourages student participation and promotes active learning (Offenbeek, 2001). Even though this pedagogical approach applies to all disciplines, students in hands-on skills courses and a career-oriented curriculum could acquire knowledge by dealing with real-world situations in the TBL classes.

Scholars (e.g., Wright, 2012) conducted studies on the efficacy of team/group based pedagogical approaches for increasing student engagement and thus achieving a better learning experience. Wright (2012) found that students would have a “deep learning” because of Group Project-Based Learning pedagogical approach. Even though there have not been pedagogical studies on journalistic ethics, group discussion, and TBL may have been used in journalistic ethics teaching. It has been a common teaching activity. Like the other scholars, the findings of this study show the TBL helped journalistic ethics students with collaboration and critical thinking. In this respect, this study offers insights into the pedagogical benefits of this approach,



particularly from the student perspective. Thus, the current project extends the existing knowledge on the role of TBL in journalistic ethics pedagogy.

## Literature review

### Journalistic ethics

Careers in journalism and communication (e.g., reporting, public relations) require dealing with ethical issues daily. Moreover, in an age of growing media distrust, teaching ethics has become a greater pedagogical requirement for communication education than at any other time in history. Ethics refers to what one ‘should’ do; it has been a great challenge for journalists to agree on what ‘should’ entails and what ethical means in the media.

Studies (e.g. Veenstra et al. 2014) found media cover incidents based on the ideological standpoint of respective media organizations and their people. In this respect, media professionals make ethical decisions based on consensus rather than ideological standpoints. Thus, it is essential to know how to deal with ethical dilemmas in a group setting accommodating different perspectives rather than individual ideological views to the news in a newsroom setting. In real-life settings, journalists and public relations practitioners also have to work in teams.

Usually, students learn mostly theoretical aspects in a traditional journalistic ethics class. Instructors often use examples to clarify theoretical points, but with this method, students can’t discuss possible solutions for any ethical dilemma in a group setting. The main purpose of journalistic ethics pedagogy is to prepare students as considerate and ethical media practitioners to solve ethical issues related to media in a group environment. According to Hanson (2002), news directors are now demanding students join the workforce with better critical thinking and problem-solving skills, meaning students need to be better prepared for what they could face in real-world scenarios. As “intellectual flexibility, creativity and intrepidity” (Bowers, 2016) are necessary components for media ethics pedagogy in the future, the TBL could be a revolutionary approach to teach journalistic ethics.

### Teaching media ethics

Even though the Hutchins Commission (1947) emphasized a socially responsible press, there were few formal pedagogical approaches to media ethics instruction in the early days of media education in the U.S. The debate and discussion over pedagogical approaches related to media ethics have evolved with the development of professional journalism. However, interest in media ethics pedagogy has been growing with the development and improvement of courses related to media ethics since socio-political upheavals in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States (Lambeth et al., 2004). The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (2018) requires all accreditation-seeking institutions to “demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.” Christians (1978) in his seminal study found journalism scholars disagreed on the formal educational process of teaching media ethics and making journalism students aware of ethical concerns in their profession. Referring to a survey conducted during that time, Christians (1978) documented the approach to the subject by journalism schools: “About 88 percent of the schools without ethics courses believe it is pedagogically more sound to treat ethical issues as they arise in the classroom,” (p.4). Cooper (1980) also noted the lack of media ethics education among journalists and argued that because of inadequate ethics training, journalists were not concerned with the consequences a story may have or the outcome of a story entirely.

Christians (1978) concluded the pedagogical style of teaching media ethics needed to improve. Other media educators and researchers also noted the necessity for media ethics instruction after Christians and Covert’s (1980) study, “Teaching Ethics in Journalism Education,” (Lambeth et al., 2004). Braun (1999) found students would prefer a stand-alone course in media ethics employing a variety of teaching methods. In terms of focusing on the value of media ethics, students said they would prefer a media ethics

pedagogy to “examine various cultural interpretations of media ethics” (p.171). Conway and Groshek (2008) observed the positive impact of ethics education in changing the attitudes of students of journalism. As a result, students had harsher views on the penalties for a lack of ethical journalism. The concern was raised across the board for the importance of ethical journalism.

Despite the growing consensus on teaching media ethics in schools of journalism since the 1970s, the mandatory requirement for a mass media ethics class in the journalism curricular has not been widely accepted. Therefore, scholars (e.g., Richardson, 1994; Black & Steel, 1991, Christians & Covert, 1980; Meyers, 1990) highlighted the importance of innovative teaching strategies like the Arthur Miller Socratic approach, problem-solving, role-playing, and case histories. According to a study conducted by Lambeth et al. (2004), 37.2% of the JMC units at that time required students to take an ethics class. In terms of objectives of the courses on media ethics offered by the educational institutions at that time, Lambeth et al. (2004) found “fostering moral reasoning skills ranked first, seeking moral development of students ranked second, and preparing students for professional work ranked third,” (p.245). Based on a survey conducted among television news editors, Hanson (2002) found both the employers (television news producers) and employees (journalism students) agreed ethics is best learned on a real-life job.

Schwalbe and Cuillier (2013) examined content areas, teaching styles, and effective teaching methods of media ethics courses and found discussions, team-oriented exercises, case studies, and readings were the most used pedagogical methods. However, case studies were more prevalent in teaching ethics. In this respect, TBL could provide a good setting to teach media ethics classes using case studies as students can discuss and argue about a particular case in a group setting, simulating a real newsroom scenario. Scholars (e.g. Ruminski and Hanks, 1995) found that even though three-quarters of journalism schools offer critical thinking-oriented media ethics curricula, they do not follow a “systematic or well-defined way” (p.238). According to the authors, even though traditional methods of ethics education are still relevant, elements such as visual and kinesthetic exercises, and personally relevant and motivational activities should be integrated into the ethics curricula.

### Theoretical Framework: TBL

TBL is a dynamic learning-centered approach that can introduce a pedagogical approach urged by Ruminski and Hanks (1995). Michaelsen originated the idea of TBL in the late 1970s. In this learning approach, instructors ask, “What do I want my students to learn?” instead of the more traditional question of “What am I going to teach” (Knight, 2004). The foundation of the TBL is based on a democratic learning process, which means students along with their instructor take responsibility for their exposure to the course content. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) emphasized the impact of active learning, noting, “students understand better, remember longer, and develop higher-order learning when they actively engage in a learning activity.” Scholars (e.g., Merrill, 2002) also stressed learning could be more effective when students solve real-world problems. In that respect, scholars (Bean, 1996; Phillips & Soltis, 2004; Bonwell & Eison, 1991) observed students could achieve higher-order learning in a more collaborative environment. In terms of defining TBL, scholars (e.g., Flink, 2004, Michaelsen et al., 2004a) focused on the power of small groups and making learners more engaged in the learning process. According to Fink (2004), “TBL is a particular instructional strategy that is designed to a) support the development of high-performance learning teams and, b) provide opportunities for these teams to engage in significant learning tasks.” In this definition, Fink (2004) has emphasized two key ideas in the definition:

- TBL is a particular instructional strategy;
- TBL revolves around the development of teams.

This idea of TBL is founded on the notion of the “power of small groups.” According to the founders of this concept, students take responsibility in the learning process. Michaelsen et al. (2004b) observed, “TBL is a unique and powerful way of using small groups.” Flink (2004) also highlighted the importance of small groups in TBL, noting, “TBL” is a special approach to the use of small groups that take both teachings and learning to a whole new level of educational significance,” (p.4). Anwar et al. (2012) found the group performance improved over individual performance. Roebuck (1998) found students would spend 80% of their time working within a group setting if a TBL class is conducted correctly. Thomas (2012) found 86.4% of students enjoyed group activities. Roebuck (2014) said both students and teachers benefit from group learning and instructors become a “facilitator and manager of learning rather than the spoon feeder of information,” (p.5).

For a TBL class, the design of the course depends on a three-phase sequence: preparation, application, and assessment. In the preparation step, students complete their reading assignments. In the application step, students utilize the content for the particular subject/topic in the application step. The instructor in the assessment step completes grading. Several principles are required for the TBL class including forming the group correctly and making students engaged and accountable for group activities. The success of TBL relies heavily on the process of team formation. While both teams and groups consist of two or more people (four to six are ideal), team members are required to show a higher level of commitment and need to have a higher level of trust among members than does a group. In a TBL class, it is expected students understand the content of the course, can use the content to solve real-life problems and will develop their ability and skills to work in a team, resulting in improvement of their critical thinking skills (Flink 2004, p.23). According to Roebuck (1998), the TBL classes include six steps of instructional activity sequence: individual study, Individual Readiness Assurance Test (IRAT), Team Readiness Assurance Test (TRAT), preparation of written appeals, instructors comments, and application-oriented activities, projects, and exams.

Scholars (Michaelson, 2004; Fink, 2004; Roebuck, 1998) highlighted the benefits of TBL in classes across curriculums. One of the major benefits of this learning method is helping students apply concepts instead of simply learning those objectives. Students are, in essence, thinking holistically rather than responding by rote. Fink (2004) points out some of the drawbacks of traditional learning techniques in the new media age. Students want a new type of learning experience rather than just “information dumping.” Fink notes human interaction and problem-solving are the two most important qualities employers want in new hires. Moreover, instructors want to create an active and interesting learning environment. In a traditional class setting, it is not always possible to engage students and ensure more human interaction. In this respect, TBL could be a game-changer by providing a new learning strategy.

According to Fink (2004), TBL brings four kinds of transformation:

- Transforming small groups into teams
- Transforming techniques into strategy
- Transforming the quality of student learning
- Transforming the joy of teaching

According to Michaelsen (2004), TBL is effective for several reasons such as “motivating attendance, handling discipline problems, and engaging members.” (p. 48). For Fink (2004) two conditions must be met for using TBL in class: The course must contain a significant body of information and ideas (i.e., the content) the students need to understand; and students must be prepared to solve problems, answer questions and resolve issues, etc.; In this respect, TBL could be a good teaching instructional strategy for a media ethics class. Anwar et al. (2012) found the TBL is more beneficial for academically “at-risk students” than their non-risk counterparts. They also found attendance was higher in the TBL classes compared with regular classroom sessions. Roebuck (1998) found attendance, participation, and preparation increased in the classroom using TBL. He also found students became empowered by their own learning experience and could, therefore, recognize the value of hands-on activities during application rather than just listening to lectures in a traditional lecture-based class. Through solving problems in teams, students could improve their interpersonal skills. In a TBL setting, even the most efficient member of a team would be able to achieve a project alone that teams can achieve (Watson, Michaelsen, & Sharp, 1991). Varol (2012) found the TBL could be an effective way to improve the communication skills of students.

After examining the effects of the TBL in a mass communication theory class, Han and Newell (2014) found as the TBL approach required student-led discussion, group discussion, and term papers from each team, the instructor acted as the manager of the learning process. Students had an increased interest in the learning process. In terms of applicability of TBL for mass communication classes, Han and Newell (2014) argued J&MC programs have a career-based curriculum and most of the classes are hands-on skills-based courses. Particularly, TBL would be a good pedagogical approach for mass communication classes because, “teamwork is the chief mode of operation in the mass communication industry, particularly in advertising, public relations and healthcare communication,” (Han & Newell, p 190.). Kilpert and Shay (2013) also echoed Han and Newell, noting a journalism program itself is an example of a vocation driven curriculum.

Despite its advantages, TBL has some drawbacks. As the main component of TBL is forming the teams, the effectiveness of TBL depends mainly on the cohesiveness in the teams. In this respect, the role of the instructor is important because the instructor ensures small groups are acting as powerful teams. Timmerman and Morris (2015) found exercises are important in the TBL classes because the instructors need to reconfigure the entire course with uniquely suitable exercises. Tsay and Brady (2010) agreed students’ academic

performance depends on their active participation in a TBL class.

## Using TBL in a communication ethics and social responsibility course

This current exploratory study has been designed to examine what impact, if any, the TBL would have on teaching a course on communication ethics and social responsibility. The course was a 400-level undergraduate class titled Communication Ethics and Social Responsibility. This is one of the courses in the core curriculum for all majors and is offered every semester at a mid-sized university in the Southeastern United States. Major objectives of the course include teaching primary ethical theories common to ethics in communication and applying ethical theories in given sets of circumstances. Following the TBL guidelines, the instructor divided the class into 12 modules. Students were assigned reading material for each module. At the first meeting of each twice-weekly class in which a new module was introduced, the instructor assessed student preparedness through the Individual Readiness Assessment Test (iRAT) and Team Readiness Assessment Test (tRAT).

Students used the theories related to communication ethics by working on a case study during the second and sometimes third meeting of the module. In this way, students engaged in a series of activities during the semester.

TBL requires classes to be divided into distinct teams, so the instructor assigned 4-5 students to each group based on concentrations in communication, assuring that each team comprised multiple concentrations found in the department. Then, the members of each group worked together for the rest of the semester. The instructor introduced the TBL pedagogy in the first-class followed by practicing iRAT and tRAT on the course syllabus. As the TBL pedagogy requires students to complete the assigned readings before the class meeting, the course instructor assigned readings for each week. Then, students were required to take both an iRAT and a tRAT. In this way, the instructor was able to assess student comprehension of the concepts assigned for that particular week. Each iRAT and tRAT consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions, each worth four points. (Appendix A). First, each student took the iRAT individually. For the iRAT, students uncertain of the correct answer had the option to divide the scores among four options for the answer. For example, one student could assign one point for each of the four options on the answer sheet. Then, students took the tRAT as groups. The instructor used the Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IF-AT) to conduct the tRAT. The IF-AT form provided a “scratch and get the point” option. (Attachment A). A team would get the full four points if the team could get the right answer (a star) in one scratch. Students were required to discuss the questions and options for answers with their team members based on their reading of assigned topics and their iRAT answers taken before the tRAT. After conducting iRATs and tRATs, students were asked in the second weekly class to work on a case study related to an ethical issue faced by media. (Case Study Attachment). Importantly, questions relating to the case studies were sequenced so that the students experienced a progression of complexity. For example, the first step for the students was to learn how to identify an ethical dilemma. Consequently, the first exercise was to identify an ethical dilemma in a case study and to explain why it was a dilemma. The next step was to understand loyalties. After reading an assignment on identifying and applying loyalties in ethical decision making, then the students read a case study and then identified the ethical dilemma and then stated their loyalties, and applied them to the case. This progression continued throughout the semester until students examined a case study and applied all the concepts they had studied.

During the case study exercise, students worked with their teams. Students had to study the case and provided their options to address the dilemma mentioned in the case. First, the teams spent around 20-30 minutes to discuss the case and brainstorm their ideas. Second, they were given 4-5 minutes to present their arguments regarding the case to the class. Third, the whole class provided feedback after each presentation.

## Student Profile

The class was taught in Spring 2018 with 35 students enrolled for the course. Among the students, 51 percent were female and 49 percent were male. Of the total students, 51 percent were seniors, 46 percent were juniors, and 3 percent were sophomores with 94 percent majoring in communication and the rest majoring in English or Economics/Finance. In terms of ethnic background, 43 percent were Caucasians, 40 percent

were African American, 6 percent were Hispanics, 3 percent were Asians, 3 percent mentioned their races as unknown, and 5 percent mentioned two or more races.

## Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent will TBL enables students to work in a collaborative environment to deal with ethical issues in the media?

RQ2: To what extent will TBL enables students to think critically about issues related to journalistic ethics?

## Method

This is a mixed-method study and data were collected based on a survey and in-depth interviews in a media ethics class at a mid-sized Southeastern university in the United States. We have used the TeamUSA Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) pre/post-course survey. A Graduate Assistant (GA) majoring in communication conducted the in-depth interviews following several steps. The GA was trained and briefed about the purpose of the study. An email invitation was sent to the students in CA 445 (Communication Ethics and Social Responsibility). Only several students responded to the email expressing their willingness to participate in the study. Some students preferred to answer the interview questions via email. So, the GA sent the set of questions to the students. The questions of the in-depth interviews included: “How does learning in a group setting increase your understanding of the course material?” “How does learning in a group setting increase your ability to think critically about media ethics issues in a real-life setting?” “In what way is solving problems in a group setting an effective way to practice the course material?” “In what way is it necessary to collaborate with team members to be successful?”

## Measurement

Collaboration (before) was measured by averaging six statements on a five-point scale (Strongly disagree 1, strongly agree 5). Statements included: “I ask questions or contribute to course discussion in other ways” “I explain course material to other students.” Collaboration (after) was measured by averaging six statements on a five-point scale (Strongly disagree 1, strongly agree 5). Statements included: “I ask other students to help me understand course materials” “I work with other students on course projects or assignments”

Critical thinking (before) was measured by averaging 10 statements on a five-point scale (strongly disagree 1, strongly agree 5). Statements included: “I connect my learning to societal problems or issues” “I evaluate a point of view, decision, or information source.” “I can solve real-world problems.” Critical thinking (after) was measured by averaging 10 statements on a five-point scale (Strongly disagree 1, strongly agree 5). Statements included: “I examine the strengths and weaknesses of my views on topics and issues.” “I analyze an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts.”

## Results

We conducted a paired sample t-test to measure the differences in *collaboration* before and after taking the course. We found no statistically significant difference in the scores for Before (Mean(M)=3.60, Standard Deviation (SD)=5.71) and After (M=3.64, SD=4.20) taking the course; t= -0.168.

Even though the results showed no statistical significance, we found some practical significance. For example, the mean score for the Collaboration Average slightly increased from Before (3.60) to After (3.64) taking the class. We also found the mean scores for three out of six statements on the scale increased from Before to After taking the class. For example, the mean score for “I ask other students to help me understand course materials” increased by .43 points (from 3.57 to 4.00). The mean score for “I explain course material to other students” increased by 0.29 points (from 3.71 to 4.00).

M	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Valid N		
I ask questions or contribute to course discussion in other ways	Before	3.86	1.23	0.40	0.70	14
	After	3.71	1.00			14
I ask other students to help me understand course materials	Before	3.57	1.34	-1.15	0.27	14
	After	4.00	.79			14
I explain course material to other students	Before	3.71	1.14	-1.44	0.17	14
	After	4.00	.73			14
I prepare for exams by discussing or working through course materials with other students	Before	2.86	1.51	-0.354	0.73	14
	After	3.00	1.30			14
I work with other students on course projects or assignments	Before	4.00	1.24	0.694	0.50	14
	After	3.71	1.00			14
I give course presentations in groups (not just PowerPoint presentations)	Before	3.77	1.30	0.433	0.67	13
	After	3.62	1.04			13
Collaboration Average	Before	3.60	5.71	-0.168	0.87	13
	After	3.64	4.20			13

Table 1: Collaboration

Lastly, the mean score for “I prepare for exams by discussing or working through course materials with other students” also rose slightly (from 2.86 to 3.00).

In the open-ended qualitative responses, students also mentioned the effectiveness of Team-Based Learning for collaboration and cooperation. For example, in response to “what was the most beneficial aspect of the Team-Based Learning,” one student mentioned: *“Hearing everybody. Different opinions and perspectives and all coming to one agreement.”* Another student referred to the applicability of the Team-Based Learning classes for preparing them for the real world and mentioned: *“I learn a lot more. I always work better with the team. I don’t like how a lot of our classes are not team-based learning. In the working world, you work with other people.”*

One student mentioned how the TBL provided a platform for networking and said: *“Making friends who can help in and out of class.”* The responses from in-depth interviews showed that students highlighted the benefits of TBL for their learning.

One student mentioned *It is easier solving problems in a group setting. You can brainstorm and come up with different approaches to solving the problem.*” Another student referred to the benefit of TBL for solving media related real-life problem and said the benefit is *“having more solutions helps create the best possible answer to the problem.”*

With the same perspective, another student said, *“I have been in several groups during my time at South. I’ve learned so much about the different roles members in a group have. I’ve also learned how to handle conflict in group settings which have prepared me for a real-life setting.”*



M	SD	t	S i g . (2-tailed)	Valid N		
I connect my learning to societal problems or issues	Before	3.36	1.65	-2.07	0.06	14
	After	4.14	0.77			14
I examine the strengths and weaknesses of my views on topics and issues	Before	3.71	1.27	-1.16	0.27	14
	After	4.07	0.83			14
I imagine how an issue looks from another's perspective to better understand someone else's views	Before	4.21	1.12		0.84	14
	After	4.29	0.83			14
I connect ideas from courses to my prior experiences and knowledge	Before	4.00	1.18	-.23	0.82	14
	After	4.07	0.73			14
I apply facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations	Before	4.14	1.10	0.64	0.53	14
	After	3.93	0.73			14
I analyze an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	Before	4.00	1.18	-0.68	0.51	14
	After	4.21	0.70			14
I evaluate a point of view, decision, or information source	Before	4.07	1.21	0.00	1.00	14
	After	4.07	0.73			14
I form new ideas or understandings from various pieces of information	Before	4.21	1.21	0.41	0.67	14
	After	4.07	0.73			14
I think critically and analytically	Before	4.00	1.18	-0.68	0.51	14
	After	4.21	0.80			14
I can solve real-world problems	Before	4.29	1.20	-.49	0.64	14
	After	4.43	0.76			14
Critical Thinking Average	Before	4.00	10.78	-.55	0.60	14
	After	4.15	6.50			14

Table 2: Critical Thinking

We also conducted a paired sample t-test to measure the differences in *critical thinking* before and after taking the course. We found no statistically significant difference in the scores for Before (M=4.00, SD=10.78) and After (M=4.15, SD=6.50) taking the course; t= -.55. However, we found slight practical significance for critical thinking as the mean score increased by .15. Even though the results showed no statistical significance, we also found some practical significance for different questions on this scale. The results showed the mean scores for seven out of 10 statements on the scale increased from Before to After taking the class. For example, the mean score for “I connect my learning to societal problems or issues” increased by more than three-quarters of a point (from 3.36 to 4.14). The mean score for “I examine the strengths and weaknesses of my views on topics and issues” increased by .36 points (from 3.71 to 4.07). The mean score for “I think critically and analytically” increased by .21 points (from 4.00 to 4.21). The

mean score for “I apply facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations” increased by .21 points; “I analyze an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts” increased by .21 points, “I form new ideas or understandings from various pieces of information” increased by .14 points, and the mean score for “I analyze an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts” also increased by 0.21 points (from 4.00 to 4.21).

In the qualitative open-ended responses, we also found students mentioned the impact of Team-Based Learning in their critical thinking. For example, in responding “What was the most beneficial aspect of Team-Based Learning, one student said, “*Learning different methods of solving problems from other perspectives*. Referring to the benefit of Team-Based Learning for critical thinking, one student identified, “*getting to see things from another perspective*.” In the in-depth interviews, students also acknowledged the usefulness of Team-Based Learning for developing their critical thinking. For example, one student said, “*Learning about media ethics can be complex at times. Talking about these issues with my group allowed me to better understand an otherwise complex and difficult subject*.” In that respect, another student said, “*when you’re in a group you have other brains to help develop your thoughts*.” Students also mentioned how working in a group setting for any media ethics-related case allowed them to brainstorm and share ideas and to benefit from this process. In this respect, a student mentioned, “*Solving problems in a group setting allows group members to brainstorm and come up with new ideas that can aid in the process of learning the material*.” Another student echoed the same viewpoint.: “*When you’re in a group you have other brains to help develop your thoughts*.”

## Discussion and conclusion

The objective of this current study was to examine the impact of Team-Based Learning in two important components of a media ethics class: collaboration and critical thinking. While reported increases in collaboration and critical thinking did not have statistical significance, we found the practical results were significant.

Our first Research Question (RQ) was to what extent Team-Based Learning enabled students to work in a collaborative environment to deal with ethical issues in the media. We found no statistically significant difference in the scores before and after taking the course. For example, the mean score for the Collaboration average slightly increased from Before (3.60) to After (3.64) taking the class. We also found the mean scores for three out of six statements on the scale increased from Before to After taking the class. For example, the mean score for “I ask other students to help me understand course materials” increased by .43 points (from 3.57 to 4.00). However, we did not find any difference in mean scores for the three statements. For example, the mean score for ‘I ask questions or contribute to course discussion in other ways’ decreased (from 3.86 to 3.71). There might be some reasons for this negative mean score. For example, students might achieve a better comprehension of their role in a team at the end of the semester. Hence, students thought that statement opposed team cohesiveness.

Our second Research Question (RQ) was to what extent Team-Based Learning enabled students to think critically about issues related to media ethics. Even though the results showed no statistical significance on critical thinking questions, we also found some practical significance for different questions of this scale. The results showed the mean scores for seven out of 10 statements on the scale increased from Before to After taking the class. For example, the mean score for “I connect my learning to societal problems or issues” increased by more than three-quarters of a point (from 3.36 to 4.14). However, we didn’t find any difference in mean scores for the three statements. For example, the mean score for ‘I apply facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations decreased (from 4.14 to 3.93). Perhaps, students have a better understanding of the notion of facts, theories, or methods of ethics at the end of the semester. In this sense, students cautiously responded to this statement after taking the class.

Though the sample size is limited and the study is based on a case in the United States, it provides several insights on the effectiveness of Team-Based Learning in media ethics. First, as the initial study on the impact of Team-Based Learning in media ethics, the findings of the study will help assess the overall effectiveness of Team-Based Learning for teaching media ethics. Scholars (e.g. Richardson, 1994; Meyers, 1990) highlighted the importance of finding innovative teaching styles and pedagogical approaches for media ethics. In this respect, the current study will open up avenues for adopting Team-Based Learning in teaching media ethics. Second, media ethicists (e.g., Phillips & Soltis, 2004; Bonwell & Eison, 1991) pointed out



the importance of collaboration and critical thinking for journalism students. This current study will help to understand the usefulness of Team-Based Learning in enhancing collaboration and critical thinking among journalism students. Third, as we measured collaboration and critical thinking, future researchers will be able to use these measures for other studies related to journalism and communication. Based on these initial findings and the robust qualitative data we obtained, future studies with increased sample size should be conducted to further explore the effectiveness of Team-Based Learning in media ethics courses. Additional research examining the benefits of Team-Based Learning across a variety of learning contexts is warranted. For example, studies investigating the use of Team-Based Learning in larger courses and other countries will provide opportunities for broader generalization.

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## Appendix 1: Example of iRAT

## Appendix 2: Example of

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ RAT NO. 12 Team No. 1

Each question is worth 4 points. You should assign a total of 4 points on each line. If you are uncertain about the correct answer, you may assign points to more than one box, but total points must add up to 4.

Q#	A	B	C	D	Points Correct
1		2			4
2	1		3		3
3	1				4
4			4		4
5		3		1	3
6			4		4
7				4	4
8			4		4
9			4		4
10				4	4
11		4			4
12	4				4
13			4		4
14	4				4
15				4	4
16	4				4
17	1		3		3
18			4		4
19		1	3		3
20	1				4
21					
22					
23					
24					
25					
Total Points					76

IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE (IF AT®)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Test # 12

Subject CA-495 Ethics Total \_\_\_\_\_

SCRATCH OFF COVERING TO EXPOSE ANSWER

	A	B	C	D	Score
1.					4
2.					4
3.					2
4.					4
5.					4
6.					4
7.					2
8.					4
9.					4
10.					4
11.					4
12.					4
13.					4
14.					4
15.					4
16.					4
17.					4
18.					4
19.					4
20.					4
21.					4
22.					4
23.					4
24.					4
25.					4
					76

## Appendix 3: Example of Case Study from the text book (Black, J., & Roberts, C. (2011). *Doing ethics in media: Theories and practical applications*. NY: Routledge)



### CASE 4.1 Journalism: Publish or Not: Changing Stages, Changing Sides?

You are an editor with Freedonia Media International (FMI), your nation's largest wire service with 1,000 domestic clients. Freedonia has long been at war with a smaller nation thousands of miles away, and FMI has long had reporters and photographers embedded with Freedonia military units to document the action for the 1,000 newspapers that are your clients.

A week ago, an FMI photographer was on a routine mission with the Freedonia military, for a magazine-length story about difficulties encountered by such units. The unit was hit by an ambush, and your photographer captured photos of an enlisted man receiving first aid by fellow soldiers minutes after being hit by a rifle shot. The photos show a slight hint of blood, but you've seen worse watching PG-rated war movies.

The soldier died on an operating room table a few hours after the photo was taken. You followed military protocol, which forbids publishing photos until the next of kin are notified. Moreover, you made sure an editor showed a photo to the family before releasing it to your clients.

The family says it does not want you to publish the photo, and both military public affairs personnel and high-ranking Freedonia Department of Defense officials have called you to ask that you respect the family's wishes.

➤ You feel pulled by both sides. You appreciate the point of view of the military and the family—your father was an officer for ten years, although you never served. But you also feel the need to tell the story.

#### Questions to Answer

1. For each stop along Kohlberg's list of moral development stages (Table 4.1), describe the competing interests, your decision if you acted at that stage, and the justification.
2. Now consider the same case study, this time using Gilligan's "ethics of care" orientation (Table 4.2) to defend decisions both to publish the photo and not to publish the photo.
3. At what point do the Kohlberg and Gilligan developmental approaches intersect?
4. Which approach felt more comfortable to you?
5. Imagine that you were the editor of the hometown newspaper of the soldier who died: How might this affect your decision?



# Education for social change: The potentials of participatory teaching and learning with students in media and communication education

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## Abstract

What lies beyond ‘teaching’ as straightforward instruction? How does one train for engagement and mobilization for social change? These questions continue to challenge educators who believe that higher education should be about adjusting unequal and unfair social practices, and that their role is to be agents of such a process. This paper explores the potentials of participatory research and teaching methods within the setting of media and communication studies. It offers an overview of the experiences of an assistant university professor across three academic years devoted to experimenting with deliberative pedagogical approaches, and insights into the influencing role played by the settings. On the basis of a combinatory qualitative methodology using observations, journals, evaluations and testimonials, and analysing teaching output, the research findings deliver evidence of the ways in which participatory learning schemes can prepare students for a socially reflec-

tive and engaging role in an ever-transforming all-digital media environment. The results should inform curricular development of media and communication studies, with the ultimate aim of better connecting higher education to social change.

**Keywords:** media gender inequalities; participatory action learning and action research; deliberative teaching; social awareness; responsiveness to social inequalities

## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century media industries are (re)-producing gender inequalities pervasively and enduringly, perceivable in misrepresentation in media output, in ‘awkward’ working conditions, and in exclusion from decision-making (Ross and Padvani, 2007; Padovani, 2020).

The picture regarding the enduring, and newly emerging, inequalities that will be experienced by the next generation of the media workforce, is distressing. After decades of research, advocacy and activism by feminist scholars and media educators dealing with issues of inequalities, violence and exclusion – as well as their intersections –, the question today is: how should pedagogy in the future “be translated into reflective, responsive and transformative gender-aware approaches and models to educate a new generation of media professionals, ICT developers and global communicators?” (Padovani and Ross, 2020, p. 154).

The main challenge this research addresses is: *How, and in particular through which educational methods, should we reimagine the classroom as a space for social change?* Which teaching and learning methods are most suited to raising students’ social awareness and to empowering them to challenge the realities and practices of the industry? What role should educators as individual agents (Made, 2009) play in this process? The answers to these dilemmas lie in critical reflections on the curricular design of research seminars offered to students of media and communication studies at the University of Vienna within the setting of a dedicated Teaching Project (TP), and, accordingly, the disciplinary reconceptualization and realization of teaching practices.

This paper tells the story and describes the experiences of those involved in the TP, which was implemented over three consecutive academic years. The paper is structured as follows: first, it offers an overview of the design of the TP and the methodological considerations underpinning the concept; next, it provides insights into the classes attended, and the research projects undertaken by the students; then, it analyses and evaluates the various sources of information related to the learning and teaching observations - grouped under three pillars (relationships; reflection; recognition) - so conclusions on the procedural, thematic and personal aspects can be drawn; finally, it invites discussion around the baseline challenge of (better) connecting education to social change.

## Media gender inequalities and the educational responses: Formulating the research question

The structural, organizational and behavioural inequalities women have faced in the media industries were identified as early as 1987 by Margaret Gallagher and further analysed in a first-ever globally representative study on employment patterns (Gallagher, 1995). In a search for the reasons for (re-)production of such configurations in and by the media sectors, Carolyn Byerly (2014) identified the micro-, meso- and macro-level structural interdependencies, and pointed to the role of organizational culture, ownership and policy



(Byerly, 2014). Digital media and their labour practices consolidated the structural barriers to women's advancement (Duffy, 2015), and recent data on the current status of women in the media sector (Nordicom, 2018); (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2021) underscore the fact that gendered media inequality is the reality today. This evidence has also re-affirmed the validity of the hypothesis by Rush et al. more than three decades ago maintaining the 1:3 or 1:4 ratio of women's historical marginalisation (Rush, Oukrop, and Sarikakis, 2005).

The gender inequalities inherent to media industries and output are multifaceted and structural and thus cannot be solved merely by 'raising the numbers' of women working in the field. While the presence of women in media industries does make a substantial difference to media output, the higher proportion of women in journalism alone, even in decision-making positions (Ross, 2014), does not per se lead to a different – 'better'-gendered and more sensitive – type of reporting. Today, gendered implications of digital transformations, as well as the exposure and safety of media professionals in the news-making sector, have gained prominent attention (Padovani, Raeymaeckers, and De Vuyst, 2019) but there is an ongoing need for more theorisation and reflection (Keil and Dorer, 2019). The continuum of historical, structural, legal and political constraints (Kassa et al., 2019) presumes that any attempt at change must address the entirety of inequality regimes – including higher education, the institution 'producing' future journalists and other media professionals.

The situation within the Austrian media system, where the TP was conducted, echoes the global concerns to a large extent. Although the number of female journalists has risen constantly over the years, reaching near-parity by 2019, with 47 percent of all journalists female (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2020), news beat assignments remain gendered, with men favoured for reporting on hard news and sports, while women covered mostly lifestyle and culture (Letstalkequal Blog, 2019). Also, the dominance of men in leading positions in both traditional (print) and online media remained overwhelming (European Parliament, 2018). Moreover, the recent picture regarding the representation of women in the news and the prevalence of gender-sensitive topics remains disturbing (Rozgonyi, 2020). In the Austrian media sector – which constitutes a highly competitive and over-saturated labour market (Dorer et al., 2009; Kirchhoff & Prandner, 2017) – the future of many media and communication students very much depends on their awareness of, and preparedness for, the conditions under which they will be looking for jobs and pursuing careers. On the one hand, they must be cognisant of the fact that the various and systemic glass ceilings they will be faced with are not evidence of a personal failure to advance their careers, and at the same time they must be prepared to abolish them. On the other hand, they will need to critically reflect on their own position and responsibilities in producing news and media content and the 'genderedness' thereof. These preconditions further imply that their education should not only reflect these realities didactically (Roth-Ebner, 2019), but enable them to develop skills, competencies, and robust capacities to effect transformative change in and by the media, for a gender-equal future.

Against this background, the TP aimed at establishing the classroom as a laboratory of teaching and learning for social change. Therefore, the central and overarching Research Question of this paper aimed to answer the inquiry: which particular features of educational methods and practices are best suited to empowering students, as the next-generation media workforce, to play a socially reflective and responsible role in the media, dedicated to challenging gendered inequalities?

## Methodology

### Considerations on pedagogical methods

The TP was aimed at reinforcing the establishment of a connection between education and social change, creating a learning space for students to be co-creators of their own learning through deliberative conversations (Bargerstock, Van Egeren, and Fitzgerald, 2017). The "need to train gender-aware next-generation professionals to contribute to implementing gender equality principles and gender-equal practices in both media structures and content" (Montiel and Macharia, 2019, p. 128) is apparent to gender media scholars and educators, and there have been a number of calls for more gendered education in this field (North, 2010) providing a collective case study about the teaching of gender in journalism education. The research finds

that no journalism program offers a unit that specifically addresses the portrayal of women in the media or, importantly, the gendered production of news and gendered newsroom culture. This paper posits the importance of gender education in journalism courses, hypothesises why it is ignored as a valuable part of journalism education, and suggests how tertiary journalism education could address systemic inequity for women in media organisations by adapting its curriculum.(North, 2010); (Padovani and Ross, 2020). The precondition for the pedagogical experimenting (Geertsema-Sligh, 2014) was the enabling institutional normative framework in place at the University of Vienna, and the Department of Communication specifically provided for the necessary curricular flexibility.

The pedagogical concept originated in the critical tradition of Freire (1992), and aimed at *conscientization* of students with the ultimate goal of positioning them to challenge and transform future working conditions in the media industry. It also focused on energising students' personal engagement in selecting the object of their studies and the manner in which they approached the learning process. Given the sensitive nature and the social complexity of the undertaking, it was felt that traditional teaching methods may not suffice to achieve transformative change; instead, a learning continuum of critical exploration, assessment and reflection with shared and participatory feedback loops and learning cycles appeared necessary. Thus, the TP was designed in a manner that created an enabling communicative space (Habermas, 1987; 1981) for students, with the ultimate goal of increasing their social commitment to challenging replication or (re-)production of gender inequalities in and by the media, while understanding the role of the media in creating the Good Society (Djerf-Pierre, 2011).

The methodological considerations underlying the TP also reflected my more than 15 years' experience of teaching practice, including experience of a particular *learning bottleneck* (Pace and Middendorf, 2004) namely *distance*. While teaching topics and disciplines related to freedom of expression, media freedom, pluralism, diversity and democracy, I was confronted with the superficial distance of the issues at hand, and the everyday media realities of the students involved. Very often, the students recognised actual gendered hate speech in their social media newsfeeds – sometimes even targeting them – but they were unable to connect those experiences to abstract questions about the limits to free speech. Also, for them, normative theories referring to the social-political-philosophical principles organizing the relationship between media and society were frequently disconnected from the realm of 'fake news' shared by their friends and connections. Therefore, reflections on freedoms as human rights and foundations of civility, equality before the law, solidarity and cohesion, cultural diversity, active participation, or social responsibility, were rarely triggered. Consequently, my pedagogical approach had to focus on the critical lack of engagement with their role and responsibility as future media and communication professionals, and their potential as change agents. This bottleneck also triggered realisation that 'the notion of a unified critical thinking' runs counter to an essential strand in current thinking about teaching which stresses the disciplinary nature of knowledge (Pace and Middendorf 2004, p. 1).

Meanwhile, I shared feminist scepticism about the political ambitions of critical pedagogy (Luke and Gore, 1992), and reflected upon that scepticism as I carried it with me into the TP on which this paper is focused. I resolved to take on the role of the 'engaged pedagogue' of (bell hooks, 2014) addressing the personal well-being of students in addition to their academic achievements, bringing the personal into the realm of the professional. We devoted significant time to discussion of students' experiences with their own gender awareness and consciousness awakening. Many were frustrated, and emotionally affected, by the ignorance displayed by family members towards the issue of gender equality, and their resistance to any discussion of the topic at the dining table. Discussions within the safe space of the classroom were intended to build communities through perseverance (hooks, 2003).

Finally, the selection of the *teaching method* rested upon the working hypothesis that shared, active and inclusive learning journeys would best fit with the objectives of the TP: activating students' awareness of their relatedness to the topics and *identification* with the topics, while contributing to theoretical knowledge transfer. Necessarily, some limitations had to be negotiated. The upper limit to the size of the class was set at 30 students, to ensure personal and hands-on guidance. The students could select from a pre-defined set of research topics tailored for participatory methods, typically of a qualitative nature. Thus, the results of the TP need to be interpreted within these boundaries.

## Participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) as a theoretical concept

The method of participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) was selected for the TP. Action research in social sciences is a participatory research method that involves participants actively reflecting on social problems and contributing to finding solutions while producing guidelines for effective practices. The term was coined by Kurt Lewin (1946), who characterized it as “...comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action”, using a process of ... a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action” (Lewin, 1946, p. 35, 38). Action research as a method and as social action focuses on finding ‘solutions’ with the ultimate aim of changing an existing situation and thus enforcing social justice. Moreover, it is generally used to improve practice involving action, evaluation, and critical reflection deeply embedded in the process of engaging researchers and participants to collaborate closely and continuously (Norton, 2008). Action research creates ‘knowledge’ within the process of acting, residing with ‘the belief that knowledge is socially constructed, subjective, and influenced by culture and social interactions’ (Koshy, et al., 2011, p.12). In this way, findings emerge as the action develops with the purpose of learning for personal and professional development and in order to inform and influence practice (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, 2014). It is often argued that action research is a particular orientation and purpose of investigation rather than a distinct research methodology (Reason and Bradbury, 2001), in seeking transformative change through the simultaneous processes of taking action and doing research linked together by critical reflection (Rowell et al., 2015). Furthermore, it holds the potential to democratize research by challenging its exclusive and exploitative institutionalization (Waterman et al., 2001).

Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) first applied the concept of action research to teaching and curriculum development. He positioned teachers as practitioner-researchers, stressing the need for research-informed teaching conducted as educational research (Stenhouse, 1975). It is first and foremost the action process as an empowering experience for students and for educators which enhances participation, problem finding and solving skills primarily based on qualitative research methods. The role of the teacher within this scenario spans that of a planner-leader-catalyser/facilitator-designer-listener-observer-synthesizer and reporter within the settings of schools, universities and learning communities everywhere (Bradbury et al., 2019).

Out of the various approaches linking action research to education, the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) scheme provided an optimal educational, theoretical, and methodological framework, which involved a partnership and collaboration between the educator and the students (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). This is why PALAR was chosen as a methodological approach, rather than a single and distinct method; it permitted a flexible, multidisciplinary and democratically-engaged critical educational exercise (Jordan and Kapoor, 2016).

The courses throughout the semesters were built upon the participatory and action-led PALAR model, whereby the main building blocks, the pillars of the teaching method, corresponded to the ‘3 Rs’: (I.) relationships; (II.) reflection; and (III.) recognition (Kearney, Wood, and Zuber-Skerritt, 2013) - woven into one process on the assumption that the students would connect them to gendered inequalities projected onto their realities.

The relationship-building (I.) pillar underpinned the development of trust and the team-building process among the students and the educator, and the creation of an inclusive atmosphere within the classroom and throughout all communications during the research and learning process. The reflection (II.) elements (critical, self-critical and meta-reflective) were inherently built-in at every stage of the TP, with a special emphasis on identification with the research objects, namely gendered inequalities in, and brought about by, the media. This practice was vital in ensuring self-critical insight into the students’ own worldviews, and was facilitated by the greatest possible flexibility provided with regard to the research design. Meanwhile, recognition (III.) of outcomes involved the open publication of the students’ findings on a dedicated web platform, and of their individual action proposals in the form of academic blog entries, as a recognition and reward for the research efforts.

## The process of data investigation: Analysing and evaluating the TP

Data on the TP was generated in multiple ways and analysed through different methods. The Individual

Articles

Learning Journals completed after each class by the students and submitted at the end of the semester (n68) served as the major source of information. Students had to systematically and anonymously keep logs documenting the learning process, note, analyse and reflect on their observations, draw conclusions, and map a personal action plan. The content of the Learning Journals was first categorised according to the 3 R’s (relationships-reflection-recognition) and then analysed thematically while observing characteristics and patterns in students’ experiences of conscientization.

Furthermore, I recorded my observations in Teaching Diaries (n19), all of which were systematically analysed across the main pillars of the TP. Collegial Teaching Visits organised by the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of Vienna (n5) provided further input and feedback informing this paper. Additionally, students’ formal course evaluations submitted to the University of Vienna (n68) and aggregated by the Quality Assurance Division (n3) were further assessed against the criteria of clarity of teaching objectives, and satisfaction with the outcomes and the quality of teaching, as well as against the Research Question. Finally, the research reports and the individual testimonials expressed in the blog entries of the students were thematically studied as a matter of social reflection and responsiveness to gendered inequalities.

## Implementing the teaching project: module description and timeline

Based on the aforementioned theoretical and pedagogical considerations, a series of research seminars over three academic years were dedicated to the TP. All modules were organised around a complete research cycle within the field of media and communication studies, which includes various areas of professional communication, such as journalism, public relations, advertising, and market research. First, students identified social problems related to gender inequalities within the research areas of journalism practices in Austria, representation in media content or the urban settings of the city in which they lived (Vienna). Next, they worked together with their research subjects (Austrian journalists, media professionals and gender specialists) in a participatory fashion to understand the problematic social situation and change it for the better. To this end, they conceptualised, designed and implemented complex research projects with the aim of critically assessing and planning possible interventions on gender mainstreaming in the media. The research results - in the form of blog entries, videos, podcasts, data visualization and photo stories - were published on a dedicated web-based teaching platform (academic blog). Finally, they identified with their future role as socially responsive media professionals and change agents and wrote short essays about their reflections (also published on the academic blog).

The pilot phase was realized in the 2019 Summer semester, and the results were taken further in the 2019/2020 winter semester and the 2020 Summer semester teaching periods. In total, 68 students were involved. The student body of the seminars consisted exclusively of female Bachelor students usually in their fourth or fifth semester<sup>1</sup>. The TP relied upon the hypothesis that the realities of gender inequalities in the Austrian and other European media industries where the students will seek jobs, would not only create detrimental long-term conditions for their career development, but also oblige them to align with the industrial routines of (re-)producing inequalities. However, the distance bottleneck would have prevented students’ identification with these realities, as well as the realization that they were linked to their future job prospects. So the TP aimed at ‘doing gender’ in and by the media, illustrating that gender is performed and embedded in everyday interactions, to highlight how gender is produced (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and how gender is ‘thought’ (Rakow, 1986) in and by the media industries.

Thematically, during the first seminar series in the 2019 Summer semester (the pilot phase of the TP) a group of students quantitatively researched gender distribution among all Austrian journalists in order to be able to make valid statements on the current situation of gender (in)equality in the media sector<sup>2</sup>. They independently and creatively designed their data collection and the analytical process, whereby they were trained in digital skills to present their research findings<sup>3</sup>. Further, another group qualitatively assessed best

<sup>1</sup> Several colleagues at the Department of Communication have often noted, with disappointment, that classes for which the description includes the keywords ‘gender’ or ‘intersectionality’, are largely attended by female students. When male students do register for such a course, they often drop out when they realize they are ‘alone’. Since gender-related classes are not mandatory under the curriculum, many students complete their studies without significant contact with feminist theory and practice, or issues of intersectionality, signalling curricular policy deficits.

<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the gender distribution of the national and regional print media, and the radio and online media landscape, was examined. In total, data on 3,883 journalists in Austria were collected as part of this project. See Quantitative Studie zu Gender-Diversity unter österreichischen JournalistInnen.

<sup>3</sup> During one of the classes, a data visualization expert gave a guest lecture on visualization techniques. Students experimented suc-

Articles



practices on gender mainstreaming in the media with the members of the Austrian public service broadcaster's (ORF) 'Frauen task-force' (a special unit within the ORF set up a decade ago to change the organisation from within<sup>4</sup>). The students selected interview formats, including podcasts, and also decided how to exhibit personal portraits of the women - who have achieved historical, meaningful transformation of the broadcaster into a role model in Europe for gender-equal institutional change. In parallel, students launched the [Let's Talk Equal web platform](#)<sup>5</sup> on gender (in)equality and media in Austria, utilizing strategic thinking about the complexity of inequalities in, and brought about by, the media, as they addressed gender issues and developed ideas and proposals for gender equality policies. The platform served as the main reference point of the TP and a crucial feature of the deliberative pedagogical exercise. The opportunity for visibility lent gravity to the students' projects and was a critical tool for the action assignments.

The second phase (2019/2020 Winter semester) of the TP included a complex, broad and interdisciplinary research exercise on gender mainstreaming in cooperation with the City of Vienna. The 100+ years of experience, and the achievements, of the Austrian capital city in creating gender equal opportunities and better life qualities for its residents inspired and informed the project. Throughout this semester, students worked in cooperation with the Gender Mainstreaming Department of the City of Vienna following the PALAR method. The learning objective was to become familiar with the policy processes of gender mainstreaming in a non-media related context (urban planning and management), which the students had interpret and transfer to their core studies on media and communication. From the very beginning, students enjoyed agency, conceptualising the research areas, selecting their objects and introspectively evaluating their personal experiences as young women living in Vienna. They identified five action research areas: childcare; security and safety (including harassment); urban planning; community spaces (including sports fields and parks); and gender-neutral language - all of which reflected personal experiences. Conceptually, they focused on methods of gender mainstreaming and the learnings of the City of Vienna and abstracted the research takeaways and findings to the media context.

And finally, the third part of the TP (2020 Summer semester) was dedicated – in the midst of the COVID-19 public health crisis – to monitoring and analysing news reporting at the leading Austrian online outlets, in cooperation with the Global Media Monitoring Project, which is the is the largest and longest-running research endeavour on gender in the world's news media, and an important advocacy tool for gender equality<sup>6</sup>. The students volunteered to run a pilot research element for the global monitoring, which considered for the first time the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on news reporting. They used the monitoring tools, and delivered country-specific results. The quantitative snapshots were discussed in class, compared with the longitudinal data on Austria of the previous global monitoring exercise, and contextualised with the help of literature, and a number of gender issues and problematics related to the Austrian media were identified. Finally, the students formulated their action proposals referring to media best practices retrieved from the Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries platform (AGEMI)<sup>7</sup>, a Europe-wide database and resource hub promoting a more equal, diverse and inclusive media.

## Analyses of the Teaching Project

Once the TP concluded in 2020, I started with the investigation of the data gathered from the Individual Learning Journals, the Teaching Diaries, the feedbacks and the evaluations (see Methodology section above). Next, I categorised the information according to the 3 R's (relationships-reflection-recognition) and then analysed it thematically, and traced it systematically for the characteristics and patterns of students' conscientization.

### (I.) Relationships

The assessment of the students' learning journey experience (Table 1) revealed that a safe, secure and overall inclusive teaching environment was fundamental for the meaningful participation and engagement of students, and that adoption by the lecturer of the role of change agent was also essential.

cessfully with the use of the Flourish software programme in presenting the research results on data collection and analyses for all types of media in Austria, as well as for the gender ratios at different media outlets. See [Data Visualisation](#).

4 The ORF gender equality plan was recognized as 'good practice' by the [European Institute for Gender Equality in 2013](#), and was also awarded the Women's Empowerment Principles CEO Leadership Award by the United Nations in 2015. See [ORF Task Force](#).

5 See the [Letstalkequal blog](#).

6 See the website of the [Global Media Monitoring Project](#).

7 See the [Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries platform database](#).

	Students' individual attributes	Lecturer's attribute
Personal traits	Experiences of young women living in Austria Intersectionality	Agency Experience Authority Managing complexity
Motivation	Appealing research agenda ('something different at last') Atmosphere Self-defined research objective Equal participation in the definition and design of the research project <sup>8</sup>	Inclusive feedback Drive Mitigating conflicts Nurturing Guidance Inspiration through 'real-world' situations
Journey	'Full ride' research cycle Mature decisions & responsibility 'Stretching limits'	Safe space Partnership Sharing experiences
Reflection	'My own awareness of change' Empowerment	'It's about you'

Table 1: Relationships – students' learning journey experience

The establishment of close and friendly working relations, along with cultivation of a collaborative context, were crucial preconditions for effective application of the PALAR method. Moreover, external partners in the research activities – including senior media professionals at the ORF and representatives of the City of Vienna – also connected in a non-formal, generally welcoming manner with the students, which enabled activation of imaginative skills in research design. Likewise, dedicated teaching techniques, such as differentiation exercises, helped the participants identify their exact affiliations within the different groups in a transparent manner. They freely created, and assigned to themselves, roles such as 'researchers', 'journalists and editors' or 'activists'.

### (II.) Reflection

The next critical part of the PALAR process was about researching for action, which involved a spiral of self-reflective cycles (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon, 2014) guided by formative feedback from the educator and each other (peer feedback) on educational excellence as well as on their mastering of identification. Analysis of this pillar (Table 2) revealed another set of crucial features of the participatory teaching and learning exercise.

Features of self-reflection	Learning experience
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8 "By involving all students equally in the process, I think it was much more motivating for us to choose one of the ideas, something that might not have been the case would we have simply chosen them from existing topics or if we would have had to come up with them by ourselves. It was certainly a well-executed group method that I will keep in mind, should I ever find myself in a similar situation again." (Quote from the Independent Learning Journal (ILJ) of J.L., BA student). Note: only initials of students' names are referred to for data protection purposes.



Setting one’s (own) research agenda	Taking on board personal experiences (fear, intimidation, otherness) Agency Interest and dedication
Research process design	Learning and failing
‘Getting out’ – ethnographic research	Beyond classroom boredom Among ‘real people’ Exploring the city, we live in
Team bonding	Responsibility Peer feedback; mitigating competition
Inspirations	Female leaders Personal stories Realizing the true impact of change-making (ORF Task Force)
Gendered awareness	‘See others’ (‘I felt like I was living in a bubble.’) Solidarity (towards women with care duties) ‘See gender’
Being heard - visibility	Proudness of ‘tangible’ output Creativity and the reward of visibility

**Table 2: ‘Reflection’ – students’ reactions and responses to the research journey**

The freedom and agency associated with the setting of one’s own research agenda and the process design was a core, indeed a decisive, key to undoing distancing and activating consciousness, and also enabled close team bonding and engagement. The sense of being ‘taken seriously’ and the promise of ‘making an impact’ due to the prospect of publicity for their research output proved highly inspirational, and students often volunteered for extra assignments, which helped increase the visibility of the research output. Moreover, ‘seeing gender’ and an overall raised awareness facilitated identification with, and deliberation on, the objects of their studies. Overall, the iterative process of reflection permitted students to “learn more about their context, about themselves and about the knowledge they have co-created; and to identify requirements for further action” (Kearney, Wood and Zuber-Skerrit 2013, p. 128).

**(III.) Recognition**

Recognition of outcomes in the PALAR process – of both action and learning – was important as an affirmation of collective and personal achievements. The TP considered recognising students’ achievements by enabling visibility and ‘being heard’ through the dissemination of action leads formulated as part of their research projects, and by tailoring the evaluation and grading system of the courses to the specific learning objectives reflecting their personal journeys.

Visibility: the output of the students’ research was published on the self-crafted and self-curated online platform on gender (in)equality and media in Austria, the [Let’s Talk Equal website](#), which served as a deliberative and empowering communication channel for them to present their work, and constituted an opportunity to establish individual presence and publicity, and to speak up and have their voices heard. The published action proposals on possible interventions on gender mainstreaming addressing gender (in)equalities in, and brought about by, the media were shared with the external research partners such as the ORF and the City of Vienna, and were acknowledged. Furthermore, the actions were contextualised and strongly linked to industrial practices in the media with the help of the AGEMI [resources bank](#), and they were aligned with best practices included in the AGEMI platform.

The evaluation and grading of students’ academic performance clearly and transparently measured the detailedness and quality of personal action plans in terms of their adherence to challenging gendered practices of media production with the objective of empowering the next-generation media workforce to play a socially reflective and responsible role in the media. Thus, association of the research subjects with a gender-transformative agenda was a crucial requirement for successful completion of the courses.

**Findings and discussion**

Once we had completed all courses, I assessed against the Research Question all the data and information gathered, including the individual learning journals, the teaching diaries, testimonials published on the blog, colleagues’ feedback and students’ formal course evaluations. My analysis focused on the signals of social reflection and responsiveness to gendered inequalities, logically organised across the learning journeys, including both the research and the action phases (Table 3).

	Research Phase	Action Phase
Observations	Atmosphere Self-defined research objective; equal participation in the definition and design of the research project	Inspiration by ‘real-world’ situations
Analyse, explain, gain insights	Facing real-life inequalities	Connections to real-life situations (ORF, City of Vienna)
Reflect	Research limitations (non-availability/non-responsiveness of interview partners, time allowance, workload) Critical need for continuous feedback Articulation of need for the use of multidisciplinary research methods	‘Sense of importance’ - making meaningful contributions to social change Acknowledgment through involvement of ‘real’ stakeholders (ORF Task Force members; City of Vienna representatives) Advocacy for social change
Conclusions <sup>9</sup>	Realization of how complex the social science research process is Hardships in formulating the Research Question Multiple research reporting methods (interview transcripts, videos, podcasts, visual story-telling) highly welcomed	Engagement Visibility as motivation Pride about work output appreciation of the role of social science research in social transformation <sup>10</sup>
Personal action plan	Devoting more resources to research work	Self-reflection on the role of the researcher as a change agent <sup>11</sup> Identification with social realities <sup>12</sup> Activation of personal strategies to effect social change

**Table 3: Assessment of the learning journey**

The PALAR method offered a concise, yet comprehensive, explanation of the didactics and practice - a transformative, collaborative and inclusive process for resolving complex problems related to methodology and the theory of learning (Wood, 2020). PALAR appears to have been the appropriate fit for work with students as individual change agents, utilising their personal experience gained throughout research projects

9 “... the main conclusion I reached was that talking about the issue is helping solve the issue. It is the refusal to define the problem in the first place that leads to numerous problems, especially the refusal to discuss issues that do not affect oneself”.; “The example of the City of Vienna shows us how implementing awareness of gender perspective in the policy-making process can have a long-term impact on society and can make the society more aware which would ultimately lead to some social changes. Such examples encourage us to have more hope for change in the future.”; “And media power is one of the most powerful mechanisms for changing the subconscious. And as a first step, it is important for us to take measures to minimize inequality in journalism. To show the serious intention of women to break through that very unfinished glass ceiling and rise to the top. The intention to talk and discuss topics that are important for society. And the intention to save freedom of speech. The intension to speak and be heard both for women and men.” (Selected quotes from students’ blog entries on the Let’s talk equal web platform.)

10 “Research is a way to show the world why it needs to change and help to start a change.” (Selected quote from the ILJ of C.C., BA student)

11 “I will try to always see the bigger picture behind my own research: Who can I help with my research? How can I help? Research isn’t just researching; it is a way to change the world.” (Selected quote from the ILJ of C.C., BA student)

12 “...die Tatsache, dass ich die Stadt Wien mit anderen Augen wahrnehme”. (“The fact, that I could see the City of Vienna through a different lense.”) (Selected quote from the ILJ of L.G., BA student)

and organising their reflections, with the ultimate aim of deepening their social commitment to challenging replication or re-production of gender inequalities within and by the media. Through the action exercises they were empowered and gained the confidence to start to work for change, coaching and learning from each other in dialogue and in discussion (action learning).

The enabling and deliberative research process, the close-to-real-life situations and the sense of importance were clearly articulated as the cornerstones of the TP. The participatory design allowed students to take ownership of the learning process. Identification with the gendered social problems encountered during their inquiries – whether true stories about the struggles of senior female journalists or the perception of urban settings through gendered lenses – was the most significant benefit of the participatory methodology. The students engaged with the subjects of their research, and attained critical levels of alertness – becoming aware of gendered inequalities in their daily routines, while walking on the streets, acknowledging the diversity of the city they live in or ‘seeing’ the exclusion of young girls from participation in public open spaces.

The scope of freedom and responsibility for their own research design, complemented by the publicity afforded the results, in the context of accountability for action, countered to a great extent the distance bottleneck: it was ‘their’ problem to study, and ‘their’ ideas for change to put forward. Moreover, publicity for, and acknowledgment of, their work proved a central motivation for excellence. The perception of the importance of countering acute social problems and being heard by real decision-makers (such as the ORF and City of Vienna representatives) spurred devotion to the tasks at hand.

In sum, the outcomes of the TP answered the Research Question by delivering evidence that: deliberative pedagogical techniques are well suited to, and welcoming of, students at early stages of higher education; and that the PALAR method – democratic, open and inclusive in design and implementation – is highly appropriate in education for transformative social change. The TP was also acknowledged by the students in their formal evaluation of the seminars as a great educational experience.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the AGEMI research platform acknowledged the TP as representative of ‘best practice’ in ‘education making change’; details about it were published in the AGEMI ChanGE section.

## Conclusions

The TP was a manifestation of a deliberative pedagogical exercise focused on preparing students with skills for participatory decision-making in building democratic mind-sets to tackle ‘wicked problems’ (Carcasson, 2017), such as gender inequalities. The participatory learning scheme showcased *how gender is performed in social interactions and advanced students’ understanding of gender as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday practices*. The *participatory approach* enabled students to conduct serious research about problems and challenges that affect their lives (McTaggart, 1997). Moreover, the TP created an ideal ‘classroom for creative experimentation with alternative languages, vocabularies, images and genres – spaces enriched by international encounters where gender-aware storytelling from different geo-cultural contexts would parallel the opportunities to learn from academic studies and research’ (Padovani and Ross, 2020, p. 155).

The experiences of the TP reaffirmed a critical need for the systemic and strategic embedding of similar pedagogical methods in the curricular development of media and communication studies ‘manufacturing’ the next generations of professionals. The urgent need for globally sensitive and locally reflective pedagogies should inform our considerations on what we teach our students and how we get them to ‘feel’ this urgency, and to engage. Future journalists, PR and marketing specialists should be equipped not just with skills that reflect the quest for excellence; they should be able to inherently and adamantly challenge the assumptions, the context and the social value of their professional actions. Instruction that advances such a mindset may well be at odds with old curricular objectives.

This necessitates further research about the transforming realities of media industries, the changing nature of creative work, and the newly emerging vulnerabilities of the workforce in the precarious conditions of the all-digital environment. A better understanding of the (re-)production of media gender inequalities should inform education policy reflecting upon the dynamic of demography and diversity in our places of higher education, and should lead to adaptation of both episteme and pedagogics. Teaching practices should endow

<sup>13</sup> See ‘Auswertungsbericht Lehrveranstaltungsevaluation zur Veranstaltung FOPRAX: PS Forschungspraxis (19S-22-220031-02), SE Forschungspraxis (19W-22-220023-08), SE Forschungspraxis (20S-22-220032-10) mit dem Fragebogen vom Typ 022-2-V6’; where the average value of all the criteria evaluations by students was a high-end 1.1.

students with skills and capacities suited both to big data-driven media production, inherently built upon artificial intelligence, and a focus on their potentially transformative role as change agents, thus ultimately connecting education to social justice in the digital age.

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# Should journalism curriculae include trauma resilience training?

## An evaluation of the evidence from a scoping literature review and a pilot study

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### Abstract

We investigated the claim in literature that exposure to work related traumatic events affects the wellbeing of journalists. We did this through a scoping review of studies on practising journalists; studies on journalism curriculae and reflections on findings of a questionnaire pilot study of journalism students' experiences of exposure to traumatic events through teaching materials. We found evidence to suggest that practising journalists who are regularly exposed to traumatic events are susceptible to a range of adverse psychological reactions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); and that the teaching of resilience is not widely included in journalism curriculae. The pilot study indicates that teaching materials did not evoke adverse psychological reactions with damaging effect to students' wellbeing. Nevertheless, we rec-

ommend the inclusion of resilience training in journalism curriculae to be taught by an interdisciplinary team of scholars in order to build resilience among journalism students and equip them to cope with the increasing risk of journalism practice in the twenty first century.

**Keywords:** trauma, PTSD, resilience, journalism, coping strategies, curriculum.

### Introduction

**Scholarly studies on journalism and trauma consistently conclude that journalists who witness trauma and disaster events are at risk for physical, emotional, and psychological injury (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Keats & Buchanan, 2012).**

Studies have also found that almost two thirds of journalists feel ill prepared for their first trauma related assignments (Simpson & Boggs, 1999; Amend et al., 2012). These would be incidents which, by the criteria of the American Psychiatric Association (2013) involve exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic events; witnessing, in person, the events as it occurred to others; learning that the traumatic events occurred to a close family member or close friend; and experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic events (ibid).

Professional journalists rarely talk about the emotional and psychological impacts of doing their job. However, some break this taboo by speaking out. For example, the BBC announced in January 2020 that after decades of covering conflict, Fergal Keane would be changing his role from that of Africa editor to further his recovery. And his BBC colleague, Jeremy Bowen, Middle East editor, also spoke about his own diagnosis of PTSD in 2017, characterised by bouts of depression attributed to aspects of his work (Keane, 2020).

Journalism is not only about glamour and glitz but also about extreme life experiences. According to Dart Centre Europe (2015), journalists frequently bear witness to human suffering, whether covering mass disasters or individual atrocities, and are sometimes the direct targets of violence (Smith et al., 2015). The latter claim is evident in the report by Reporters Without Borders (2019) that 941 journalists have been killed over the past 10 years. Of these, some 63 percent of journalists killed were murdered or deliberately targeted (Woodyatt, 2019). Moreover, journalists are exposed to human suffering by covering events such as domestic violence, racism, court cases, and via user generated content. In these instances, journalists are having to gather horrifying details from dangerous scenes, process it all, and then report it back to the public (Lifton & Faust, 2009; Dworznik & Garvey, 2019).

While few journalists are habitually engaged in reporting conflict and disaster, most journalists at some time will confront violent, distressing situations – terror attacks, violent crime – and therefore need to be prepared. Some examples of distressing situations journalists have found themselves reporting include Derek Bird shootings, Manchester Arena attack, Boston Marathon, 9/11, and school shootings such as Dunblane and Lockerbie. The Manchester Arena bombing happened on 22 May 2017 when an Islamist extremist suicide bomber detonated a shrapnel laden homemade bomb at a concert by Ariana Grande as people were leaving the venue. Journalists were with first responders at the scene of carnage to witness 23 dead bodies and over 800 wounded people including children. It is fair to say that the people as well as journalists who witnessed the attack will have been distressed, to some degree, by what they witnessed.

The above assertions raise some pertinent research questions: is there is a problem with journalists being unprepared to encounter traumatic situations, and if so, how significant is the problem? Is journalism education able to address these problems? If so, how might it best prepare students for these events? These are pertinent research enquiries because a review of journalism curricula in the UK found that courses are not sufficiently preparing students for the risks associated with exposure to traumatic stressors as part of their work (Specht & Tsilman, 2018).

We attempt to answer these questions through a scoping review of prior scholarly works to examine evi-

dence of emotional and psychological effects of exposure to critical and traumatic events on journalists on the one hand; and through a pilot study to explore the extent to which journalism education is addressing these problems to better prepare journalism students, make recommendations, and identify research gaps for further studies on the other. These are pertinent research enquiries because journalism underpins democratic societies, facilitates the sharing of ideas and debates amongst citizens, and fosters the exercise of fundamental human rights.

## Methodology

To address the research questions, we conducted a scoping review to identify what the research in this area had uncovered and to discover what was provided by journalism courses in this field.

We began by systematically searching electronic databases (Scopus, Medline, Cochrane and CINAHL) using keywords or search terms: 'journalism\* and trauma\*', 'journalism\* education\* and trauma\* teaching\*', 'journalism\* and resilience\* training\*', communication\* and mass media\*. These databases and search terms were discussed with the research team and agreed as most likely to generate relevant results from the search.

Reference lists and the website for Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma were also scanned for relevant materials. Studies were included whenever they provided investigation of the occupational stress of journalists; presented a qualitative and/or a quantitative design; the publication date was from 2009 to July 2020; and provided full articles published in peer-reviewed journals. We found 148 studies, but 50 studies met these inclusion criteria. Studies that did not meet these inclusion criteria were excluded.

The included studies were independently screened by both authors by examining the titles, abstracts and full text against the inclusion criteria. An agreement was reached regarding any contested studies.

The studies were conducted in four continents, that is, Africa (South Africa, Kenya), Asia (Japan), and Europe and America, and studies adopted a wide range of methods including focus group; scoping review; content description; mixed methods; survey (Impact of Event Scale; web based); reflective practice; critical ethnographic study; in-depth interviews and workplace observations with journalists; self-report questionnaire; thematic; descriptive statistics; and stepwise linear multiple regression analyses.

The University of Lincoln offers an undergraduate journalism course with a curriculum involving practical skills development which exposes students to potentially distressing images and vicarious exposures to situations which may be experienced as traumatic. To monitor a possible psychological impact of these exposures, a paper questionnaire was distributed to students in all year groups during January and February 2019. The pilot study questionnaire was a composite of The Impact of Events Questionnaire (IES-R) (Horowitz et al., 1979; Hyer & Brown, 2008), The Psychological Outcome Profile (PSYCHLOPS Version 5) (Ashworth et al., 2009) and The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988). These survey instruments are in regular use in clinical studies which monitor impact of trauma on survivors, levels of social support available as well as general adjustment in non-clinical populations. Coded survey returns were analysed using SPSS statistical software.

In addition to demographic data on age, gender and year of study, students were asked to identify situations that had arisen during lectures and practice-based classes which involved exposure to critical and traumatic events and to have these in mind when answering survey questions.

## The consequences of journalists' exposure to traumatic situations

Journalists are exposed to traumatic situations by bearing witness, by being victims or both (Smith et al., 2015; Tandoc & Takahashi, 2018). The evidence of exposure to traumatic stressors are well documented. For instance, Ikizer et al. (2019) noted in their study of camera operators that, they have frequently witnessed dead bodies, injuries and accidents, and mourning of others over deaths of close ones (ibid).

Journalists who are directly exposed to traumatic situations have exhibited some psychological effects. For example, a study on non-war journalists found varying degrees of prevalence of PTSD, from 4.3 percent to 13 percent among United States and European journalists (Smith et al., 2015). Similarly, a study on Norwegian journalists who covered the 2004 Asian tsunami showed that 7 percent were classified as suffering

from probable PTSD nine months after the incident (Backholm & Idås, 2016; Idås et al., 2019). As a result, scholars argue that the coverage of trauma on a regular basis can lead to damaging psychological and emotional effects (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019).

The types of psychological effects evoked by traumatic stressors are varied. For example, some journalists reported mental health breakdowns following their coverage of Hurricane Katrina, which hit the United States in August 2005 and flooded New Orleans for weeks (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019). Similarly, journalists reported suffering from flashbacks and traumatic stress symptoms after covering the terrorist bombing at the Boston Marathon which killed three people and injured hundreds in April of 2013 (Zhao, 2016; ibid). Also, some journalists sought therapy after covering a mass shooting in Orlando, where a lone gun man entered the Pulse Nightclub and killed 49 people in June 2016 (Hayes, 2016; ibid).

Other types of effects include guilt, depression, compassion fatigue, burnout, avoidance, intrusive experiencing, increased arousal, desensitization or numbing (or sensitization), helplessness, and emotional lability including anger outbursts (Buchanan & Keats, 2011; Ikizer et al., 2019; Seely 2020). Guilt, for example, is associated with moral injury, that is, the injury done to a person's conscience or moral compass by perpetrating, witnessing, or failing to prevent acts that transgress personal moral and ethical values or codes of conduct (Litz et al., 2009). This could happen to journalists when they are forced to invade privacy and grief in doing a death knock story (Shay, 2014; Litz et al., 2009). Editors and news managers could also feel guilty at not having done enough personally to help the refugees, and of shame at the observed behaviour of others (Feinstein & Storm, 2017; Browne et al., 2012).

Journalists are at risk from two related forms of exposure, namely vicarious and secondary traumatization. The vicarious form involves reacting adversely from repeated exposures to other people's extreme experiences or their accounts of what has happened to them. Secondary traumatization is the duress resulting from hearing about the first-hand experiences of other trauma survivors. These instances confirm that journalists are at risk from absorbing some of the pain or grief of others which they encounter in the course of their reporting or editing (Beam & Spratt, 2009).

Desk-based journalists who use social media as a newsgathering tool can exhibit adverse psychological reactions (Specht & Tsilman, 2018). For example, Wendling's (2015) study found evidence that journalists using social media exhibit vicarious trauma, as more than 20 percent of research participants scored high on clinical measures of PTSD (ibid), and journalists were found to experience secondary traumatization when exposed to serious injury, unnatural death, accidents, terrorist attacks, and war (Ikizer et al., 2019). In these scenarios, journalists may exhibit significant negative psychological symptoms in the short, intermediate and long term which impact on their lives in a number of ways including not being able to pursue the life they had previously enjoyed and developing negative perceptions of themselves, others, and the world around them (Culver et al., 2011; Dworznik & Garvey, 2019).

However, clinicians have discovered that event-related psychological effects may appear months or years after covering traumatic scenarios such as war, natural disasters, domestic abuse, family violence or accident content. For example, Idås et al.'s study of Norwegian journalists who covered the 2004 Asian tsunami found that seven percent were classified as suffering from probable PTSD nine months after the incident (Backholm & Idås, 2016; Idås et al., 2019). The long-term effects are even worse among diaspora journalists, because being cut off from the support of family and friends back home means they are more psychologically vulnerable (Feinstein et al., 2016).

However, the scoping review reveals that the weight of evidence is inconclusive because scholars consistently conclude that journalists are at moderate risk of trauma-related psychological distress compared to other trauma-exposed groups (Simpson & Boggs, 1999; Novak & Davidson, 2013; Pearson et al., 2019; Feinstein et al., 2018). Nevertheless, journalists suffer a vast range of experiences from minor emotional effects of remembering to serious memory related reactions like PTSD. The inclusion of resilience training in journalism education; therefore, will provide students with the tools to deal with these reactions.

## Coping strategies

Literature notes that only a **minority of journalists are at risk for long-term psychological problems and few** show signs of PTSD and depression. Scholars attributed this to resilience among journalists and to the claim that journalists enter the field understanding that reporting and editing may expose them to tragedy (Feinstein & Storm, 2017). Journalists expect that, and the satisfaction that they get from their jobs or the morale in their newsrooms does not appear to be linked directly to the violent events or traumatized



individuals whom they encounter in their work (Beam & Sprat, 2009).

A positive observation is that journalists have adopted coping strategies for dealing with negative stress sources including emotion-focused strategies (a slightly higher frequency in daily work than in critical events); problem-focused strategies (almost twice the frequency in critical events than in daily work); and denial/avoidance strategies (a residual frequency in critical events, which was five times higher in daily work) (Monteiro & Pint, 2017). Hence, Keats & Buchanan (2012) observed that developing coping strategies such as taking time for exercise, maintaining healthy sleep patterns, ensuring a balanced diet, and taking time for relaxation and socialization are examples of beneficial strategies for maintaining a balance between work and personal life (ibid). However, some journalists use less favourable coping strategies such as drinking, smoking, self-criticism, or self-blame, for acute or short term distraction from evoked emotional distress, which in general stands to be associated with greater susceptibility to symptoms of PTSD (Lee et al., 2017).

## Evidence of what is being done about these effects

Clinicians and scholars have made some suggestions about how to help journalists cope with trauma. Pearson et al. (2019) argue that mindfulness-based meditation offers promise to help journalists build resilience to post-traumatic stress (ibid). Novak and Davidson (2013) also suggest that the stories that journalists have of themselves can shape their resilience and the way they work; therefore more attention needs to be paid to them (ibid). Idås et al. (2019) observe that exposure to trauma could promote post-traumatic growth (PTG), that is, a cognitive process whereby negative experiences may initiate reflections on life and result in strengthened self-esteem (ibid, p.2). PTG is enhanced by access to social support (SS) which induces the perception of being cared for and of being part of a supportive social network that provides assistance (Taylor, 2011; Idås et al., 2019). For example, a study on Australian journalists concluded that growth is related to personal trauma management strategies, including peer and management support and opportunities to reflect (McMahon, 2016).

However, some journalists are reportedly reluctant to seek help for dealing with negative stress sources. Keats & Buchanan (2012) attribute this to silencing fears or behaviours that may be perceived as weakness; defining who and what is successful in a journalism career; and bowing to pressures related to extended work hours (ibid). The implications are that journalists were more likely to turn to family members than managers or colleagues for support after traumatic incidents and they were less positive about seeking organizational help for trauma-related problems (Greenberg et al., 2009). While some resort to unofficial confidential talks with experienced colleagues (Idås, 2013; Idas et al., 2019), others compartmentalize the problem; use drugs and alcohol, and remember the higher purpose of their job (Seely, 2020).

Based on these assertions and the fact that journalists sometimes work alongside firefighters, police and paramedics, we recommend that journalism educators should take seriously the assertion that journalists are susceptible to the psychological and emotional reactions evoked by trauma. By doing so, they stand to benefit personally and as a profession from resilience training during university studies and as part of continuous professional development.

## Journalism curriculae

The scoping review reveal evidence that almost no course in the UK is teaching the risks of vicarious trauma or user generated content (Specht & Tsilman, 2018). Specht & Tsilman reached this conclusion by inspecting the course description of 63 journalism related courses including specifications of the courses, the names and description of all modules and course introduction materials such as videos (ibid). Seely's (2020) study reached a similar conclusion by noting that journalists felt ill-prepared to cover certain story assignments and would have liked a lecture series and guest speakers who could speak about trauma on a personal level (ibid). We propose that teaching materials should focus on resilience building.

Some scholars argue that journalism courses are not sufficiently preparing students for the risks of vicarious trauma found in the industry (Specht & Tsilman, 2018). For instance, McMahon (2010) describes the presence of trauma literacy in journalism education as embryonic at best and non-existent at worst (McMahon, 2010, Seely 2020). In sounding a note of warning, Specht & Tsilman (2018) said the growing body of evidence of vicarious trauma among journalists suggests that universities may not be meeting the needs of

their students by largely avoiding the subject matter of risks arising from exposure to traumatic stressors (ibid). To address these shortcomings, they recommend a new emphasis on vicarious trauma, coupled with training and interdepartmental support (ibid).

However, there is evidence to suggest that journalists have given a high level of support for trauma training in journalism schools, with some specifically pinpointing a lack of trauma education in the college classroom as a problem (Masse, 2011; Dworznik & Garvey, 2019). Moreover, some scholars argue that the best place for trauma training is in journalism schools because young journalists are highly likely to encounter trauma very early in their careers (Barnes, 2014). Some studies have made a case for the importance of incorporating more trauma education into curriculae. According to Dworznik & Garvey (2019), journalists need to be taught to understand both their own psychological reactions to trauma and critical incident stressors as well as those of trauma victims (ibid). This is because most newsrooms do not offer a supportive environment for young reporters who are either dealing with their own psychological reactions to trauma or need guidance on how to approach victims (Duncan & Newton, 2010; Dworznik & Garvey, 2019).

We discovered journalism schools in the US to be ahead of the UK in incorporating resilience training in journalism curriculum. In the US, trauma training began in the early 1990s (Rentschler, 2010). However, the training on offer is still patchy. For example, a US study found that of the 41 respondent schools, only one offered a course specifically aimed at teaching journalists how to protect themselves from psychological trauma and how best to interact with victims of trauma (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019); and only one (2.4 percent) indicated that they had a course in their curriculum dedicated specifically to teaching how trauma can impact journalists. Thirty-five (85.4 percent) indicated that they taught about journalist trauma as part of other courses in their curriculum. Five indicated that they do not teach this topic at all (12.2 percent) (ibid).

Previous studies found that the content of media ethics courses in journalism programmes is inadequate for training new journalists for dilemmas they may face on the job (Amend et al., 2012). For example, only a handful of schools offer media ethics courses with a simulation or trauma training component, which might include inviting trauma victims to speak to students about their experiences, learning strategies to cope with stress and secondary trauma, and mock interviews with actors posing as victims (ibid).

The literature also indicates that journalism students are ill prepared to cover the death knock. For instance, Duncan & Newton (2010) observe that few journalists appear to receive formal training, or indeed advice or instruction from senior editorial staff, and whilst most journalism courses now integrate ethical reporting into their curriculum, few instruct students in approaches to intrusive reporting or, to use the journalism industry term, a death knock (ibid). However, scholars acknowledged the difficulties of re-creating the challenges of the death knock, and ape the industry's aforementioned preference for "learning by doing", because the tutor would have to subject the student to what could be extreme emotional stress, a position at odds with the institution's duty of care to students (ibid).

## Approaches to address this gap

Different approaches have been taken by journalism educators to address the gap in journalism education to prepare new journalists for dilemmas they may face on the job. For instance, scholars advocate that trauma training should be infused more strongly into the existing curricula (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019). To illustrate, Duncan & Newton (2010) suggest teaching students to reflect critically, not only on specialist modules about media ethics, but reflecting across the journalism curriculum will assist them in identifying the stress points in their reporting and in taking appropriate, positive action; thus giving them greater control over the situation (Duncan & Newton, 2010).

Kay et al. (2011) added that ethics teaching should include trauma reporting and the skill for reflection-in-action while covering trauma, interviewing survivors, or creating news items about communities where trauma has occurred (ibid). Similarly, Seely (2020) argue that university courses could bridge the gap between theory and practice by incorporating ethical discussions into the classroom regarding the idea of reporting with sensitivity, minimizing harm to victims and the community, and avoiding sensationalized reporting (ibid).

Adopting a trauma informed approach could help to introduce resilience training into the existing curricula. Resilience is defined as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of risk (Thompson et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2019). For the purpose journalism education, it means gaining a better understanding of what those who have suffered traumatic events, who are grieving, are going through, and a better understanding of how to respond to them and specifically, how



not to aggravate their suffering by building empathy.

Maynard et al. (2019) identified four key elements of this approach including realising the impact of trauma; recognizing the symptoms of trauma; responding by integrating knowledge about trauma policies and practices; and resisting re-traumatisation. They also identified six principles of this approach including safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice and choice; cultural, historical and gender issues (ibid).

In addition, Barnes (2014) argues that some basic skills for journalism students could include how to assess any risk to themselves and, secondly, how to deal with a potentially traumatising situation, be it an accident, suicide or murder. Thirdly, there are lessons to be learned about appropriate questioning when dealing with victims as well as fact checking, to avoid revictimising the victims (ibid).

Some scholars argue that resilience training should encompass the emotional aspects of telling traumatic stories (Young, 2011; Dworznik & Garvey, 2019). In terms of specific effects, Seely (2020) suggests that traumatic stress, burnout, and sensitivity should be addressed not only in relation to crime and accident stories but also in relation to stories involving sexual assault and harassment, political issues, and immigration—which often involve reporting on victims and addressing emotionally charged topics (ibid).

## Incorporation of resilience training in journalism curriculum

Rentschler's (2010) study gives us an insight by noting three examples. Firstly, some journalism schools have created stand-alone programmes, such as the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma associated with the Department of Communication at the University of Washington-Seattle. Secondly, others incorporate training exercises into their existing curricula without separate programmes, such as Indiana-Purdue University's journalism programme in Indianapolis and the University of Colorado-Boulder. Thirdly, some programmes establish formal relationships with academic experts in traumatic stress and psychiatry in addition to individual victim advocates and advocacy organizations, such as the Victims in the Media Programme at Michigan State University and their collaboration with the Michigan Victim Alliance (ibid; Beam & Spratt 2009).

Classroom simulations could also help to introduce resilience training into the existing curricula. According to Amend et al. (2012), simulations are an efficient way to educate and prepare journalism students for the situations and ethical dilemmas they will encounter in their careers, and we propose ways to effectively implement such forms of training (ibid). They argue that simulations allow students to engage in behaviour that approximates a realistic situation, to act and react to the situation as a journalist might, while at the same time permitting the instructor to observe, coach, and ultimately comment (ibid). The use of case studies is also a good way to infuse resilience training into the existing curricula. For instance, Melki et al. (2013) note that instructors can assign readings on the history of war reporting, discuss the symptoms of PTSD, and talk about case studies. The concept of self-care, which is often overlooked in the classroom, should be discussed to normalize discussion of mental health and eliminate stigma (ibid).

Mindfulness-based meditation also helps to infuse resilience training into the existing curricula. Scholars argue that it has the potential to strengthen journalism graduates' resilience, deepen their learning and shore up their moral compasses as they enter an occupation where their reporting can expose them to trauma and the upheaval in the industry can subject them to stress, burnout and other mental health challenges (Pearson et al., 2018). Mindfulness is defined as 'bearing in mind' or 'inclined to be aware' (ibid). For example, Ryerson University's School of Journalism in Toronto Canada introduced mindfulness-based journalism to its curriculum in 2018 with a one-hour weekly class supplemented by students undertaking individual meditations ten minutes per day and maintaining a record of their experiences in a journal (Pope, 2018).

Fundamentally, the scoping review reveal some benefits of including trauma training in journalism curriculum. In New Zealand for instance, Barnes (2014) observes that changes to journalism curriculum promote equipping students with skills to recognise signs of stress in themselves as well as victims (ibid). The implication is that journalists learn to see affect as a valuable news commodity and a different orientation to their jobs (Rentschler, 2010). Barnes (2014) adds that the workplace can underpin this training with recognition and support, which has been shown to improve productivity and resilience (ibid). Without this workplace support, Young (2011) cautions that young and talented journalists may leave the profession because no one explained that it was acceptable to feel emotional (ibid).

## Challenges to the incorporation of resilience training

The scoping review reveals some challenges to the incorporation of trauma in journalism curriculae. For instance, the topics of journalist trauma and victim trauma are those that are included if there is time, or not considered a priority among other skills and topics that must be taught (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019). Barnes (2014) found that covering the full curricula, coupled with increasing time pressures, meant journalism teachers simply could not include trauma training (ibid). Moreover, a qualitative study of journalism educators found they would like to see more attention paid to the topic, but that perceived barriers—including accreditation issues, lack of time and resources, and lack of knowledge about the topic—stood in the way. Several mentioned that it was not an appropriate subject matter for an introductory journalism course (Melki et al., 2013).

Another challenge is that the textbooks for introductory news writing courses contained little, if any, acknowledgment of the emotional toll of the journalism profession (Hopper & Huxford, 2017; Seely, 2020). To address this, organizations such as the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University offer classroom resources, readings, and training opportunities - tools that may mitigate instructors' perceived barriers and offer supplemental readings on trauma and self-care to fill the gaps in textbooks (Seely, 2020).

Perhaps, the greatest challenge is how to address the lack of enthusiasm among journalism educators to include resilience training in journalism curriculae. According to Specht & Tsilman (2018), journalism educators viewed trauma predominantly as an issue of war correspondence and foreign reporting, with great doubts expressed over the seriousness of vicarious trauma caused by user generated content and its necessity in university curricula (ibid). Similarly, a survey of accredited U.S journalism schools found only one programme among the respondents offered a course about trauma reporting (Dworznik & Garvey, 2019; Seely, 2020); and another survey in 2013 shows that 50 percent of journalism educators said trauma reporting received little to no attention in the curriculum (Melki et al., 2013; Seely, 2020).

However, these challenges cannot be overcome without institutional support. Hence, Specht & Tsilman (2018) suggest the creation of guidelines on how to teach vicarious trauma in the university to give confidence and support to educators, and to establish a mandate for better integrated teaching across faculties, bringing in experts from other fields to support journalism education (ibid). And policymakers have a role to play too. For instance, the UK Department for Education and National Health Service has identified trauma, attachment, and post-traumatic stress as key areas where schools need guidance (Department of Health and Department of Education, 2017 in ibid, 2019).

Based on the evidence of a lack of introduction of resilience training in the existing curricula and the institutional challenges, we argue that journalism educators have a duty of care towards journalism students and should prepare them to cope with the effects of exposure to traumatic event.

## Reflections on findings of a pilot study

Both in terms of number of students affected and the levels of distress attributed to teaching materials, returns indicate low impact of exposures among participants. Some variations were noted according to the type of situations and scenarios that had been used for training purposes. The more serious a traumatic incident (terrorism, war) the more marked was its impact. Also, more personal contact with trauma survivors, for instance through direct interview or attending Coroners' Courts, appeared to be recalled as more distressing experiences. However, evoked reactions were not considered qualitatively or quantitatively different from other events that arise ordinarily in their lives. A trend worthy of note was that returns from final year students indicate a keener awareness of life stresses, including those arising from trauma related teaching materials, than reported by their cohorts in years one and two. Levels of social support were reported to be high for all participating students and showed no consistent association to acknowledged impact from exposure to potentially distressing materials.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This scoping review and the survey have, may be for the first time, collated a range of publications which lend substantial evidence-based support to university teaching staff and academics who have led the way on

challenging journalism courses to introduce curriculum changes that take into account risks arising for qualified journalists when assigned to scenarios involving exposure to critical incident and traumatic stressors.

The aim is to develop both personal and professional resilience to minimise, as far as possible, the broad range of event related adverse psychological reactions documented in this scoping review. While the principle of so doing is strongly supported and universities which offer journalism training have a duty of care to their students, it is far from clear how this resilience training might be delivered, how effective the various chosen approaches may be in the short, intermediate and longer terms. As the momentum of recognition for this unmet need is gaining pace, an additional question arises as to the extent to which the format used for resilience training may present psychological risks to journalism students. In this regard, some reassurance emerged from participants in a pilot study conducted among journalism students at the University of Lincoln, UK. On the questionnaire measures used in this paper-based survey, teaching materials used had not impacted adversely to the extent of leading to significant functional impairments. However, it is noteworthy that while this is true for the generally successful students who attended lectures and took part in the survey, the sample comprises of only 75 percent of the total student intake for this three-year undergraduate course.

This leaves many absent journalism students for which there is no evidence to draw on. To the extent that this balance of participants and non-participants is likely to repeat itself in future student surveys, courses and universities should, by all reasonable means, seek to clarify reasons for their absences. While these may include adverse life events, relationship crises and academic struggles largely unrelated to journalists' resilience training, there should be an acceptance that exposures to potentially distressing teaching materials become entangle with other life processes so that some students may be more at risk than others and may react in idiosyncratic ways that compound the distresses of their lives. These challenges can all be addressed through further systematic research. Generalisability of findings will improve by ensuring high levels of cooperation and coordination between journalism courses in the UK and internationally. Experience gained to date is encouraging so far that a pilot study achieved what is generally considered a high level of student participation. It is also strongly recommended that a comprehensive research strategy should include ways of systematically following up students' reasons for deciding not to participate in this research or for being absent at relevant times for data gathering.

The limited survey experience gained to date also indicates that the use of questionnaires designed to monitor the impact of critical and traumatic events such as war or natural disasters on survivors are insufficiently sensitive to gauge any impact that resilience training may have upon the overall functioning of journalism students. This is consistent with observations made in other surveys involving student populations. The research imperative is to use methods and methodologies which make possible a disentanglement of both the positive and troublesome psychological impact of resilience training with the broader background life stressors which arise as part of student life.

One of the suggestions arising from this scoping review is that some assignments given to qualified journalists are of such a nature that some work-related psychological impact should be anticipated and fore-warnings should be given to students. To recognise this is to accept that some responses are to be expected and may even be adaptive for journalists in the field as well as subsequently. To the extent this is true, it removes evoked reactions from the realms of pathology to the realms of distress and personal suffering which is likely to be acute and short term but may also extend into the longer term.

Indications are therefore that if resilience training is one of the aims of journalism courses, one of its key elements will have to be awareness raising about the ways all humans can be affected by critical incidents and trauma and which are the steps to be taken to reduce the intensity, frequency and impact of evoked reactions upon their lives in the short, medium and longer terms. This way, links are made to lifestyle adjustments that are advantageous for high risk journalists prior to assignments and how to manage their personal and social resources to mitigate the impact of what they have reported upon.

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# Do digital skills development factors predict the online journalism readiness of mass communication students?

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## Abstract

While Internet technologies have gradually transformed how news is produced and consumed, journalism schools have been challenged to match the online skills they offer with industry needs, in order to produce ‘online-ready’ graduates. This study explores the role of selected digital skills development factors (training content, training resources, students’ online habits, industry experiences and online attitudes) in mass communication students’ perceived preparedness for online journalism practice. The study employs a mixed-methods approach including a survey of 182 finalist mass communication students from five Rwandan universities, focus group discussions and a review of Online Journalism modules. Results showed positive correlations between the factors and students’ online journalism preparedness, with industry experiences, students’ attitudes to online tools and training resources having the greatest positive correlation. Al-

though training content and online habits had positive relationship with students’ online journalism preparedness, these were statistically insignificant. Focus groups confirmed the importance of these factors in students’ online journalism preparedness but highlighted negative educator attitudes towards teaching social media to ‘digital natives’, inadequate content and facilities as online skills development barriers. Ultimately, practical industry experiences were considered critical in imparting relevant online skills for future journalists.

**Key words:** Online journalism, Preparedness, Digital skills, Attitudes, Online habits, Training

## Introduction

**Modern media industry faces a paradigm shift where news is gradually produced and consumed online (Hamzah & Mustafa, 2014). With social media tools that leverage user-generated content, players in traditional news media like radio, TV and print must now adapt to the demands of this convergent journalism, also called online or digital journalism (Daniels, 2012).**

On this online platform, practitioners can quickly access different story sources and have real-time engagements with audiences. This unfettered access to online tools by audiences has positioned them as co-producers and co-consumers of the stories with journalists, putting the relevance of the professional journalist on the spotlight. Furthermore, the emergence of a networked professional who must regularly engage with audiences has raised the digital skills bar, signaling the need to constantly demonstrate agility with diverse online tools to produce attention-grabbing content (Bor, 2014). Digital skills competence is now integral to most communication careers and hiring practices (Sutherland & Ho, 2017; Kanigel, 2014).

While journalism schools strive to adjust to the realities of the converged industry, a sound framework of the online skills needed to produce ‘work-ready’ professionals is lacking (Iyer, 2015; Jeanti, 2015). Devoid of such a framework, Sagrista & Matbob (2016) suggest adopting Ferrari’s (2012) ‘Digital Competence scale’ (which amalgamates other frameworks) to outline the critical digital skills required for the 21st century media professional. Ferrari suggested skills in online searching, multimedia content production, social media communication, online ethics and strategy development as critical for the rapidly changing work environment. As these skills are also critical for future media professionals, this study argues that they can be contextualized to form the basis for assessing journalism students’ readiness to work in an online environment.

Preparedness for work in online environments has been attributed to several factors including the nature of digital skills taught, the training environment, learners’ online experiences and perceived comfort in using online tools (Jeanti, 2015; Sutherland & Ho, 2017). Evidence also suggests looking beyond knowledge gained to explore how attributes such as personality and attitudes regarding technology affect people’s confidence in using different technologies (see Flores, 2010).

While Rwanda’s media industry endeavours to leverage online tools for improved performance, evidence indicates that most institutions have not fully embraced online opportunities, partly due to inadequate online skills (Media High Council, 2014). A survey by the Rwanda Governance Board (2018) found that 90 percent of the industry stakeholders attributed this online skills inadequacy to uncoordinated skills development, especially between the journalism schools and media houses. Although Rwanda’s media policy (2014-2020)

envisions intensified online tools use for quality content production, the survey showed lackluster online performance by media houses. With employers expecting ‘industry-ready’ graduates, exploring how different factors contribute to this readiness becomes pertinent. Although students’ perceived digital competence has been explored in different domains (e.g. Sutherland & Ho, 2017), attention has rarely focused on the media industry, especially among future media practitioners in the developing world. In Rwanda, how such future professionals’ ‘online-readiness’ is developed is not clear. Thus this study explored the role of the training content, training resources, students’ online habits, industry experiences and attitudes to online tools in the students’ perceived preparedness for online journalism work. What follows is a discussion on the relevant literature and study methods, before presenting the results and their implications.

## Review of empirical literature

With the proliferation of Internet technologies in the media industry having challenged journalism schools to integrate digital skills in their curricula, journalism educators continue to adjust to these skills demands by reworking their content and teaching environment especially to simulate the modern digital newsroom. Studies have explored how these new technologies are impacting the teaching and learning of online journalism.

Becker, Vlad and Kalpen (2012) assessed the curricula content satisfaction of 2,195 graduates from 82 US journalism schools. Majority (>70 percent) attributed the content variety for their readiness to “write for the web, edit for the web, use and create blogs, and use the social media professionally” (p. 1). However, only a few were comfortable with doing web animation and using mobile-devices to produce stories. The researchers recommended the need to balance emerging technology skills in the curricula. Wotkyns’ (2014) survey of Australian journalism students pursuing the new media convergence major established that 88 percent appreciated the diversity of digital skills taught. Moreover, employers endorsed the multimedia content production skills that these graduates possessed. Although some students expressed the risk of learning many digital skills but mastering none, the study suggested mastering a few skills like multimedia production to apply them in different contexts.

Kwanya (2014) surveyed 78 journalism students in four Kenyan universities and found that 62 percent of the respondents judged the digital journalism courses as mainly theoretical. They considered web design, online search, blogging, new media ethics and desktop publishing skills critical to their future news gathering and public relations work. The respondents recommended prioritizing Internet connectivity and more practical lessons with social media tools. Hodgson & Wong (2011) assessed how integrating blogs in a news writing course influenced the online skills development of 52 Hong Kong journalism students. Overall, the students appreciated the blogs as crucial to their online interaction skills and online portfolio for future job reference. To develop professional online habits among journalism students, Marinho & Pinto (2006) provided students with an Internet-enabled multimedia laboratory, an audiovisual lab and press room to provide them access with daily news. With time, the students had developed important multimedia content skills as they stretched their imagination with the digital facilities provided.

As heavy users of social networking sites, students develop different online habits of content generation and knowledge sharing (Jeanti, 2015; Stoker, 2015). While such habits build confidence and experience in using new media in different contexts, evidence also shows that some focused users learn critical skills from the technological interaction while others remain passive (Deng & Tavares, 2015). For example, although journalism students may demonstrate newsgathering instincts with a mobile phone by taking photos and videos, Switzer & Switzer (2013) argue that most still need to learn how to convert the ‘social use’ to ‘professional use’ of such tools. Daniels (2012) explored how online behavior influenced industry perceptions of 203 undergraduate journalism students in a large university in the South-West USA. The students were heavily dependent on social media for their news and social interactions and considered this dependence positively for the industry and their career.

In their study, Diddi, Arvind & LaRose (2006) explored the formation of online news habits and how this related to professional outlook of 329 journalism students from University of Gothenburg (Sweden) and University of Tampere (Finland). The online habits were largely shaped by the students’ ‘digital capital’ (the number of digital tools students actively participated in) and the social media tools recommended by the educators. Spyridou & Veglis (2008) investigated the perceived determinants and consumption patterns of online news by journalism students in Greece. More than half of the students got their news online, with

over 90 percent attributing their perceived readiness for their future online careers to their regular online news consumption. In Deng & Tavares’s (2015) exploration of Hong Kong students’ cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of new media use outside their formal learning context, students expressed positive attitudes towards social networking sites like Facebook in sharing important professional ideas. For example, Facebook interactions strengthened the students’ peer support as they engaged in professional discussions.

In line with Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory which underscores the importance of work-related experience in linking theory with authentic practice, Gugerty (2011) assessed the field work experiences of public relations and advertising students and found that, while some students lauded the superiority of the on-the-job technology experiences, others considered such experiences as eye-openers to their digital skills gaps and also credible measures of their digital readiness. These results are consistent with Njuguna and Jjuuko’s (2019) study which established that journalism students’ participation in digital scholastic journalism helped to evaluate their professional readiness in producing tools like online newspapers and also improved their online writing skills. As underscored in Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory which foregrounds the criticality of mastery experiences in developing people’s confidence to perform given tasks, scholars like Nistor (2015) consider authentic field experiences as the crucial link between academic and industry preparedness. Similarly, online interactions with professional works may influence students to model professional behavior by vicariously learning through observation and participation in the performance of those in the industry (Bandura, 1986). Thus social media are appropriate platforms where journalism students can launch their careers through self-publishing and connections with other professionals.

Stocker (2015) interviewed six journalism students who had blogged for more than 12 months in fashion, popular music, football and darts. Students’ blogging motivation mainly came from job adverts (with requirements of blogging experience), tutor encouragement and personal drive to build online visibility. Stocker therefore advocates for leveraging online tools like blogs to boost the students’ creativity, initiative and online communication competencies. Davis’ (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) underscores the importance of user perceptions of the attendant benefits and ease of use of technology in their attitudes regarding the successful use of ICTs. Thus the way students’ perceive technology in their professional development is crucial since it affects their level of interest, engagement and confidence with the technology (Steensen, 2011).

With attitudes towards online interactions considered influential in students’ learning online (see Aifan, 2015), establishing students’ attitudes towards online tools for professional growth is significant. Lewis (2010) investigated 463 Oklahoma state university Public Relations students’ attitudes regarding social media as a strategic communications tool. Students perceived social media positively and considered them critical facilitating job readiness among media students. Particularly, those who used social media as primary news sources regarded social media highly in professional development. The findings contrast with Obaid’s (cited in Aifan, 2015) survey results on Saudi Arabian computer science students’ attitudes towards social media tools to support skills development. Although most students found no significant value in the use of social media to support professional skills development, this was mainly attributed to the educators’ own reluctance to show the way by connecting to the sites.

The foregoing discussion outlines key factors responsible for developing students’ preparedness for the online work environment. With no systematic study addressing how these factors shape journalism students’ online journalism preparedness, this study is considered a pioneer effort. It examines the role played by training content, training resources, online habits, work experiences and students’ attitudes towards online tools in mass communication students’ perceived preparedness to work in the online environment. The null hypothesis proposing no significant relationship between each of these factors and students’ online preparedness was tested at 0.05 level of statistical significance.

## Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach involving a survey, focus group discussions and review of online journalism modules. For the survey, Yamane’s (1967) formula, i.e.  $n = N/1+N(e)^2$ , was used to draw a systematic sample of 182 finalist undergraduate mass communication students from five Rwandan universities. This sample constituted 62 percent of the total student population of 293. Scale items for the questionnaire were derived from extant literature. Ferrari’s (2012) digital skills framework was adapted and contextualized in journalism studies to test the students’ perceived preparedness to perform online jour-

nalism research, communicate with different social media tools, create and share multimedia news stories, observe ethical online publishing and use online tools to solve organizational problems. Insights from Su-I Hou’s (2017) Social Media Active and Engagement Levels and Rosen et al.’s (2013) ‘Media and Technology Usage’ sub-scale of the Media Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale, were used to define the online media habits items. Students’ attitudes towards online tools reflected a modified version of selected items from Rosen et al’s (2013) ‘Attitudes’ subscale of the validated Media and Technology Usage and Attitudes Scale by. Eight online media practitioners approved the face and content validity of the resulting five-point Likert-type instrument (where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). Students’ level of online journalism preparedness was derived from the composite of ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly Agree’ (i.e. High online journalism preparedness) and ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’ (i.e. Low online journalism preparedness), with those indicating ‘Neutral’ considered undecided or uncertain.

Five focus groups (comprising six students per journalism school) were developed from a purposive sample of any three students with high online journalism preparedness score and any three with the lowest online journalism preparedness score. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) recommend six to nine participants per FGD and three to six FGDs for mixed designs, as was in our study. Targeting the high and low scorers facilitated a balanced view on how these made sense of online journalism preparedness and attendant factors. The findings were interpreted together with the responses from the questionnaire and FGDs comments – which we transcribed and coded under themes to facilitate triangulation of responses.

A pilot survey involving 20 randomly selected students (i.e. four from each journalism school) indicated that the instrument was reliable with a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.731 (see Faizan & Zehra, 2016). Descriptive and inferential data analyses were done to reveal the variable response patterns and relative contribution of the selected factors on students’ online journalism readiness, to confirm or disconfirm the study hypotheses.

## Results and discussions

### Descriptive analysis of study variables

Out of the 182 questionnaires distributed, the usable questionnaires were 143 (i.e. response rate = 79 percent). To measure the respondents’ online journalism preparedness, the composite scores for their perceived confidence in performing given online tasks were computed. Table 1 shows the response patterns.

I am confident in...	Generally Agree	Neutral	Generally Disagree
Conducting online journalism research	84.4	12.1	3.5
Communicating with different social media tools	76.7	12.9	10.3
Producing multimedia news stories	73.7	15.0	11.3
Observing ethical online publishing	80.4	15.0	4.5
Using online tools to solve different problems	85.3	9.9	4.8
AVERAGE	80.1	13	6.9

Table 1: Respondents’ confidence in online journalism preparedness

From the results, majority of the respondents (> 80 percent) felt prepared to perform the different online journalism tasks, with most expressing confidence in their ability to use online tools for organizational problem-solving (85.3 percent), conduct journalism research online (84.4 percent) and observing ethical principles for online publishing (80.4 percent). Of the five different tasks, respondents expressed the least confidence in their preparedness to produce and share multimedia news stories (73.7 percent). While a paltry 7 percent felt unprepared to do online journalism tasks, 13 percent were not sure of their level of preparedness. While the findings align with evidence which stresses the need for students’ to innovate with new media tools as an indicator of efficient usage of these tools (see Sutherland & Ho, 2017), they contradicted Bor’s (2014) argument that ‘digital natives’ will most likely develop social media communications skills earlier than innovating with new media skills.

### Characteristics of online journalism content taught

This variable focused on the online skills taught, the training emphasis and if content was consistent with industry needs. Table 2 shows the responses.

Construct	Indicator	Mean	STD
Skill variety	Most journalism modules include ICT issues	3.69	1.07
	We learnt multimedia content production	4.10	1.12
	We learnt professional social media usage	3.99	1.05
Theory vs practice	Modules were more practical than theoretical	4.11	1.04
	Some content was got from online sources	3.67	1.18
Relevance to industry	Content included examples from industry	3.92	1.02
	Content was updated with industry needs	3.73	1.18
AVERAGE		3.9	1.10

Table 2: Mean responses for characteristics of training content

Generally, respondents felt that the online content taught gave them several skills, was more practical and industry-focused (M=3.9). The practicality of the multimedia production content and the regular integration of industry cases to enhance digital skills learning were particularly affirmed. FGD participants expressed learning online skills like creating blogs, using Joomla for web design, how to publish stories online, using Adobe InDesign to produce the online newspaper and producing stories for online broadcasts. In all FGDs, participants indicated skills in web design, social media tools like Twitter and blogs and online newspaper production as key focus of their online journalism training. In learning social media skills, however, some respondents cautioned some lecturers’ assumptions that students’ high social media exposure equated to professional ability to use them. For example:

*“We know many people who are very rich because of using social media ...[but] we practically needed to learn how to [professionally] use them ...to make money” (Male participant, FGD1).*

*‘[...] I miss [skills] like how to create professional blogs and websites, although I can write and post stories” (Male participant, FGD5).*

Although the module descriptions indicated a more practical focus in teaching skills like photojournalism, website design and social media production, this sounded overambitious given comments from FGD participants who blamed technical and time limitations for adequate practice.

### Online journalism training resources

This factor focused on the trainer competence, availability and appropriateness of the resources used in online journalism teaching. Table 3 shows the results.

Construct	Indicator	M	STDV
Resources quality and availability	Software and hardware resources are adequate	3.53	1.118
	There are manuals for multimedia production skills	3.69	1.140
	Internet connectivity is always reliable and available	3.64	1.178
	Internet is accessible at many sites at the campus	4.22	0.958
Trainer ability	Trainers are versed with most online media tools	3.6	1.139
Resources Variety	Mobile phones are used to teach multimedia skills	4.13	1.013
	Online tutorials improve our journalistic learning	3.92	1.101
AVERAGE		3.82	1.092

Table 3: Response rates for training resources



Participants generally affirmed the adequacy, accessibility and variety of the training resources (M=3.82). Internet was considered accessible at different campuses, allowing students easy usage to access library resources and online tutorials. In addition, most students judged the trainers as competent and updated on different online skills. These findings corroborated with the module descriptions, where the centrality of training resources like computer labs, studios and, to some extent, mobile phones was emphasized in the delivery of the online modules. Mobile phone use in multimedia production was particularly praised for facilitating the skills acquisition:

*[...] mobile phone has really helped us [...] producing stories for online [platforms] looks easy now' (Female participant, FGD1).*

*[...] after learning how to capture and edit stories with phones, it is like the problems of few video cameras is being solved [...] we can produce stories from any location now' (Male participant, FGD3).*

While many participants lauded the mobile phone for digital production, reservations were raised on associated Internet costs and some editors' reluctance to accept stories from a mobile phone. This notwithstanding, scholars argue that mobile phones are cheaper alternatives and offer journalism students' unfettered access to digital resources that facilitate digital learning in and out of class contexts (Steensen, 2011;Switzer and Switzer, 2013).

### Students' online habits

Online habits have been associated with professional learning (see Robinson, 2013). This study operationalized these habits as the user exposure and behavior with online tools, roles (consumer or prosumer) and eagerness to remain updated with online skills, as summarised on Table 4.

Construct	Indicator	M	STD
Online audience	I create and post new stories, images, etc. on my networks	4.36	0.84
Engagement	I often read other people's posts without giving feedback	3.76	1.17
	I create and update groups on my social media networks	3.57	1.39
Online accounts	I regularly use my social media tools to get news updates	4.59	0.60
usage	I regularly follow other media professionals online	4.43	0.82
Online accounts	I have several active online media accounts	3.01	1.33
Ownership	I always explore new online tools and skills to learn	3.45	1.19
	AVERAGE	3.88	1.05

Table 4: Response rates for online media habits

With a mean score of around 3.9, the respondents demonstrated an active online behavior, with their use of different social media tools to get news and regular following of favourite media professionals being prominent. Respondents also actively created and posted stories and images/videos to their online audiences, exhibiting a 'prosumer' behavior characterized by a dual role of producing and consuming news stories (see Daniels, 2012). Of the online habits explored, the respondents' tendency to keep several online accounts active obtained the least affirmation (M=3.01), possibly on account of the amount of time it would require to have all active and updated. Despite this, majority of the respondents expressed their keenness to explore new online skills as they emerge.

The results resonated with scholarly opinion that people's participation on social networking sites provide them with both quick sources of information and learning spaces for new story-telling techniques (e.g. Deng & Tavares, 2015). The respondents' prosumer behaviour supports evidence that associates active online habits with self-teaching as users experiment and discover new skills with different online sites (Aifan, 2015). Some FGD participants attested to online skills gained through their day-to-day engagement with online colleagues:

*[...] I use internet a lot for searching the news and ....trending topics [...] In this way I update myself. I think I have gained good [journalism] skills" (Male participant, FGD1).*

*"For me I think social media are like addiction ...Since I always visit my social media it is easy to do many tasks with them" (Female participant, FGD4).*

Despite the benefits of such habits, some participants feared inadvertently 'creating wrong online image because once you post bad messages, they cannot be changed' (Female participant, FGD2). Others cautioned the futility of good online habits without basic professional skills: 'even with many online media activities, if you lack enough journalism writing skills, it may not help' (Male participant, FGD5).

Although module descriptions did not expressly indicate students' online behavior as part of the module delivery, some modules indicated students would practice much on their own, alluding to the self-teaching nature of most online tools. On the whole, the results were consistent with studies that relate personal use of online media tools with direct and indirect digital learning (e.g. Deng & Tavares, 2015).

#### Industry experiences

The focus here was on industry exposure through internships, class cases drawn from industry and contacts with practitioners. Table 5 shows the response mean scores.

Construct	Indicator	M	STD
Skills gained from industry	I was exposed to different online tools in my fieldwork	4.07	1.298
	I learnt to produce online news	3.38	1.289
	I learnt to cover live events using online tools	3.45	1.476
Contributions to industry	I developed social media accounts for organizations	2.72	1.441
	I contributed stories to online news media	3.43	1.172
	We did online productions for the industry	3.47	1.093
Professional	I participated in producing our e-newspaper, online radio.	3.11	1.459
Contacts	Works of other professionals improve my online skills	4.34	0.797
	AVERAGE	3.5	1.253

Table 5: Response rates for industry experiences

Findings showed that students gained work-related experiences as they were exposed to out-of-class assignments. On average, online skills gained from fieldwork including making contact with professionals (M=4.34) largely contributed to this digital experience. Industrial training had equipped students with skills to produce news stories and social media coverage of live events. This online coverage was considered instrumental in demonstrating the 'professional' usage of such tools in actual events (see Jeanti, 2015). Most respondents also contributed news stories to online news media and produced useful content for the industry (e.g. websites). This potentially improved their online news writing self-efficacy. The respondents expressed the least exposure to helping organizations develop and maintain social media accounts (M=2.72), revealing a gap in their ability to promote the use of online tools for organizational branding, crucial in organizational competitiveness. Consistent with scholarly journalism's critical role in preparing students for the industry (see Njuguna & Jjuuko, 2019), respondents affirmed the experience gained from participating in the development of the school online newspapers, suggesting they had a 'feel of the industry' as future practitioners. This value of 'real-world' experiences in developing professional competence is underscored in Bandura's (1994) self-efficacy theory where successful performance of a given task is predicated on people's mastery of skills through direct experience or observation. For example, by participating in online productions, respondents developed self-efficacy for such online journalism tasks upon graduation, as one participant noted:

*"I have done a website at my place of internship Ni Nyampinga...so I am ready...I learnt this skill when I started doing volunteer work in different organizations during my holidays" (female participant, FGD5).*

*Another experienced 'live' use of social media networks like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp during talk shows where we could interact with audiences through their comments". (Male participant, FGD1)*

These observations pointed to possible direct relationships between pre-employment digital experiences and performance with these online tools after graduation. Opinions by FGD participants coincided with the survey results where most respondents affirmed their work-related online experiences as critical drivers of their industry preparedness.

Attitudes to online tools for professional development

Attitudes were assessed on the respondents’ beliefs in online media tools as catalysts of their future employment; feelings about online tools vis-a-vis their professional survival and intention to adopt these tools for professional growth. The mean response scores are shown in Table 6.

Construct	Indicator	M	STD
Beliefs regarding online tools	Knowledge of online tools can get me employed	4.62	0.65
	Online tools can teach me new skills for my future job	4.71	0.48
	My future work depends on knowledge of online tools	4.26	0.98
Feelings about using online tools	Online tools lower my ability to write professionally	3.75	1.17
	The media industry depends on new media to survive	3.99	0.97
	Online tools are not always trusted information sources	3.43	1.23
Behaviors or intentions with online tools	I use online tools to improve my interaction skills	4.49	0.65
	I have several online accounts to keep myself updated	4.57	0.66
	I always sign up to new social networking sites	4.22	1.12
AVERAGE		4.2	0.90

Table 5: Attitudes to online tools for professional development

Results indicated that respondents positively perceived online tools as drivers of professional performance in the industry (M=4.2). They strongly believed in online tools as instruments of teaching important professional skills (M=4.71) and felt that good knowledge of such tools improved their chances of future employment (M=4.62). The respondents’ beliefs regarding the online tools for professional developed seemed to match their behavior of deliberately using the tools to improve their interaction skills, having several online accounts for news updates and exploring emerging tools, possibly to learn new skills. This is consistent with studies like Iyer’s (2015) where future professionals are expected to demonstrate active interest in emerging technologies, to fit in the fast-changing industry. It was evident that both beliefs and action indicators enjoyed mean scores of >4.0. Although the respondents generally felt positive about these online tools, concern was raised on their negative effect on their journalistic writing skills (as noted by Hodgson & Wong, 2011) and the risk of some online tools not being trusted news sources - a challenge shared by scholars like Kwanya (2014).

In sum, the respondents’ high mean attitude scores portrayed online tools as critical to their future careers. Module descriptions also showed that such tools were integral to the content taught. In addition, all online journalism modules carried the maximum number of credits (20), further indicating a strong emphasis on digital skills in the program. These findings align with studies that associate technology attitudes and self-efficacy for digital skills (see Rosen et al, 2013). Results also underscore the relevance of Davis’ (1989) technology acceptance model – where attitudinal aspects such as perceived ease of use and benefits of using a technology are key to beliefs or confidence in the successful use of the technology. With a technologically-driven media industry, respondents asserted the need for persistence:

*“We cannot avoid it ...we have to try and keep ahead by discovering many things about what is happening in social media” (Female participant, FGD2).*

Inferential analysis of survey results

Correlation analysis between the selected digital skills development factors and the students’ online journalism preparedness showed that levels of interdependence ranged from weak to strong, at 95 percent confidence level. Table 7 shows this correlation matrix.

It was evident that while industry experiences strongly and significantly correlated with the students’ online journalism preparedness (r=.527, p-value .000), correlations with characteristics of the training content, training resources and attitudes towards online tools correlated were moderate though significant.

Students’ online habits exhibited the weakest yet significant correlation with their online preparedness. With majority respondents citing online skills gained through fieldwork, such industry experiences were key

		Training Content	Training Resources	Online Habits	Work Experience	Online Attitudes	OJP
Online Journalism Preparedness (OJP)	Pearson Correlation	.450**	.496**	.270**	.527**	.413**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							
Table 7: Correlations between selected factors and online journalism preparedness							

to their preparedness. Although students’ online behavior has been associated with incidental professional learning, evidence suggests that this ‘digital culture’ among most youth may only relate to online social interactions with no innovative learning intended (Daniels, 2012). Therefore, the learning effects of online media habits may not be generalized among all students, as evident in this study.

Although study results confirm that appropriate training content and resources are key in preparing students for the industry (e.g. Switzer and Switzer, 2013), FGD results pointed to a possible disconnect between the schools’ fairly connected multimedia facilities and actual usage by students. One participant noted the ‘limited time to practice even with an equipped computer lab’ (Male participant, FGD1). Another complained about machine-student ratio: ‘[...] we are too many students in a small lab [...] only a few do the practice as others follow in theory’ (Female participant, FGD5).

Regression analyses results showed that industry experiences explained the greatest variance in students’ online journalism preparedness (27.8 percent). This was followed by training resources (24.6 percent), training content (20.3 percent), attitudes regarding online tools (17 percent) and students’ online media habits (7.3 percent), when each factor was assessed on its own in the model. The goodness-of-fit models for each factor were found statistically significant at 5 percent, with ANOVA results indicating significant relationships between the factors and students’ online journalism preparedness thus: characteristics of the training content [F(1,142=35.356, p-value<0.000)], training resources [F(1,142=45.255, p-value<0.000)], online media habits [F(1,142=10.955, p-value<0.001)], industry experiences [F(1,142=53.426, p-value<0.000)] and attitudes to online tools for professional development [F(1,142=28.510), p-value<0.000)]. With all the models being statistically significant at <0.05, each factor demonstrated its reliability to predict students’ online journalism preparedness.

The tests of significance of the regression of the factors with the students’ online journalism preparedness revealed positive significant relationships with students’ online journalism preparedness as follows: characteristics of training content (β=0.416, t=5.946, p-value <0.000), training resources (β=0.380, t=6.727, p-value <0.000), online media habits (β=0.332, t=3.310, p-value <0.001), industry experiences (β=0.411, t=7.309, p-value <0.000) and attitudes towards online tools for professional development (β=0.507, t=5.339, p-value <0.000). The observed positive linear relationships implied that a unit improvement in the characteristics of training content, training resources, online media habits, industry experiences and attitudes towards online tools was predicted to increase the probability of the students’ online journalism preparedness by 41.6 percent, 38 percent, 33.2 percent, 41.1 percent and 50.7 percent respectively, keeping all other factors constant.

With the p-values of <0.05 in all factors, the null hypotheses were rejected with a conclusion that each of these factors exerted a significant and positive influence on the students’ online journalism preparedness. These findings concur with empirical evidence that failure to adapt the journalism training to the required digital age content and skills is bound to expose programs to possible failure and therefore, negatively affect careers of graduates especially in the digitally-oriented industry (Robinson, 2013). The role of resources in digital skills development cannot be gainsaid. For example, in journalism education context, the link between digital training resources and online self-efficacy is exemplified in studies that emphasize the right mix of resources to enhance online story-telling experiences of the future professionals (e.g. Bor, 2014).

The role of online habits in ‘teaching’ professional lessons to users, for example, by gaining online communication skills (see Stoker, 2015) is evident from the study results. With most students considering online platforms as second nature to their lives, Switzer and Switzer (2013) argue that this ‘tech-savvy’ generation is gradually socialized into a techno-culture with attendant personal and professional benefits. With the study results showing the significance of work experiences in the journalism students’ digital learning, the

positive relationship between attitudes to online tools for professional development and the online journalism preparedness of the respondents cohere with previous studies (see Hodgson & Wong, 2011) which found a relationship between students' perceptions of technology and their digital skills development.

An assessment of the joint influence of the factors on the students' online journalism preparedness showed the overall model had a 0.455 degree of association between these factors and students' online journalism preparedness, implying that the factors collectively explained 45.5 percent of the students' online journalism preparedness. Moreover, ANOVA results indicated the overall model was significant i.e. (F-statistic of 22.552 (5, 138) and p-value 0.000<0.05), confirming the factors' joint significant and positive influence on the students' online journalism preparedness. Thus the overall model predicated as  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 + \beta_4 + \beta_5 + \epsilon$  to investigate the link between the factors and the students' online journalism preparedness was a good fit for regression analysis. When all variables were fitted on the overall model, industry experiences had the most positive and significant influence on the students' online journalism preparedness (B=.258, p-value 0.000) followed by training resources (B=.178, p-value .003) and attitudes to online tools (B=.255, p-value 0.003). While the students' online media habits and the characteristics of the training content were positively related with students' online journalism preparedness (i.e. B=.136, p-value .096 and B=.104, p-value 0.156, respectively), their levels of significance in the overall model were >0.05, therefore insignificant.

In the overall model, the null hypothesis test revealed positive relationships of varying statistical significance between the selected factors and students' online journalism preparedness as follows: characteristics of training content (t=1.427; p=0.156>0.05), digital training resources (t=2.987; p=0.003<0.05), online media habits (t=1.676; p=0.096>0.05), industry experiences (t=4.658; p=0.000<0.05) and attitudes towards online tools for professional development (t=3.038; p=0.003<0.05). The null hypotheses regarding the characteristics of training content and students' online media habits were accepted since these factors had positive but statistically insignificant relationship with students' online journalism preparedness. On the other hand, null hypotheses regarding training resources, industry experiences and attitudes to online tools were rejected on account of their significant and positive relationships with students' online journalism preparedness.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to current debate regarding effective journalism education for the digital age. By exploring the role of training content, resources, online habits, industry experiences and attitudes to online tools in students' confidence to work online, the study findings affirm these factors as critical in preparing 'online-ready' media professionals. Although scholars like Deng & Tavares (2015) caution against equating online habits to 'professional' habits, incidental learning is possible, as evident in this study. Encouraging students to 'be constantly online' may, therefore, boost their confidence to execute certain professional tasks with time.

With industry experiences, training resources and online attitudes highly associated with the respondents' online preparedness, the need for journalism schools to leverage academia-industry linkages and the right attitudes towards online tools to authenticate the future professionals' industry readiness becomes clear. With digital skills learning being a gradual process, students may need to maintain active online identities right from their first year of study, while journalism schools structure digital skills training in cognizance of practice time against huge student numbers.

To enrich findings in this study, future research could involve more objective online journalism preparedness measures (e.g. practical assignments) to remove the bias of self-assessments. In addition, the mediating role of such factors as gender, digital capital and online mastery orientation (associated with online behavior) in the students' online journalism preparedness might give deeper insights, especially as only about 46% of the variations in the students' online journalism preparedness were explained by the study factors.

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# What is press freedom? A study on journalism students' perception of press freedom

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## Abstract

Press freedom applies to journalists working in conditions where press freedom is denied or threatened, as well as to journalists who feel the pressure of downsizing of news staff and polarized opinions. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the aim of this paper is to examine how journalism students in France, Palestine, Uganda and Norway define press freedom. We find that the students' definitions were in line with the historical and liberal roots of the concept, and that in all four countries the professional work, the role of journalism and journalism's autonomy were highlighted. They recognized the complexity of press freedom as well as the difference between an ideal situation and real conditions on the ground.

**Keyword:** Press freedom, role in society, limitations and pressure, journalism, journalism students

## Introduction

Some journalists convey news in countries where press freedom is taken for granted, and, although debated, journalism is seen as a carrier of information and a means to democratic

**rights.**

Other journalists struggle with access to information, or censorship and safety for their sources and themselves. Five days into 2019, an Afghan citizen journalist, Noori Javid of Radio Neshat, was killed, and on January 16, Ghanaian journalist Ahmed Hussein-Suale was shot down in Accra, Ghana (RSF, 2019a/2019b). Yet, 2019 turned out to be a year with a historically low number of journalists killed (RSF, 2020). The International Federation of Journalists states that, “There can be no press freedom if journalists exist in conditions of corruption, poverty or fear” (IFJ, 2006). However, the concept of press freedom includes a variety of aspects besides safety and good working conditions. There are reports of a decline in press freedom, if one looks at aspects such as impunity, fake news, repressive laws, commercialisation leading to less diversity, or the decline in global freedom and democracy 13 years in a row (Brandt et al., 2019). The conditions for press freedom apply to journalists, and editors, as press freedom is the foundation for journalism. That is not only true for journalists working in countries where press freedom is denied or threatened, but also applies for journalists who feel the pressure of downsizing of news staff or polarized opinions from hyper-partisan online mobs (Shahbaz & Funk, 2020).

The aim of this study is to explore how journalism students in Palestine, France, Norway and Uganda define press freedom, after they have learned about press freedom through a pedagogical tool, the Rig, on press freedom. First, we explain what this pedagogical tool is, before stating the research questions, presenting and discussing the literature review, methodology and findings.

## Starting point

### The Rig on press freedom

In order to teach journalism students, the meaning and significance of press freedom, a pedagogical tool – called the Rig on press freedom – was created at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo Metropolitan University in Norway in 2008. The Rig is a practical, journalistic project. After lectures on topics related to press freedom and a fact-checking assignment, the students work in groups, with each group scrutinizing the conditions on press freedom in a particular country. The students apply journalistic methods of gathering information and, at the end of the project, their news stories featuring different aspects linked in some way to conditions of press freedom are published. So, each group publishes several stories about the country in question and the stories of all groups are rigged, or linked, together. At Oslo Metropolitan University, as well as journalism departments at other universities where the Rig was conducted, there is an important demand that the students should not (only) see the world through the narrow view of their home country. The students should seek to find and emphasize the views and opinions as well as facts from the country in question, which leads to using sources and first-hand information from that country. Collaborating with each other and working with a teacher in the group in a process towards publishing, resembles the work in a newsroom. Hence, an important aspect of our pedagogical approach is to stimulate learning journalistic skills and methods while dealing with abstract concepts.

### Research question

This study takes its point of departure in the Rig on press freedom, where bachelor’s students in journalism in Palestine, France, Norway and Uganda investigated the conditions of press freedom around the world. Since the Rig was created to help students grasp the concept of press freedom, our research investigates the students’ way of seeing the concept of press freedom. So, our research question is: After doing the Rig on the conditions for press freedom, how do the students define press freedom?

### Press freedom

Press freedom is linked to other freedoms, especially to freedom of speech, and they both derive from

ideas that man is able to reason, think, form an opinion and express it. These ideas were expressed by John Milton to the English Parliament in 1644, opposing licencing of printing in a document of the period called Enlightenment, Milton argued for reason and for religious and political freedom. He wrote: “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions, for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making” (Milton, 1644:38). Truth and understanding cannot be monopolized by the church or the state, the priest and poet argued. Knowledge is not to be licenced, nor to be handled “like our broad cloath, and our wooll packs” (Milton, 1644:28). Free writing and free speaking are liberties that Milton compared to “the breaking forth of light” (Milton, 1644:31-32), moving the society and its people forward. With the liberal idea of press freedom, “truth is no longer conceived as the property of power” (Sibert et al. [1956] 1969:3) and the press is seen as a partner in the search for truth (Sibert et al. [1956] 1969:3).

With the kings’ and the church’s loss of control of regulating what was written and printed, the press grew into a fourth estate, bearing the means to control those in power, without being censored. Free media and freedom of expression have been, and still are, battlefields about power and control. The struggle for press freedom and fight against state licencing of printing grew from the new bourgeois class’ critical attitude towards the ruling classes. The transformation of the press from lapdog to watchdog was a process slowly moving forward from the time of the Enlightenment period up until this day, and it still continues. Being a watchdog is an ideal for many journalists globally, although being a watchdog towards political and economic groups is not usually found in non-Western societies (Hanitzsch et al., 2010). Also, monitoring the government is a challenge to journalists in most countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2016). Being a watchdog when relating to power is highly regarded among journalists, especially in the Western world. For instance, it is highly valued in Colombia as well as Norway (Frey, Rhaman & El Bour, 2017:88), but not so much in Tunisia and Bangladesh. In the latter two countries, the notion of being neutral to any power is more important (Frey et al., 2017:59). This finding is in agreement with Hughes et al. (2017) who argue that journalists in insecure democracies feel pressure and influences about their work more intensely. However, Muchtar et al. (2017:568) found that journalists in Muslim countries stress the importance of scrutinizing political leaders, and as such act like a watchdog.

Press freedom is freedom from governmental control (Sibert et al, [1956] 1969). That the state does not have monopoly of ideas and information is what Picard (1985) would call negative press freedom. He also points to the aspects of positive press freedom, such as individual persons using the media. Curran (1996) divides between the classical liberal focus on the freedom to publish, and the radical democratic perspective that the media should redress the imbalances in society. Splichal writes that in modern democratic societies, “where the people rather than different estates legitimize all the powers” (2002:xiv), reforms of political, economic, and social regulatory practices are needed for equalizing citizens use of reason and access to the public sphere. This ties into the right of access to information stated in the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Breunig (1991), however, found that nations that guarantee freedom of information in their laws did not necessarily provide for more freedom.

Another aspect of press freedom that is important when it comes to imbalances in society, is diversity. Diversity of power in a society, diversity of media ownership and diversity in voices being heard and hence, media content pluralism is highlighted by Czepek (2009:41). In order to freely cover events and secure that a variety of voices and opinions is transmitted to the public, plurality of media outlets and media owners are vital (Frey et al., 2017, Czepek & Hellwig, 2009). Structural conditions may foster or hinder the dissemination of diverse ideas and opinion to large audiences (Weaver, 1977, Rozumilowicz, 2002). Thus, Hachten (1987) points out that press freedom also has to do with political development, as well as fighting illiteracy and poverty, and building political consciousness. Journalism and media systems are “rooted in the institutions of the national state” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:13), and structural conditions such as legal, economical, social, cultural, and religious issues play important roles (Czepek & Hellwig, 2009).

The belief that man is reasonable and hence should be free to think and express himself, is a notion directly linked to the idea of democracy. Therefore, and also because of the hegemony of the Anglo-American press model, also called the Liberal model, a free press is often connected to democracy (see more in Frey et al., 2017, de Burgh 2005, Curran, 2011). As Ash (2016:183) puts it, “a free press is a defining feature of a free country, while censorship is a defining feature of dictatorship. A democracy cannot long survive without the former, a dictatorship without the latter.” However, the press itself cannot create democracy, Schudson argues (2003:197–198), as the state has to tolerate criticism and permit some degree of self-government to the press. Self-regulation of media ethics is one mark of autonomy of the press, as is media accountability, and acting according to the Code of Ethics. Effective self-regulation and high professional journalism standards could promote values of freedom of expression and media plurality (Richter 2018-2019). Opposite is

state regulating the media with fines, closing of media outlets, and imprisonment, which are dimensions of censorship.

Pressure on media freedom takes on different forms, including economic pressure, bad working conditions and low salaries for the media staff, that could, for instance make them open to bribery. The absence of safety for journalists is another. Intimidation, threats, imprisonment, attack on and killing of journalists to ensure power is upheld, is ultimate censorship by those in power, being the state or different stakeholders. As Høiby and Ottosen (2017:2) state, the lack of safety and security for journalists ultimately “are issues of freedom of expression, press freedom and democracy.” Still, as Merrill (2009:10) writes, there are cacophony of “muttering worldwide about press freedom” – even when obstacles and restrictions are numerous.

## Methodology

### Sampling

Our starting point was the Rig on press freedom, as conducted in four journalism departments in four countries. These are the only departments where the Rig has been done. As such, we thought it interesting to include all four departments that have used this pedagogical tool. So, our research population is the 188 bachelor students doing the Rig during the period December 2017 to June 2018.

Department and Institution	Place and country	Time of this Rig	Number of participating students	Countries examined during the Rig	Previous Rigs at the department
Department of Print and Electronic Journalism at An-Najah National University	Nablus, Palestine	December, 2017	63	Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Norway, Saudi-Arabia, Tunisia, Qatar	0
Cannes School of Journalism/IUT, University Côte d’Azur	Cannes, France	March, 2018	24	Italy, Iran, Japan, Switzerland	3
Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo Metropolitan University	Oslo, Norway	May, 2018	66	FYR Macedonia, Jordan, Kenya, Russia, The Netherlands, The Philippines, Venezuela	9
Department of Journalism and Communication, Makerere University	Kampala, Uganda	June, 2018	35	Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia	0
Total N:			188		

Table 1: Sampling of 188 journalism students. N = student

All participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire with seven questions related to the Rig on press freedom. Three of the questions were on the Rig itself, while four sought background information. Almost every sampled student in Kampala (97 per cent) and Nablus (95 per cent) responded, but in Oslo and Cannes, the response rate was only 59 per cent and 50 per cent respectively. Out of a total of 188 students there was an overall response rate at 72 per cent. It has to be taken into account that fewer students in France were involved in the Rig than in the other countries, and only half of them answered. Their responses constitute only eight per cent of all answers. The students from Palestine, contributed 41 per cent of the responses, while contributions from Norway and Uganda made up 27 and 23 per cent of the overall responses, respec-

tively. The next two tables show the gender and ages of the students who participated in the survey.

Institution	Female	Male	Total N
An-Najah National University, Nablus	42	18	60
University Nice-Côte d’Azur, Cannes	5	7	12
Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo	27	12	39
Makerere University, Kampala	22	12	34
Total N:	96	49	145
Per cent	66	34	100

Table 2 Gender of students. N = student.

In Oslo, all the students were in their first year of their bachelor study, and in Cannes they were in their second year. In Nablus, students from second, third and fourth year participated in the Rig. Still the majority of them were in the youngest age group, 20 years or younger. In Kampala, the Rig was conducted directly after the students had finished their fourth and final year of the bachelor studies. None of the students was 20 years or younger, and most of them were between 21 and 24 years old. The majority of the students in Oslo also belonged to this age group, although they were first-year students. Table 3 shows the participants’ age groups.

Institution	20 years and younger	21-24 years old	25 years and older	Total
An-Najah National University, Nablus	48	12	0	60
University Nice-Côte d’Azur, Cannes	9	3	0	12
Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo	10	23	6	39
Makerere University, Kampala	0	30	4	34
Total N	67	68	10	145
Per cent	46	47	7	100

Table 3 Age groups. N = student.

### Data collection and analysis

As a first step, we decided to use a survey to collect our data from 188 students. As a survey is recognized as a way of reaching a lot of people with the same questions, we asked the students to answer a questionnaire in their language. Mostly, members of the research team translated the questionnaire and the answers, and in one case used the help of a translator.<sup>1</sup>

Taking into account that we desired to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, we designed the survey with closed and open-ended questions, as well as cross-off options for answers and space for open answers written in the students’ own words. There were four questions on background information, i.e. the students’ gender, age, in which year they were in their journalism studies, and which country they investigated during the Rig on press freedom. To explore the students’ perceptions on the concept of press freedom, we asked them to define press freedom in their own words, which is the focus of this paper.

To reach the students at campus directly after the Rig, and hoping for a maximum response, the questionnaire was handed out as hard copies to students in Nablus, Oslo and Makerere. In Cannes, the students were invited to fill in an online questionnaire, which was the most convenient way for their schedule. As noted above, 145 of the 188 students answered, which is 72 per cent.

To answer our research question, we combined quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. Combining the two approaches gives a richer set of data and analysis. To quantitatively analyse answers from the survey we used SPSS, an advanced program for statistical analysis. In the quantitative analysis we performed cross analysis to test for possible influence from different variables, for instance gender, home country, how long the students had been studying journalism and so on. So, the quantitative data from the survey provide a

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Bashar Farran in Palestine



basis for exploring any differences in variables.

For the responses to the open-ended question, we needed a more qualitative approach. In regard of true qualitative methodology, we closely read and re-read the students' answers to the open-ended question and interpreted them using Nvivo, a program for qualitative text analysis. Within the answers, we looked for elements, words, expressions and concepts. The material itself then provided raw findings with patterns leading to different categories of aspects of press freedom and its conditions. For instance, pivotal aspects concerning journalism's role in society is linked to the journalists' duties and their ethics and epistemology. So, answers relating to these issues form one category, which we called "Journalism ethics and the role in society".

However, an answer from a student held different elements of the concept of press freedom, that fed into different categories. For example, this answer "[press freedom] is the guaranties that the government must provide so as the journalists have the freedom of expression and [to] gather and publish information without restrictions" (respondent 6) got into five categories that emerged through our analysis: "Societal framework and politics", "Journalism ethics and the role in society", "Human rights and freedom of expression", "Journalistic work" and "Limitations and pressure".

Furthermore, we did not categorize in terms of dividing positive or negative correlations. That means that the same category includes answers pointing at danger and pressure threatening journalists as well as answers focusing on safety and the absence of pressure. Also, there were some references to democracy, and we had to discuss which category these mentions belonged to. We decided to include words like democracy and democratic into the same category as human rights, although it could be argued that so-called democratic societies also violate human rights.

## Results

In this section we present the empirical findings of our research question: How do the students define press freedom?

We got a response rate at 72 per cent on the survey, which is good. However, the response rate in Oslo and Cannes were much lower. Also, the number of students varied from Rig to Rig. Due to the response rate, the students from The Middle East and Africa outnumbered the European students: The biggest group of students (60) who answered were from Nablus, then Oslo (39), thirdly Kampala (34) and finally Cannes (12). When testing for differences, we did not find divisions along the lines of variables such as the students' home countries, their age, gender or which year they were in their journalism studies.

The students got to define press freedom in their own words when responding to the question in the survey, How do you define press freedom? Please, write in your own words here. Since it was open-ended, the question yielded a multitude of answers. First, we observed that many of the students' definitions of press freedom were normative. Some students defined press freedom as they thought it ought to be, while others defined it by mentioning what it should not be. So, there were many negatively or positively loaded words and concepts in the students' definitions.

Then, as stated in the methodology part, we scrutinized all answers and systematized the multiple elements into different categories, a total of seven categories. We called the most comprehensive category "Journalism ethics and the role in society". Aspects of autonomy, the rights and duties of journalists, journalism's ethics, and journalism's role in society were mentioned 144 times in the 145 answers. This category has to do with journalism's professional frames, its epistemology, and the role of journalism in society and its role as a watch dog, which were named as positive aspects of press freedom. Here, the students for instance stressed the need to work within the boundaries of the ethical guidelines of the profession. We also found mentioned 11 times the aspect of being critical, which underlines the importance of asking critical questions, critically analysing facts and the sources as a part of doing journalistic work, and criticising without fear of the consequences. The words autonomy or editorial independence were highlighted 46 times as important elements in the definition of press freedom. (the liberal aspect of press freedom). Also, several students stated the journalists' ability and the possibility to seek and tell the truth. As such, this category bears an ideal task of professional journalism.

The second largest category "Limitations and pressure" consists of limitations of press freedom such as for instance censorship, pressure, intimidations, threats, detainment and violence towards journalists and editors. Again, we found the duality between presence and absence. Many students used negative correlated

words combined with the word without. Thus, without restrictions, limits and constraints, being punished or restricted, consequences, monitoring or political pressure, financial censorship, being controlled or influenced by others, negative sanctions from the authorities, being controlled, regulated or limited by the state, and finally interference. We also saw that censorship is mentioned as something that should not exist in countries with good conditions for freedom of the press and that it is present in weak conditions for media freedom. Furthermore, censorship was seen as an instrument of control against the media. Many respondents pointed towards obstacles and restrictions that the state exerts, for example pressure and harsh regulations. However, censorship is not merely executed by the authorities, some students wrote in their definitions. Pressure from others with power, including politicians, criminals, religious institutions, commercial interests and so on, was also labelled as censorship, and often leads to self-censorship, the students pointed out.

The third category was "Journalistic work", which consists of the workings process of gathering information, having the right to access to information, be out there covering incidents and processes in society and report on whatever happens, and then publish the news. Words and expressions feeding into this category were mentioned 88 times in the 145 students' definitions of press freedom. Here, we also found references to reliable information, fact-checking and being accurate as parts of the journalistic working process.

The fourth category we called "Human rights and freedom of expression". 52 times, the respondents mentioned key words that form this category. The main word was freedom of expression/freedom of speech. The students accentuated a liberal aspect and made the connection between press freedom and freedom of expression, mentioning not only the journalists' right to express themselves, but also the right to freedom of speech for anyone, ordinary people and the sources of journalism stories. In the category, we saw references to human rights besides the right to freedom of expression. As discussed in Data collection and analysis, we choose to include mentions of democracy; highlighted in theory and not so much by our students, in this category.

The fifth category was mentioned three times less often than the fourth category. This category we gave the name "Societal framework and politics", mentioned 49 times. It consists of liberties given by the authorities, that is to say guarantees provided for the press by the authorities, such as governmental incentive for an independent and free press. Furthermore, it deals with constitutions and other laws which provide a legal framework for journalism, such as media laws and penal law. Included here as well are aspects tied to national security. Only two students referred to national security, one from Norway and one from Palestine. They, however, took opposite stances. The Norwegian student pointed out that journalists should challenge national security (respondent 93), while the Palestinian student specified that press freedom is the ability of the journalist to access information, especially if it is the right of the public to know about it, but without affecting national security (respondent 9).

The sixth category was only referred to 26 times. We called this category "The public". Here, the students raised the general interest of the people, the public's right to receive truthful and factual knowledge about what is going on so that people do not receive biased or wrongful information. It has to do with enlightening people through transmitting information and opinions that are of interest to the public.

The smallest of the categories was "Variety of media". This seventh category points towards conditions and premises for journalism regarding plurality of opinions and different types of media and platforms, for instance that print, online media, radio and television, as well as news agencies cover and publish news.

## Concluding discussion

The students took their point of departure in liberal theory. The radical democratic perspective which includes reforms against imbalances in society and equalizing citizens' rights (Hachten, 1987, Curran, 1996, Splichal, 2002) were not stated clearly. These perspectives were mentioned only as (underlying) elements in the categories, and not highlighted as a tool to change society. However, in liberal theory, there is also a strong element of a free search for the unmonopolized and true knowledge so that freedom of learning will thrive and people will move forward (Milton, 1644:32).

In the largest category, namely "Journalism ethics and the role in society", the students were preoccupied with journalism's epistemology, its frames, ethics and its role in society, as well as the duties and rights of journalists. Journalism's autonomy from outside forces was highlighted by the students. So was the critical and independent position as a watchdog which pursues factual and true knowledge. Both elements

tie into the journalists' duties and their rights, as well as their professional journalism standards (Richter, 2018-2019) and ethics. So, in their definitions of press freedom, the students were strongly influenced by the profession's epistemology and by liberal theory. Although the students come from different parts of the world, they shared several of the ideal tasks of professional journalism, which was emphasised in 144 of 145 answers. Furthermore, in their definitions, they expressed an understanding that journalism has its limitations, for instance when it comes to following ethically grounded principles within the profession. This however, was paired with independence from outsiders, and often self-regulation was stated by the students. The respect of ethical, professional principles and their universal validity is in line with Frey, Rhaman & El Bour (2017) and Hanitzsch et al (2010). This as well apply to the notion of being a watchdog, such as our students stated in their definitions of press freedom (Frey et al., 2017; Hanitzsch et al., 2010).

The second largest category, which was "Limitations and pressure", also revealed that the students evoked liberal theory when they included freedom from restrictions, pressure and censorship in their definitions of press freedom. That being said, the students showed that they recognize the difference between an ideal situation and the complex conditions on the ground. Practically, press freedom is situated in a local or national context, although its ideas seem to be universal, the students expressed in their definitions. The students perceived the complexity of press freedom: In dictatorships, some information may be given, and in democracies, there exist restrictions. In all societies, there is still a fight to gain more freedom or to improve the status of press freedom. On the other hand, the students emphasised existing danger, threats and limitations of press freedom and "... the lack of safety and security for reporters" (Høiby & Ottosen, 2002:2). The students were concerned with danger and restrictions imposed on journalists. Here, we also found traces of references in their definitions to the authoritarian theory. These references however, were mentioned as negative features. In addition, negative elements that threaten press freedom are not necessarily derived from the authorities, but could have their outspring from political, violent or religious forces. What we did not find in our students' definitions, were "muttering worldwide about press freedom" (Merrill, 2009:10). Rather, we observed that the students were concerned that "the media are still controlled in most parts of the world" (Curran, 2011:14).

Also, many of our students focused their definitions of press freedom on how they think it should be, and stated that press freedom in its pure form is free of censorship. It is a conventional definition, that "press freedom is defined as an absence of state intervention in media activities" (Czepek & Hellwig, 2009:9). So, the students highlighted a basic definition, which in addition is an ideal. Though in many places, the ideal is not yet materialized, it is there to strive for. So, the students showed in their definitions that they comprehend the gap between the perception of press freedom and the different empirical practicalities depending on the local and national context.

As we saw in the largest category, the students were concerned with their future role as journalists and the role of journalism in society. Being bachelor students in journalism studies, it may not be surprising that the third largest category found in their definitions of press freedom included the practical, journalistic working process. "Journalistic work" enclosed their future work; the right and necessity to gather correct information, to cover events and processes in society and then publish to an audience. The three largest categories were intertwined, and it is unlikely to imagine one without the others: How can a journalist get hold off and freely process and publish factual, unbiased and ethical news without being independent from pressure, bribery or restrictions? Also, the next four categories fed into this way of thinking. The fourth category found in the students' definitions was mentions of free speech for the sources as well as the journalists, human rights which stipulate anyone's right to seek information and to express themselves, and democratic liberties and rights. As the focus of the Rig is press freedom, it may not be strange that the students accentuated press freedom more than freedom of expression, although they derive from the same origin that man is able to reason and think and freely express opinions (Milton, 1644).

The fifth category was grouped around elements in the students' definitions concerning legal framework, and guaranties given by the authorities. As Breunig (1991), several of the students mentioned a discrepancy between the legal texts and how these laws are used and interpreted. Some students also referred to how different laws contradict each other, which leaves a space for the authorities to manoeuvre in.

The sixth category, "The public", was highlighted more in research than by the students in their definitions of press freedom. However, conveying news to the public is an important, although sometimes underlying assumption, when the students focused on journalists' duties, journalism's role in society and "Journalistic work". Even so, we saw that the students explicitly were more preoccupied with including their own future work rather than their forthcoming audience into the definitions of press freedom. This implies that the students first and foremost focused on socialization into their future profession. It may also be that our four

departments do not emphasise the public as much as we could do in our teaching. Also, the last category could be the smallest due to the same reasons as mentioned above. Because another important issue highlighted by research is the importance of variety and diversity; different voices being heard, pluralism in media content, variety of topics, diversity of media outlets as well as plurality of media ownership. This was not mentioned in the students' definitions more than six times out of the 145 definitions. However, as stated by Czepek, Hellwig and Nowak, "... press freedom, pluralism and participation are by no means concepts clearly defined and universally agreed upon" (Czepek & Hellwig, 2009:12).

Our conclusion is that the journalism students agreed on important parts which go into a definition of press freedom. We could say that their definitions were in line with the historical and liberal roots on press freedom. Hand in hand with the thoughts of Milton, the students highlighted the professional role, journalistic values and the work as journalists in their definitions. While this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how journalism students define press freedom, we acknowledge some limitations. First, the literature is mainly Western based, even though we looked for theory on press freedom in our four countries and the different parts of the world that we represent. When testing for differences due to the students' nationality, gender and age, we did not find significant differences. That the same learning tool is used in four different departments, could be one reason for finding joint understanding of what press freedom means. Another aspect is that during the Rig, the students investigate the conditions of press freedom in several countries, but not in their own country. So, this learning project in itself encourages the students to seek opinions and statements about press freedom globally, although routed in specific countries. Hence, our study points in the direction of these journalism students having the same basic opinions on press freedom and journalism, which indicates that journalism is an universal profession that still needs to fight for the principles of press freedom. However, future research is encouraged to encompass societal and educational context, as well as the students' comprehension of press freedom before they do the Rig. As such, our study could be the starting point of further research.

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# ‘A modern-day equivalent of the Wild West’: preparing journalism students to be safe online

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## Abstract

Journalists are increasingly becoming the target of online abuse; the backlash over the death of TV presenter Caroline Flack and coverage of the Black Lives Matter protests are just two recent examples. Yorkshire Evening Post editor Laura Collins has highlighted how female journalists face the brunt of this abuse, describing social media as ‘a modern-day equivalent of the Wild West’. The fact that journalists are exposed to this kind of attack is becoming an increasing focus; but how are we – as educators – to prepare our journalism students for entering this world? What guidance should we be giving them – to respond or not to respond, to block or not to block? And at what point should they report their experience via more formal channels? The authors of this paper set out to identify strategies and tools for students to help protect themselves and remain resilient in the face of online abuse. Through qualitative interviews, we asked how practising journalists are coping with social media attacks, and what steps they and their employers are taking to protect and support them. The result is a set of guidelines offering practical and emotional advice from journalists to directly inform journalism educators and their students.

## Introduction

Online abuse has today become something of a norm for many in the public eye – whether for members of the royal family (Davies 2019, *The Royal Household ND*), footballers (Rashford 2021) or pop stars (Hyun Young Li & Sangmi Cha 2019).

Holton & Molyneux (2017) note that traditionally, journalists had not had to develop a direct audience-facing identity, with most working in relative anonymity. But with a changing economic environment in journalism and the move to digital and online, they report a shift towards individual and organisational



branding by journalists. Brems et al (2017) also highlight the demand for personal branding amongst journalists, particularly on Twitter, and this is reinforced by Wolfe (2019) who says that journalists are increasingly being required to have an online presence and to interact with their audiences. ‘This is identified by media owners as a way of engaging more “eyeballs” and potentially driving up profits.’ (ibid p.11).

As journalists have been forced more into the public eye, so too have they become more a target of abuse online (Costa-Kostritsky 2019; Chen et al 2018; NUJ 2020; Amnesty International 2018) - often simply for doing their job reporting on events. The backlash against the media after the death of TV presenter Caroline Flack was just one example, with publisher Reach plc offering guidance to its reporters as a result (Mayhew 2020). But Brexit, COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter have all been the backdrop for attacks on journalists as well. According to Samantha Harman, Newsquest Oxfordshire editor, ‘it reached a boiling point this year [2020] during coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement, with reporters having to deal with abhorrent, disgusting and racist comments on stories.’ (Behind Local News 2020).

The issue has increasingly become the focus of academic research (for example Gardiner 2018, Ferrier 2018, Chen et al 2020) – but how are we, as journalism educators, to prepare our journalism students for entering this world? Online safety for journalists is something that is increasingly required within our training (Employer A ND, Employer B ND), but how exactly should we be advising our students? As a journalism lecturer and as a Masters graduate now working in the frontline as a reporter, the researchers felt we had a valuable joint perspective to bring in the search for some answers to these questions.

## Aims and Methodology

Our aim, therefore, was to take the research that has been done into the fact of the abuse itself a step further to:

- Explore how journalists and employers are responding to it
- Identify some practical help that could be offered to trainee journalists
- Create a shared resource of guidance and tools for supporting students going into digital journalism.

Using qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews were planned with a number of journalists and editors. Brinkmann & Kvale (2018) define qualitative research as aiming to understand, describe and sometimes explain by analysing people’s experiences - including professional practices; interviews allow the subjects to convey their situation from their own perspective and in their own words. Specific questions were drafted aimed at generating the kind of ‘rich, thick description’ that Bearman highlights (2019 p.4). These were used for every interviewee for reasons of consistency but were added to as appropriate during the interviews; using semi- structured interviews with open-ended questions enables a focus on personal experience and seeks to build rapport (King & Horrocks 2010). ‘The research interview is an inter-view [sic] where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action [sic] between the interviewer and the interviewee’ (Brinkmann & Kvale 2018 p. 2).

In line with the aims of the research, a mix of journalists and editors was required for the interviews. The following list of set questions was used as a starting point for each interviewee:

- For journalists:
- What has been your personal experience of online abuse?
  - What impact did the abuse have on you?
  - How did you respond to this?
  - What strategies do you feel were most helpful for you?
  - What support or guidance did you get from your employer?
  - What advice and tips do you have for students or trainee journalists?
- For editors:
- What has been your experience of online abuse in your journalism team?
  - What impact has this had on you/them, both personally and professionally?
  - What support or guidance do you offer your journalists?
  - What advice and tips do you have for students or trainee journalists?
- Subjects were initially identified using the following criteria:

Journalists and editors who had publicly written about either themselves or their employees being the target of abuse.

Journalists and editors from a range of media platforms to ensure experiences across the industry were reflected – covering online, newspapers and broadcasters.

We wanted to ensure that participants from the BAME communities were included in order to give as diverse a range of experience as possible.

Whilst research shows women to be the main target of online abuse (Sharman 2020a, Chen et al 2018), we wanted to open it up to male journalists as well because the focus of the research was not on the nature of the abuse itself, but on strategies for dealing with it.

We also felt it important to interview Hannah Storm, director and CEO of the Ethical Journalism Network. Storm has published her own findings and guidance on this topic (Storm 2019) and is able to provide a national and international overview as a campaigner and researcher with expertise in this area.

Subjects were then approached initially by email, clearly setting out the parameters of the research project and how the data would be used. Those subjects who responded were asked to provide their consent as to whether they wished to remain anonymous or could be identified publicly, and also whether audio extracts from the interviews could be used at any stage. For the BBC, the researchers were referred to the press office who managed the initial approach, but respondents were then emailed directly, and consent processes fully observed.

The following group of 13 journalists and editors agreed to be interviewed. The majority of the respondents worked in regional journalism, and we believe this is reflective of the fact that local journalists are expected to engage more closely with their communities on social media as part of their job (Smith 2017, Reid 2014) – for example, through Facebook Lives. The sample spans journalists at different stages of their careers from more recently qualified reporters through to experienced editors, providing a range of perspectives on the issue.

Hannah Storm	Ethical Journalism Network director & CEO
Samantha Harman	<i>Oxford Mail</i> group editor (Newsquest)
Jenna Thompson	<i>Hull Live</i> digital editor (Reach plc)
Laura Collins	<i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i> editor (JPI Media)
Jess Rudkin	BBC Radio Bristol editor
Mellissa Dzinzi	Reporter at <i>Leeds Live</i>
Conor Gogarty	Chief reporter at <i>Bristol Post/Bristol Live</i>
Katie Ridley	Journalist at ITV Anglia and formerly <i>Huntingdon Post</i>
Anonymous	Female broadcast journalist
Kristian Johnson	Investigative reporter at <i>Leeds Live</i>
Anonymous	Male reporter at a daily newspaper
Susie Beever	Senior reporter at <i>The Yorkshire Post</i>
Emma Britton	BBC Radio Bristol breakfast presenter

Interviews were conducted using video technology; given the personal nature of some of the online abuse, we wanted to adopt a personal approach to reassure participants and set them at ease.

## Literature review

### The amount of abuse against journalists

The growing amount of abuse against journalists has begun to be well documented in recent years. Around half of journalists (51%) surveyed by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ 2020) said they experienced it at some point in the previous year. 78% said abuse and harassment had become normalised and seen as part of the job. Four out of five UK regional journalists say the problem has got ‘significantly worse’ since they began their careers (Behind Local News 2020). A large majority of respondents to this survey of local journalists said they encountered general abuse online every day, with 40% spending more than an hour

each week reading and dealing with it.

*‘Examples from this week alone would be: “bottom-feeder”, “bloodthirsty journalist”, “total piece of sh\*t”, “f\*\*\*ing c\*\*t”, “so-called journalist, so-called human”, “scum”, “dirty scum”, “leech”.’ (Behind Local News 2020).*

For its report on online abuse against women, UNESCO and the International Center for Journalism surveyed 714 women journalists across 113 countries in what it describes as the most comprehensive global survey of its kind (Posetti 2020). Nearly three in four women respondents (73%) said they had experienced online violence. This is reinforced by Index on Censorship whose Mapping Media Freedom report reviewed 162 incidents involving investigative journalists of both sexes from 35 countries between 2014 and 2018 (Costa-Kostritsky 2019). The report found journalists were facing an ‘onslaught’ of online abuse – but noted that this was likely to be just ‘the tip of the iceberg’ as journalists do not report all the harassment they receive on social media because ‘they get used to it and end up seeing it as being part of the job’ (ibid).

## The nature of the abuse

There is evidence that women journalists are more likely to be the target of abuse than men. A Demos report in 2014 (Demos 2014) for example found that female journalists and TV news presenters received roughly three times as much abuse as their male counterparts. Yorkshire Evening Post editor Laura Collins has highlighted how female journalists face the brunt of this abuse, describing social media as ‘a modern-day equivalent of the Wild West’ (Sharman 2020a). A survey of 597 women journalists and media workers by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) and Troll-Busters.com in 2018 found that nearly 2 out of 3 respondents said they had been threatened or harassed online at least once (Ferrier 2018). They also reported that online attacks had become more visible and coordinated in the five years up to 2018.

The abuse is more likely to be personal in nature when aimed at women; the US journalist Alison Bethel McKenzie (OSCE 2016) notes that threats and harassment against women often take the form of personal attacks focusing on the woman’s character or body parts (p.22). The British journalist Caroline Criado Perez has written powerfully in the same OSCE report on the highly sexualised attacks she endured online and how the language was often about silencing her in particularly horrific ways including rape threats (pp.12-14). A lot of the language used against women journalists is indeed highly sexualised. Amnesty International has labelled Twitter a ‘toxic place for women’ (2018b), saying online threats can also include privacy violations such as doxing or sharing sexual or intimate images of a woman without her consent. Amnesty International (2018b) quotes Dunja Mijatović, former Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Representative on Freedom of the Media, as saying that female journalists and bloggers are being ‘inundated’ with threats of murder, rape, physical violence and graphic imagery.

*‘Male journalists are also targeted with online abuse, however, the severity, in terms of both sheer amount and content of abuse, including sexist and misogynistic vitriol, is much more extreme for female journalists.’ (ibid chapter 2)*

Chen et al (2018) conducted research with 75 female journalists working internationally and who were expected to engage with their audience online as a requirement of their job. These women reported that they frequently faced comments threatening them based on their gender or sexuality. One respondent is quoted as saying:

*‘Sex is used to intimidate us. Rape is used to frighten, intimidate, and stop us ... from doing our work, but at a deeper level it is actually about stopping us from having opinions, showing any semblance of independence.’ (Chen et al 2018 p.890).*

The abuse against journalists, then, is gender-based but research shows it is also racially motivated with religion and sexual identity playing a part as well. The Guardian commissioned research into the 70 million comments left on its site between 2006 and 2016. This revealed that of the 10 regular writers to receive the most abuse, eight were women and the two men were black (Gardiner 2018). Of the eight women in the ‘top 10’, four were non-white, one was Muslim and one Jewish. And of the 10 writers, three were gay. Whilst the research focused on gender, ‘both writers and moderators observe that ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT people also appear to experience a disproportionate amount of abuse.’ (Gardiner et al 2016). These findings are reinforced by Amnesty’s Toxic Twitter report which highlights the ‘intersectional nature’ of abuse on the platform, targeting women from ethnic or religious minorities, LGBTQ women and women with disabilities (Amnesty International 2018b Chapter 1), reinforcing Storm’s point that it is the diverse

voices of our media that are under attack (2019).

As this literature review shows, much of the abuse is sexualised, abusive, racial and misogynistic but at its worst, journalists’ lives can be threatened. Amy Fenton, chief reporter for the Mail, Barrow’s daily newspaper in Cumbria, was forced into hiding after threats to her life and that of her five-year-old daughter following her reporting of a court case (Pidd 2020). Stephanie Finnegan, the court reporter for *Yorkshire Live* had a similar experience after she was targeted with rape and death threats by supporters of the far-right leader, Tommy Robinson, in the wake of her coverage of his contempt of court case (Sharman 2018).

## The impact of the abuse

Journalists who experience this kind of abuse may be badly affected in terms of their emotional and physical health. The survey carried out by Newsquest Oxfordshire editor Samantha Harman (Behind Local News 2020) revealed that journalists had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression, been forced to move home and had even left the profession. The IWMF and Trollbusters.com survey found that female journalists could suffer from ‘emotional stress and long-term psychological trauma’ because of online abuse (Ferrier 2018 p.35). In the most serious cases, journalists have contemplated suicide (Behind Local News 2020).

But the impact of the abuse also affects journalists professionally. Ferrier (2018) reports that 40% of women journalists had avoided reporting on a story because of fear of online harassment. A study by the Council of Europe in 2017 and involving 940 journalists shows that that in the face of harassment, 31% of the journalists toned down coverage of certain stories, 15% dropped stories and 23% stopped covering certain stories (Council of Europe 2017). This is echoed in the findings of a global survey by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) which found that 30% responded to online violence by self-censoring on social media (Posetti 2020). Chen et al (2018) highlight the kind of strategies journalists have developed for dealing with targeted abuse, including limiting what they post online and changing stories they report on. The OSCE calls for a recognition that ‘threats and other forms of online abuse of female journalists and media actors is a direct attack on freedom of expression and freedom of the media’ (OSCE 2016 p.6). Both Ferrier (2018) and Amnesty International (2018b) agree that the aim is to silence women and create a hostile environment.

## The beginnings of action

As the spotlight has been increasingly shone on the issue of abuse against journalists, action has started to be taken to look at how this can be dealt with – both in terms of employers, social media platforms, legislation and journalists themselves. Halifax MP Holly Lynch spoke in parliament to call for the publication of the promised Online Harms Bill, describing trolling and online abuse as ‘a public health ticking timebomb’ (Beever 2020). The Dart Center has assembled an excellent range of resources (Slaughter & Newman 2020), including recommendations from Trollbusters (Ferrier 2018) – for example, the need to document any threats using screenshots. The UK Society of Editors chose online abuse as its theme for its virtual conference in 2020 (Sharman 2020b), and publishers are starting to work with each other on common approaches (Behind Local News 2020). In the wake of the growing spotlight on the issue, the government has published its first National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport 2021). It includes training for police forces and journalists, and a number of pledges by broadcasters, publishers and social media companies to address the issue. Under the forthcoming Online Safety Bill, online platforms will be required to protect users and enforce their terms and conditions or face sanctions - including fines of up to 10 per cent of their annual turnover or having their services blocked.

Progress, then, has begun. But as Chen et al (2018) note:

*‘Our research demonstrated quite strongly that journalism schools and media outlets must pay more attention to this issue because the women in our sample overwhelmingly wanted more training to handle harassment and for their news organizations to protect them from abuse. To answer their request, student journalists should be trained how to handle the online harassment that comes with the job.’ (p.891)*

This reinforced our belief that a resource aimed at journalism educators is badly needed.



# Findings

## What should journalism students be prepared for?

To establish what journalism students should be prepared for when they enter the industry, we asked the participants to explain the nature of the online abuse they had faced in their careers.

The abuse ranged from scathing criticism of their journalistic credibility to death and rape threats, where police action was taken. The participants widely agreed with the findings of the Behind Local News survey (2020) which show abuse against regional journalists has become ‘more commonplace’ and ‘particularly more vile’ [Int 9] in recent years. One editor had ‘lost count’ of the number of times she had been threatened, abused or trolled [Int 1]. She said: ‘When I started [in 2011] it was A) not as bad as it is now and B) not spoken about as much’. Several journalists mentioned a growing hostility against the mainstream media and in particular the BBC, which ‘filters down’ to local reporters who bear the brunt of the abuse [Int 9]. This echoes findings in the NUJ Safety Survey (2020) where 94% of respondents said the current polarisation of debate in the UK has impacted the safety of journalists. The participants stressed that the abuse was carried out by a ‘very vocal minority’ [Int 3] but feared today’s journalism students will be entering the industry at the ‘peak’ of the issue [Int 1]. Several respondents used a similar analogy to explain the intrusive nature of online abuse, highlighting that it would not be acceptable in any other profession:

*‘If somebody walked into a doctors’ receptionist and started saying that stuff to them, there’d be consequences, but for some reason because it’s online and because you’re in an industry which wades around in public opinion, somehow you’re just supposed to bite your tongue.’ [Int 4]*

The editors and journalists had received abuse across all types of stories, from court reports to light-hearted reviews, and across all social media platforms. They had differing experiences of the platforms on which they faced the most abuse. Some believed that Twitter was ‘negative and toxic’ [Int 12] and the ability to hide behind an anonymous account made it easier to troll journalists [Int 2]. Other respondents believed abuse was more commonplace on Facebook and one editor described the platform as a ‘misogynistic place’ [Int 3]. Most journalists agreed that Facebook Live video broadcasts pose the most worrying threat to trainee journalists. They said these broadcasts, which are filmed live to thousands of viewers, attracted the most ‘personal’ remarks [Int 6] and ‘disgusting’ abuse [Int 11]. One respondent was targeted with ‘nasty’ comments on her appearance while filming a broadcast at a crime scene, where she was expected to film to thousands of viewers with little information on the incident [Int 11]:

*‘Most of [the Facebook Lives] I’ve done have been completely riddled with abuse. Seeing [the abuse] on the screen is like going onto a stage and enacting a scene where you have to make the lines up as you go along, with thousands of people jeering at you and yelling insults.’*

The respondents echoed the literature (Demos 2014, OSCE 2016), stressing that while men and women journalists experience online abuse, it is women who face the most personal and targeted attacks. One male journalist believes abuse is ‘far worse’ for female reporters [Int 8] while editors agreed that trolls tend to target trainee female journalists who are ‘thrown in at the deep end’ [Int 3]. One editor explained:

*‘We do have abuse at our male journalists, but it is nowhere near the same level and it’s nowhere near the same personal level. So it might be insulting them as a professional, but it’s not doing things like going and finding their partner or posting old pictures.’ [ibid]*

Storm said the motivation for the abuse was around a need to ‘silence women’, with trolls using language about ‘doing things to their mouths that will shut them up’:

*‘Where I’ve seen the worst examples of this is around women journalists who are effectively putting their head above the parapet and they’re being shot down. And the motivation almost entirely seems to be this notion of silencing women because they’re stepping “out of line”’.*

Furthermore, the respondents echoed findings (Behind Local News 2020) that suggest racist abuse has worsened this year, particularly following coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement. One local reporter had cut down her use of Facebook due to racism on the platform following coverage of the movement [Int 5]. Another broadcaster said:

*‘It’s brutal. You feel an attack personally as well as professionally. You see how people engage and how people don’t see you as someone who is deserving of equal rights, or they don’t feel like your voice should be heard. It’s like you’re existing in a world that you don’t really fit into. When you’re black and then you happen to be a journalist, it’s like a double whammy.’ [Int 8]*

## Articles

While the participants stressed that personal attacks should never be tolerated, they highlighted that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between criticism, insults and abuse. One editor said comments were often on a ‘sliding scale’ and it was difficult to know where to ‘draw the line’ [Int 3]. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of negative comments, however minor, had a serious impact on almost all the journalists and editors we interviewed.

## The impact of abuse on working journalists

A recurring theme that emerged from the interviews was that journalists are expected to grow a ‘thick skin’ [Int 3] to cope with criticism and abuse. The three male journalists we interviewed said that, for the most part, they were able to ‘brush it off’ [Int 9] and had developed a ‘superiority complex’ [Int 10] to cope with insults against their journalistic credibility. However, the female participants had experienced more personal and severe abuse and this had a profound impact in both a personal and professional context. This reflects the findings of the literature review, which suggests that women journalists are more greatly impacted by online abuse and receive more personal attacks (Chen et al 2018, Sharman 2020a). It is perhaps interesting to note that whilst reference to the ‘thick skin’ traditionally associated with journalists was highlighted mainly by more senior journalists (Int 2, 3, 11, 12), all respondents were in agreement that abuse and harassment were not acceptable and should not be seen as part of the job.

*The online nature of abuse meant it was difficult for the journalists to escape it. One participant said it was like trolls ‘coming into your personal environment and abusing you’ [Int 2] which could cause real anxiety for reporters [Int 1]. This anxiety was heightened for local reporters, as one former newspaper journalist, who now works in television, described:*

*‘The problem with working at a local newspaper is that your name is on the story, so you become a target for those people to abuse you. I’ve had [abuse] so much. And I’m not sure that everybody has it as much as I have. I don’t know if it’s because I worked at a small paper, so I was writing the majority of the stories. I’ve gone into a role now where I’m actually very happy that I’m behind the scenes and I’m not as abused at the moment’. [Int 7]*

This relentless and intrusive abuse had a severe personal impact on some of the journalists we spoke to. Respondents reported suffering mental health problems which they directly attributed to the job, or they said the abuse had triggered existing depression or anxiety, echoing the findings of the Behind Local News survey (2020). One respondent said a ‘hidden aspect’ of abuse was the impact that it could have on journalists’ family and friends, which could be ‘very upsetting’ for them [Int 2]. One reporter said since she started a career in journalism, her anxiety ‘has gone up so much, it’s more noticeable’ [Int 5]. Another broadcaster said:

*‘Sometimes I come home and hug my husband and just cry, because it’s just difficult now. There are days where I am just broken and I can’t remove myself from it. There are days where you just see that everyone is against you, because you’re not in the right mind state at that time, because you’re downtrodden and you’ve been beaten up emotionally.’ [Int 8]*

Our findings reinforce others’ research (Gardiner 2018, Storm 2018) showing the level of abuse and the personal impact on journalists from ethnic minority backgrounds is particularly severe. One black reporter said reading racist comments on her title’s Facebook page was ‘triggering’ for her anxiety [Int 5] while another broadcaster said she feels the collective pain of abusive comments aimed at any minority community [Int 8]. This suggests the students and trainees most vulnerable to online abuse may need tailored, individual support - both during their training and in the newsroom. Storm echoed this, calling for more ‘diverse people and voices’ in newsrooms and organisations to ‘recognise those people who are more vulnerable’ to abuse.

On a professional level, the impact of online abuse on the participants was concerning. For some reporters, it caused them to suffer a level of imposter syndrome and doubt their ability - particularly at the beginning of their career. One BBC radio editor said her young team can feel ‘frustrated’ and ‘upset’ when a story they are proud of is ‘hijacked’ with anti-BBC abuse [Int 4]. She explained that attacks on their work could have more of an impact than personal abuse from trolls:

*‘In some ways, it probably affects them more than if somebody’s just making personal comments about whether they’re fat or ugly. Because you know you can write those off, you don’t need to reply to those... but they feel they need to get drawn into these discussions with people who challenge the quality of their journalism.’*

While all the respondents said they would not change the type of stories they wrote to avoid abuse, it did make some of them reluctant to promote their work on social media, reflecting previous research (Posetti

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2020). One broadcaster said she deliberately censored what she shared online to avoid abuse while another said she avoided social media after witnessing the abuse that other reporters with an active online presence had received. Editors were concerned about the ‘real repercussions and implications’ of abuse on young journalists in particular [Int 3]; they feared online abuse sends a ‘worrying message’ to young people who want to enter the industry [Storm]. One newspaper editor expressed concerns that the fear of facing abuse may prevent young women from applying for editorial roles [Int 3]:

*‘You don’t want to see young women shying away from those public-facing roles, or wanting to dream big, because they’re so worried about putting themselves out there. That surely can’t be good for debate and it certainly can’t be good for democracy, can it?’*

For one broadcaster [Int 12], the growing hostility and division on social media, and her experiences of online abuse, have had such an acute impact that she is leaving the industry altogether:

*‘People say “oh you need a thick skin” - well I definitely haven’t got a thick skin. The other thing people say...is that as a broadcaster, you put your head above the parapet, so it goes with the territory that you are going to receive abuse. I’m sorry but no, that is not ok in my book. There’s nowhere where it says as a broadcaster, it is ok for people to send you personal abuse.’*

## Actions by employers

Storm stressed that online abuse ‘has to be taken seriously’ by news organisations, ‘from the top right down to the interns’. The employers we interviewed were taking several steps to support their staff, both emotionally and practically, and the journalists felt supported by their editors and knew of the reporting processes in place. This may not be reflective of the national picture, as the NUJ Safety Survey (2020) found just 56% of respondents knew about policies in place to deal with safety issues. However, it was encouraging to see the measures being actioned by employers and it is important to make students aware of the help that is available to them. The employers interviewed had begun to roll out sessions on online abuse, which are delivered to new trainees during induction. One editor at Newsquest [Int 1] has prepared the training to use across the organisation. She said the sessions are clear that online abuse ‘shouldn’t be part of your job and it’s not acceptable’; however, they address the fact that trainees need to be prepared that it could happen to them. The difference between ‘fair comment and abuse’ is also explained during these sessions, in addition to what trainees should do if they are targeted with abuse. Another editor addresses abuse during the interview process to prepare potential employees, although she said it was ‘really sad’ that this was necessary [Int 2]. The employers we spoke to had a set of tiered actions to escalate reports of abuse, from blocking trolls to reporting abuse to the police and gathering support from internal security if serious threats were made.

The importance of having an open conversation about abuse was stressed by many of the respondents. Editors said they offered the opportunity to have a one-to-one conversation with journalists who experienced abuse, opening up a dialogue around it:

*‘It’s about coaching and helping to rebuild that confidence, because, quite understandably, some of the reporters will feel like they’ve had a bit of a knock. You shouldn’t have to say to somebody ‘grow a thick skin’ - that just doesn’t feel like the right thing to do.’ [Int 3]*

Three editors we interviewed had experienced abuse during their careers, which has perhaps shaped their proactive approach. One journalist said she had struggled in a previous role where editors had built up a ‘resilience’ to abuse and ‘don’t know how to deal with it’ [J7] and Storm highlighted the value of having editors who are ‘approachable’ and recognise the impact of abuse, in addition to representing a ‘diverse spectrum of identities’. One editor believed her staff felt able to confide in her because she was a woman and had experienced abuse herself:

*‘I appreciate that perhaps for my team, it’s a lot easier to come to a female editor to discuss it - because you’ve been there. You know exactly what it is like. Would they have that similar conversation with a male editor? Or would they feel like they’ve got that understanding? I’m not entirely sure, but because I’ve been there, I think they relate to that.’ [Int 3]*

In addition to offering support to staff, the editors were making changes on their titles’ social media pages. Editors were clear they had a zero-tolerance policy for blocking and banning the worst offending trolls, letting the ‘hatred stay with them’ [Int 1] - which they said made their journalists ‘feel a lot better’ [Int 2]. One newspaper had filtered around 200 words and phrases from their Facebook page, preventing many abusive comments from appearing in comment sections [Int 3]. Editors had written letters making it clear that abuse

would not be tolerated on their pages and had launched campaigns to invite other readers to help them call out abuse [Int 2, Int 3]. But the editors felt they were limited in what they could do and were lobbying social media platforms for support in ‘keeping their house in order’ [Int 3]. For example, one editor called for the ability to turn off Facebook comments on main page accounts to allow them to block comments on stories most susceptible to abuse. The four employers recognised that not enough had been done to support journalists with the issue in the past and were taking active steps to change that. One editor said:

*‘For so long, it feels like it’s been one of those things that’s been swept under the carpet. And it’s been “oh well, it’s just part of the day job”. Actually no, it’s not part of the day job, and nobody should have to put up with this.’ [Int 3]*

This reflects the thoughts of Storm who said in order to change the newsroom we need a diversity of voices who understand what it is like to face abuse:

*‘The only way we’re going to tackle this is by making sure that we have more diverse people and voices and stories and that we hear stories of communities that are less represented. In order to get that - we need women, we need people of colour, we need trans people, we need everybody to be part of this. But what we also need is news organisations to recognise those people who are more vulnerable’.*

## Recommended practical actions

While the respondents stressed that journalists should not have to put up with social media abuse, they urged students to be prepared. One editor said that although she makes it clear to her employees that abuse is not acceptable, ‘the genie is out the bottle’ [Int 4]. The interviewees felt it was important to prepare students before they enter the industry and some had found their own training helpful; however, others felt it failed to prepare them for the reality that was to come. One former newspaper reporter said:

*‘It definitely needs to be taught before you go into the profession, how to deal with [abuse], because I didn’t think that it was going to happen to me that much. I knew people hated journalists, but I didn’t think it was going to be as intense as it sometimes is’. [Int 7]*

It is vitally important, therefore, that students are equipped with the tools they need to cope with online abuse, making them aware of the abuse that journalists often face and how to reach out for support. The respondents offered both practical and emotional recommendations, which can provide the framework for a resource aimed at journalism educators.

On a practical level, several tips on using social media emerged from the interviews. Students were advised to keep work and personal accounts separate and to keep personal profiles ‘locked as tightly as they can’ [Int 10]. Having strict privacy settings on Twitter enabled one reporter to ‘filter comments from bots and trolls’ [Int 5], preventing her from seeing much of the abuse aimed at her or her title. Storm echoed this, urging students to ‘lockdown their personal stuff’ on Facebook to protect them from doxing, when trolls find and publish personal information without consent. Many of the respondents said it was important to switch off from work outside office hours and to avoid looking at work social media accounts. Yet they recognised this is ‘very difficult’ and something they struggled with implementing [Int 1]. One editor said that while journalists are told to switch off, it is not a solution to online abuse:

*‘You can tell people, maybe it’s best if you don’t use [social media] when you’re not at work, but...telling people not to do things that most other normal people can do freely without fear - that’s not great, that’s not a solution’. [Int 2]*

Storm echoed studies (Brems et al 2017, Wolfe 2019) which show there is an increasing pressure for journalists to develop a ‘private-public persona’ which can prevent them from switching off outside work. She explained that ‘toeing that line between managing that and protecting yourself is really difficult’ and called for more support from employers to recognise the true ramifications of expecting journalists to share personal information online. Storm also recommended the practice of ‘swarming’, where a group of people step in to positively amplify a journalist’s work, ‘shouting louder’ to ‘drown out the abuse’.

There was a mixed response when we asked if it was helpful for journalists to respond to negative comments. While the respondents said that journalists ‘have the right to respond if they want to’ [Storm], they advised against it in most circumstances. One newspaper reporter said he tended to respond if abuse was

emailed to him directly [Int 10]. Other journalists had responded to comments which called the accuracy of their work into question. One reporter said he addresses comments which may spread misinformation about his story, ‘more for the benefit of anyone who might be scrolling down the comments rather than that particular troll’ [Int 6]. Another editor responded to readers who were questioning the accuracy of the title’s coverage of coronavirus deaths, detailing where the figures were sourced which ‘tended to quell the debate’ [Int 3]. Another journalist said she had responded to serious abuse on ‘a few occasions’ but was unsure if she would recommend this to students [Int 7]. She mentioned a recent occasion when she had responded to abuse:

*‘I said, look, I’m somebody’s daughter, I’m someone’s girlfriend, I’m someone’s sister. How would you like it if someone spoke to your family members like that? And the guy actually apologised in the end. But I don’t really know what the solution is, because I think they like it when you respond. And if you respond, they just go back and forth.’*

For the most serious and relentless trolls, the respondents agreed the best solution was to delete the comments, block the perpetrator on Facebook or mute them on Twitter. Respondents advised against getting into a ‘slanging match’ [Int 6] or trying to win over trolls, as they said this could rile them up and make them angry. One broadcaster said:

*‘I took action this year [2020] and unfollowed a lot of people, I muted several people and I am not afraid to block people if they are persistently offensive. And that’s made a massive difference.’ [Int 12]*

Trainees were advised to talk about the abuse with colleagues and editors and to be confident in using the reporting processes available. Respondents generally felt they had a ‘good support system in place’ [Int 6] in their newsroom and were encouraged by editors to ‘escalate it immediately’ [Int 9] if they faced abuse. They urged young journalists to mention abuse in the morning meeting, ‘shining a light’ on their experiences and ‘taking the heat out of it by not making it a secret thing’ [Int 4]. As one editor commented: ‘Don’t think it has to be huge to tell somebody, you never know how much that has happened to other people.’ [Int 4]

## Recommended actions for emotional support

In addition to these practical measures, the respondents offered tips for students to help them to cope with the emotional impact of online abuse. They reiterated the need to switch off and have down-time after work and recommended that students establish hobbies that they enjoy. One journalist said exercise and spending time with family and friends helped her to ‘deal with the anxieties’ that come with the job, helping her to catch negative feelings before they spiralled out of control [Int 5]. Another broadcaster said she spent ‘weeks’ feeling awful at the height of the backlash to the Black Lives Matter movement, but made an intentional decision to focus on something else:

*‘You need to remove yourself, try and find something that you enjoy doing. I make jewellery and so that’s an outlet for me. So find something else that will take you out of that mindset.’ [Int 8]*

The respondents stressed the importance of speaking out about the abuse, not only to colleagues but also to family and friends. This helped journalists to ‘take a bit of the heat out’ of any abuse they experienced [Int 4]. Some respondents found developing a ‘superiority complex’ helpful [Int 10], belittling trolls in their heads to maintain confidence in their own ability. They recommended teaching students that any abuse they may experience is rarely about something they have said or written:

*‘Whenever people are trolling or abusing – they’re never actually thinking about you. They are just thinking about how they can have the sharpest, wittiest, shittiest thing to say, because it’s like a kind of sport. And so very rarely is it about anything that you have said or done – and any other journalist publishing the same thing would have got the same.’ [Int 4]*

A newspaper journalist, who had a level of ‘imposter syndrome’ when she started her career, urged trainees to stand strong in their ability:

*‘Just see past it and think, wow, what a miserable person and what a miserable life this person probably leads. I think it’s really important to not let it impact your capabilities, but also your knowledge of your capabilities, your self-efficacy, because you got this job for a reason. Don’t let a person who doesn’t have an absolute clue on the internet tell you otherwise.’ [Int 11]*

However, the respondents emphasised that despite an expectation for journalists to be ‘this really tough cookie’ [Int 7], ‘there will be times when you get really upset’ [Int 5]. They called for the normalisation of vulnerability among journalists and urged trainees to know they are not alone if they are affected by abuse. Two reporters had taken time off when suffering from mental health issues and they recommended that journalists take time away from social media if they are struggling. One reporter said:

*‘Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected and to be happy in the workplace. This job is no different and if it’s genuinely affecting your confidence and your mental health, you need to take a step back, maybe talk to employers and see if there’s a way you can avoid social media for a bit.’ [Int 8]*

Research suggests that ethnic and religious minorities and those from LGBT communities receive a disproportionate amount of abuse (Gardiner 2018, Amnesty International 2018b) and one black reporter stressed that it was particularly important for these students to be emotionally prepared. She said:

*‘There are not many black journalists around anyway, and I would say to them - if you’re going to go into journalism, just make sure you actually want to do this because it’s not going to be nice, especially when you have to write stories about race. I’ve always wanted to be a journalist and that’s helped me a lot during the times that I’ve wanted to quit, just to push me on a little bit.’ [Int 5]*

With this stark advice and the knowledge that journalists who are most impacted by abuse are those who are ‘already more vulnerable’ [Storm], we question whether enough targeted training and emotional support is being given to students most vulnerable to abuse - before they enter the industry. While our respondents were keen to highlight that journalism was a ‘fantastic career’ and wanted to avoid putting students off the industry altogether, they stressed that, unfortunately, practical and emotional preparation was vital. One editor, who now addresses abuse during the recruitment process, said:

*‘I think journalism is a fantastic job. I love it. And I never want to say something in an interview which might make that career sound less appealing. But in the last year, I felt it was important to raise it with people before they even start, to say unfortunately this is something that you can expect, tell them what we would do to support them, but also ask how they would feel about that. And it’s really, really sad and not something that I wanted to do. But how can you not?’ [Int 2]*

## Conclusion

Although it is unsettling that we have to prepare journalism students for a world of online abuse, our findings show it is necessary. The respondents felt that abuse was becoming more commonplace, more vile and more serious - which could have a profound effect on trainees’ emotional wellbeing and cause them to doubt their ability. We have identified the following recommendations for students from our own and wider research reviewed in this paper, which we hope can assist journalism educators in training on the issue:

- *Separate accounts:* Keep work and personal social media accounts separate ;
- *Security settings:* Lock personal accounts and use strict settings on work accounts to filter out trolls;
- *Switch off outside office hours:* Avoid reading comments or looking at work social media accounts outside work;
- *Practise ‘swarming’:* Positively amplify the work of your colleagues who may be facing abuse;
- *Know you have the right to respond:* If the accuracy of your story is being called into question and you choose to respond, remain factual – but don’t expect to have the last word, as you can never win a ‘Twitter spat’;
- *Differentiate between attacks and criticism:* Identify those criticising your work on journalistic grounds and those making personal attacks;
- *For the latter - block, ignore and mute:* Use these tools liberally;
- *Document any threats or abuse:* Make a note of the number of threats and the details (including screenshots);
- *Report abuse to management:* Use the processes in place to report abuse and threats - editors should support you in approaching the police if necessary;
- *Ask your editors for guidance:* They can help you to distinguish between abuse, genuine criticism and a criminal offence;



- *Speak about the impact of abuse with colleagues:* ‘Take the heat off’ the abuse by raising it in the morning meeting;
- *Build a support network and confide in family and friends:* Share your feelings with people who will allow you to be upset;
- *Do things you enjoy outside work:* Find something that takes your mind out of the work environment;
- *Remember abuse is never about your ability:* It is rarely about something you have said or written;
- *Take time away from social media if your mental health is suffering:* Ask your editors to support you with this;
- *Know abuse is never acceptable and not part of the job:* You should not just have to put up with it;
- *It is okay to be upset:* Even the most experienced journalists and editors can be affected.

Although we hope this training will equip students with the tools they need to cope with abuse, our findings highlight that perhaps there is still too much responsibility placed on victims of abuse to learn to just deal with it. Our research confirms others’ conclusions that further action is needed across news organisations, social media platforms and governments to change the culture of online abuse (Posetti 2020, Chen et al 2020, Ferrier 2018, Amnesty International 2018b). While it is encouraging to see editors taking proactive steps to support their staff, we do question whether further steps could be taken to support trainees. Should young journalists be sent out to record Facebook live broadcasts, with little information, knowing the torrent of abuse they often receive? Is there too much pressure on journalists to develop a personal brand, sharing information that may make them vulnerable to abuse? Finally, we question whether people from diverse backgrounds are receiving enough targeted support when research shows they are most at risk of online abuse?

While our research paints a stark picture of the current climate of online abuse against journalists, respondents urged students not to be deterred from the industry and Storm echoed this in what may be seen as something of a rallying cry to our students:

*‘Go into journalism with your eyes open. Just as if you were going to a warzone and wearing a physical flak jacket, I would say there needs to be more work done to understand the emotional flak jacket you need to steel yourself for this. It’s not always pretty. You may incur some difficulties. You may incur some attacks, you may incur some abuse. But it’s not your fault as a journalist. As long as you toe the kind of ethical principled line of journalism and you don’t do anything unethical and egregious, then it’s somebody else’s choice to hurt you. And that’s not right. It may not feel great to hear this, but chances are that you’re not alone in this. And actually it’s almost in a way proving the point that we need your voice, if somebody is out there to try to take you down because they’re intimidated by you.’*

Opening up conversation during journalism training is therefore vital to prepare students for what they might face. But we do hope that one day, this training will not be necessary at all.

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Appendix

List of interviewees with in-text reference

Name	Title	Reference
Hannah Storm	Ethical Journalism Network director & CEO	Named
Samantha Harman	<i>Oxford Mail</i> group editor (Newsquest)	Int 1
Jenna Thompson	Hull Live digital editor (Reach plc)	Int 2
Laura Collins	<i>Yorkshire Evening Post</i> editor (JPI Media)	Int 3
Jess Rudkin	BBC Radio Bristol editor	Int 4
Melissa Dzinzi	Reporter at Leeds Live	Int 5
Conor Gogarty	Chief reporter at Bristol Post/Bristol Live	Int 6
Katie Ridley	Journalist at ITV Anglia and formerly <i>Huntingdon Post</i>	Int 7
Anonymous	Female broadcast journalist	Int 8
Kristian Johnson	Investigative reporter at Leeds Live	Int 9
Anonymous	Male reporter at a daily newspaper	Int 10
Susie Beever	Senior reporter at <i>The Yorkshire Post</i>	Int 11
Emma Britton	BBC Radio Bristol breakfast presenter	Int 12

# Comment & Criticism

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## Making one or two more calls: teaching journalism students the *value* of news

Tony Harcup, University of Sheffield

### Abstract

With journalism in a perpetual state of flux, journalism educators are understandably concerned with teaching students about new and emerging technologies, plat-

forms, investigative tools and storytelling techniques. However, while accepting the importance of updating and renewing the curriculum in this way, we ought not lose focus on fundamentals such as the social value of news and of ethical journalism conducted for the public good. This article argues that news is vital for a society's citizens and that we should not feel embarrassed about emphasising this fact to our students. It will also argue that journalists, journalism educators and indeed journalism students have not always been sufficiently questioning about how news is selected, sourced and produced, nor about the concept of "news values". To explore these issues, the article draws on research conducted for the monograph *What's the Point of News? A study in Ethical Journalism* (Harcup, 2020) and considers how different stories and voices can be included in the news, including more perspectives from below. The article emphasises the importance of allowing journalism students to question industry norms as well as encouraging them to challenge us as journalism educators.

## Introduction

**Journalism education stalwart David Holmes had an innovative way of teaching students the value of asking questions: he would appear before them wearing an upturned saucepan on his head.**

"I used the saucepan stunt at the start of the very first lecture with the postgrads each year," recalls David, who worked alongside me at the University of Sheffield. "I used to pop up from behind the lectern and then stand there in silence until one of the students asked me why I was standing there with a saucepan on my head. It was usually well over a minute before one of them plucked up the curiosity and courage to ask why I was doing it." Those were postgraduate students, remember. Probably just as well. Had David tried that trick with timid first-year undergraduates, he might still have been awaiting a question by the end of the session.

Asking questions is central to being a journalist – and to being a journalism student – and is therefore a fundamental part of the many and varied courses taught by members of the AJE. But do our students always ask enough questions about what we seek to teach them? Someone who thinks that students ought to challenge us more is former AJE chair Professor Chris Frost, who recalls another classroom stunt: "I used to have a slide in a lecture about asking questions that said, 'You need to know the simelons of every fedangle an interviewee says'. I was only ever challenged to explain it once - very depressing. I eventually had to ask

who knew what it meant, and I hope my pointing it out to them at least started them on the road to questioning everything."

## Challenge as integral to practical teaching

Questioning, that is, not just what they are told by sources, fed by spin doctors or pick up on social media. Students would do better if they also questioned more of what we say to them, more often than they do, rather than taking it at face value. Of course, we are employed for our knowledge and experience, and I certainly don't wish to suggest that students ought to apply a kneejerk rejection of everything we try to teach them. But they might more frequently greet our nuggets of wisdom with the occasional pointed, "Why?" or even a deep and meaningful, "Really?"

During the widespread Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, some journalism students in Sheffield (and, I suspect, beyond) seized the moment to ask some sharp questions about issues such as the relatively low proportion of black staff and guest speakers. This was a very welcome example of challenge, and it complemented efforts within the journalism education sector towards what has become known as "decolonising the curriculum" (as at De Montfort and Birmingham City universities, to give just two examples). These are clearly positive developments, but it would be a shame if the asking of awkward questions is seen as of relevance only to students of colour and the preserve of the guest lecture or the more academic seminar.

Challenge ought to be integral to our everyday practical teaching. When it comes to definitions of what counts as news, for example, do we really want journalism students simply to absorb and reproduce the norms of "the industry" – itself something of a problematic phrase – without questioning prevailing news values? Or to accept industry sourcing routines as the best – or only – ways of finding news stories?

Since entering journalism education (Harcup, 2012) I have spent more than two decades engaging with academic explanations of how to define newsworthiness, much of it in collaboration with Deirdre O'Neill (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; 2017; O'Neill and Harcup, 2020), but when it comes to explaining exactly why a particular item is news, there remains an unmistakable element of "because it just is!" about the process (Brighton and Foy, 2007: 147). Having said that, by standing back we can observe patterns and tendencies, meaning that taxonomies of news values will remain a useful way of exploring what does – and what does not – become news. That's why, in many university journalism departments, you are never more than 10 metres away from a lecture slide showing a list of such news values. But how often do our students challenge these, rather than simply copy them down? And how often do we encourage critique of such values during practical sessions on news reporting?

News matters to society and we should never be embarrassed about emphasising to students the vital role news plays for all of us as citizens. It is precisely because it matters so much that we should also encourage future generations of journalists to ask questions about what tends to be regarded as newsworthy and who tend to be the usual suspects appearing as news sources. Such questions are asked and discussed on many of our courses, but perhaps not frequently enough and certainly not always in a way that incorporates the challenge of asking, "Why?" into practical teaching sessions such as newswriting workshops and newsdays. As Sally Reardon (2016: 946) found in her study of the ways in which HE sells journalism courses to prospective students, there tends to be a "down-playing of critical engagement" whereas "the practice of journalism itself becomes constructed as immutable". Which raises the question, what value is journalism without critical engagement?

## Looking at news from the bottom up

Critical engagement is expected on most of our courses, whatever the slick promotional websites and brochures may say, but do we integrate it into our skills-based sessions as much as we could? That is one of the thoughts that has occurred to me from time to time while teaching journalism students about what we call news values. Another thought has been, where and what are the actual values involved in much of what we call news? Such questioning, which resulted in a research monograph (Harcup, 2020), [reviewed in this issue of *Journalism Education*] has been informed by engagement with the ever-growing literature on journalistic ethics generally and more specifically with the work of feminist scholars such as Linda Steiner

(2018; 2020), Gaye Tuchman (1978) and Meenakshi Gigi Durham (1998; 2015).

Steiner and Durham in particular have written about an approach that has been labelled “feminist standpoint epistemology”, which is a fancy way of saying that we might see things differently if we try to look at something from the point of view of those at the bottom of a power structure than from those at the top. That seems a useful idea to keep in mind when we think about journalism, including our practical teaching about news. If our starting point is that news matters to us as citizens, it is worth asking if we might be able to do it better by more routinely seeking out and listening to the standpoints of those in less privileged positions.

Consider an institution that will be familiar to most readers of this journal: the university. Anybody commissioned to write a story about the workings of a university would not be doing it very well if they spoke only to the Vice Chancellor or to a bunch of professors. Academic staff lower down the food chain might have quite different experiences, so surely it would be worth asking for their views too. But even that would be doing less than half the job, because a university relies on a vast range of administrative, professional services and technical staff who could all tell you a thing or two from very different perspectives. Would that be enough? “No,” we would chorus if presented with such copy, “what about the students?” Any account of the life of a university that excluded the point of view of those regarded by some as “customers” (argh!) would clearly be missing a crucial part of the story; and while we are at it, we might acknowledge that students’ experiences will not all be the same. But even hearing from a range of students and staff might still leave some issues unaddressed. Might we not learn something deeper about how higher education institutions operate today if we sought out the stories of those who see things from the bottom up? The low paid, precariously employed cleaners or security staff, for example; what’s their analysis of what’s really going on?

If that all sounds like an awful lot of work, then it does not necessarily have to be. Take Andrew Cline’s (2011) study of news coverage in one US city, for example, which showed how news media tend to ignore the perspectives of poorer people even when the subject matter of news stories – such as jobs, investment, prices and fares – impacts directly on local working-class communities. Cline points out that sometimes it can be relatively straightforward and not massively time-consuming to consult a small number of extra sources. “What I am suggesting here is rather simple,” he writes: “Reporters and editors should look for opportunities to add actionable information for the poor and working class to regular news coverage,” for example by making “one or two more phone calls to sources that can speak to the interests of the poor in a given news situation” (Cline, 2011: 8).

What’s good for economics stories – or stories about higher education – can also be applied to a wide range of news reporting. Not to every story, every time, but more often than it tends to be. That means, for example, not always treating council meetings and agenda papers as potential tales about party politics or processes, as stories in themselves, but as a starting point for stories about the people on the receiving end of such policies. Covering a housing committee? Find out what people living on the relevant housing estate have to say about things. Writing about homelessness? Find out what homeless people are saying, as well as those who work alongside them. This is basic reporting that is produced by some of our students some of the time. But it does not always happen, either in student newsrooms or industry ones. Shouldn’t we be showing our impressionable students that we – and they – should expect better?

## Journalism is not about amplifying misinformation

By advocating taking the time to make one or two more calls to those at the bottom looking up, I am certainly not arguing that whatever such people say should then automatically be reported as news. Journalism is not about amplifying misinformation just because it might come from a member of an oppressed or marginalised section of the population; normal standards of questioning and seeking verification must still apply. It’s just that, by seeking out such voices, journalists have a better chance of gaining a more nuanced view of events, of hearing different stories, of asking “more questions, new questions”, as Steiner and Okrusch (2006: 114) put it.

Asking more and better questions might lead to more and better answers, some of which may, in turn, help reveal significant social trends and issues. For example, some of the best reporting on the Covid-19 pandemic has managed to expose structural inequalities within society at the same time as telling compelling human interest stories. Similarly, it is now more common to see extreme weather events reported within the context of the planet’s climate emergency rather than as isolated local incidents. Is there scope for other issues to be tackled like this? How many instances of gendered violence by men against women can we cover as entirely

isolated incidents before occasionally wondering if there might be a bigger story and “acknowledge sexual violence against women to be a worldwide epidemic”, as Durham (2015: 185) puts it? Or a pandemic, even? Again, not every story, not every time, not at the expense of getting the specific details of the latest incident, and always taking care to remember that correlation is not the same as causation. But wouldn’t it be good to see the news, sometimes at least, reported in a more holistic way with a bit of context, nuance and analysis?

Part of the value of news is that it can be variously entertaining and shocking as it tells us something we didn’t know about our fellow people, and long may it continue to be so. News can be funny as well as serious, uplifting as well as gloomy, and there is much of value in that. But that’s not all there is to it, for those of us who believe that news plays a vital role in informing us as citizens. If journalism students don’t learn about this social value of news while they are learning the basics, can we assume they will necessarily pick it up when they enter the workplace?

To help journalism students – and perhaps the rest of us too – understand the value of news more deeply, we could usefully incorporate a more questioning approach to the stories they work on during newssdays as well as those they may discuss in seminars. For a start, we might ask the following questions, and encourage our students to do the same while working on stories.

## Twenty questions that are always worth asking

What’s the point of this story?

Why this angle?

What might we be missing?

What assumptions have we made?

Who is directly affected by this event or situation?

What do those most directly affected have to say about it?

Who might be indirectly affected?

Who has the least power here and what are their experiences, their analyses?

Who has the most power, and what might they be up to?

How does this story relate to long-term trends?

What structural forces are involved that might not be immediately apparent?

Where are the women in this story?

The working class people?

The black people?

People with disabilities?

What about younger or older people or others whose perspectives might be missing?

Have we stereotyped anyone?

Can we show anyone doing something positive in this situation?

Have we checked exactly what is meant by simelons, fedangles or anything else that we might not be sure about?

And, should I make one or two more calls?

If questions along the lines of some of those suggested above were to be asked during the newsgathering process – more often than they are – then news could be made even more valuable than it already is. Some might say that such a questioning approach is unrealistic, that nothing would ever get done if we all sat around contemplating our navels, and that in any case there is no point because journalists would have neither the time nor space to operate like this in a “real” newsroom. Yet, if we don’t require the best, most ethical forms of practice from students on our courses, when exactly are they going to get the message? Cutting corners to reflect the “real world” ought not be our default position. In any event, even in the real world, not all news is of the instant variety. Some stories and packages are worked on over longer periods of time, and these in particular offer scope for making more calls and bringing in a wider range of perspectives.

Even with breaking news on newssdays, we might sometimes remember that we have the luxury of being able to pause proceedings to ask some of the above questions. Yes, we want our students to work on real



journalism in real time under real pressures akin to those found in real newsrooms – but we know that it's not *real* real. We have the power to halt a workshop session or newsworld occasionally, to challenge the students on the value or depth of a story's content – not just its presentation – and encourage them to challenge us too. Hopefully, they will take some of this approach with them wherever they go on to work in the future, incorporating it into their practice alongside a knowledge of the law and ethics (including, but not restricted to, issues covered by industry codes).

## Calls can be made in more ways than one

There is scope for the journalism education curriculum to be both broadened and deepened, for efforts at decolonising the curriculum to encompass practice as well as theory, and for us to encourage journalism students to make one or two more calls. That includes seeking out and listening to those whose voices may not be very loud but who may be at the sharp end of policies or issues. Such calls can be made in more ways than one. For those of a certain generation that might mean reaching for a bulging contacts book and making an actual phone call, or even visiting a location and knocking on doors, all of which remain valid methods. But other calls are available, as demonstrated by Yorkshire Post reporter Susie Beever, who explains:

*We got sent a story on the PA wire a few weeks ago about the rising cost of rent, and the cities in the UK that have the biggest rises in rent, and two of them were Leeds and York, perfect for the Yorkshire Post, so we did that. All the quotes in that PA story were from corporations, businesses, ministers, and I just thought – this is affecting human beings, all the people quoted are not actually affected by this, so I did a bit of digging around just on Facebook and found a single mum with two children who was basically having to take money from her kids' food budget every week to meet the rent, which is just horribly unfair, and I thought that was more evocative than a quote from the Chamber of Commerce. (Quoted in Harcup, 2021.)*

Making an extra call might therefore include putting a call-out on Facebook, whereby, with a bit of luck and without delaying matters too long, a policy story can become a human interest story that has the perspective of somebody directly involved, at the target end of the policy in question. That's just good journalism, isn't it? Encouraging our students to make one or two more calls to people at the bottom of the pile - plus maybe a wider range of experts - can produce better stories at the same time as reinforcing the idea that news has value to society.

And it all starts with curiosity and having a questioning approach. Speaking of which, how is David Holmes getting on with that saucepan on his head? "Over the years, I developed it into a bit of discussion that didn't end until one of the students asked what I was going to do to remove it," he recalls. "I'd tell them that my attempts to ease it off had failed, and that the fire service wanted to use specialist cutting equipment to remove it. The students' ordeal didn't end until one of them had done the reporter's job and asked if they could go along with me to record the process."

Asking questions remains at the heart of journalism, and if news is as valuable to society as many of us think it is, then it is worth going out of our comfort zones to ask some awkward ones. If in doubt, make that call and ask that question.

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# Podcasting as a multifaceted teaching and learning tool: enhancing students' employability skills via production and content

Lily Canter and Emma Wilkinson, Sheffield Hallam University

## Introduction

**This essay describes a project designed to provide a work experience opportunity for undergraduate and postgraduate journalism students while creating a learning resource on freelancing.**

In the UK the 2018 Office for National Statistics Trends in Self Employment survey showed that 35% of journalists were self-employed, more than double the 15% rate seen across all sectors (ONS, 2018). A report on freelance journalism from the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) in 2016 found that between 2000 and 2015, the numbers of freelance journalists increased from 15,000 to 25,000 – a 67% rise (Spilsbury, 2016). The report also found that it is more common for journalists to be pulled into self-employment for aspirational reasons rather than to be pushed into turning freelance. Data from the Journalists at Work surveys carried out periodically by the NCTJ found that since 2002 the proportion of journalists whose first job was a freelancer, has roughly doubled from a starting point of 5% (Spilsbury, 2013). This has likely increased since this time and will have been heightened by pandemic.

In 2018 we researched the teaching of freelance skills within UK university journalism degrees, which we presented at the World Journalism Education Congress in 2019 and the Association for Journalism Education conference in 2018. We found that while more journalists – through necessity or choice – are working as freelances, there is little training within Further or Higher Education journalism courses on freelancing. Our survey of undergraduate and postgraduate journalism students in the UK who graduated in the past five years, found that two thirds had received no training on freelancing, and 90% wanted to be taught more about freelance work as part of their studies.

As we completed our book *Freelancing for Journalists* (Canter and Wilkinson, 2020) our thoughts turned to what resources we could create to provide information and guidance on freelancing that could be easily incorporated into existing modules on our undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Our plan was for a learning tool that would engage students in the topic while at the same time providing work experience opportunities.

## Project proposal

Our proposal was to produce a unique podcast series on freelancing in collaboration with postgraduate and undergraduate journalism students. It was envisaged as a cross between BBC Radio 4 The Media Show and popular millennial podcast Wanna Be. We applied for a Teaching Enhancement Grant with the aim that the podcast would be planned, produced and edited by a team of 25 students on a rota basis with supervision

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from Broadcast Journalism Lecturer Richard Wilson. It was proposed that each student would gain 10 hours work experience from the project.

As part of the grant application, we planned for six episodes to be presented by ourselves as experienced freelance journalists. Each episode had a different theme with two guests invited to provide their expertise and discuss their experience. It was important to us and a key part of our application that the guests were from diverse backgrounds and that we could pay them for their time.

Once completed, our goal was to make the series available via Blackboard to students on core BA Journalism Level 6 module Digital Journalism and core MA Multimedia Journalism, MA Sports Journalism and MA International Journalism Level 7 module Online Journalism. In addition, each episode would also be released on a podcasting platform to the public and promoted via social media in order to raise the profile of the university and its journalism courses. Editorial control would remain with Lily Canter and Richard Wilson ensuring no legal or reputational risks.

There were three key objectives:

To engage Level 5, 6 and 7 students in an outward facing activity with a potentially global audience to enhance their employability skills, gain work experience and enable them to network with industry professionals on a one-to-one basis;

To create a permanent online learning resource for students on core employability-focused Level 6 and Level 7 modules and respond to the recommendation in the BA Journalism revalidation to include more freelance journalism content in the curriculum;

To showcase BA and MA journalism courses at Sheffield Hallam University and the expertise of its staff.

## Getting started

We were successful in our grant application and were awarded £700 for the project. In order to share the podcast outside the university, we found a local podcast platform called Captivate.fm and it was agreed that the Media Arts and Communications department would buy an institutional package. This meant the platform could also be used by students producing podcasts for the Level 5 Podcasting and Radio Documentaries module as well as other staff members.

We recruited interested students from Level 5 with a smaller number from Level 6 and Level 7 postgraduate courses. After interviews to further explain the goals of the project and ascertain willingness to participate, we selected 10 students to take part. Roles were allocated based on the student's interest and skills. These included: guest liaison manager, desk driver, programme editor, studio producer, music researcher, art designer, website designer, and social media manager.

Recording of the podcast was to be done in the department radio studio. It was decided that staff would find and book the guests and to ensure we were able to pay them within our budget we looked for freelance journalists living in, or fairly near to, Sheffield where travel expenses would be minimal. We also wanted to highlight to our students those working in journalism careers outside London.

The planned episode topics were: Where is the freelance work; pitching and providing the goods; contacts and networking; finances and getting paid; law, rights and ethics; and branding and supplementary income streams.

## Recording the podcast

We began by recording a pilot episode with two lecturers within the department who both had extensive freelance experience. This enabled the students to gain experience of their roles as well as allowing us to iron out any technical problems and try out the episode format we had developed prior to inviting external guests to take part.

Episodes were recorded in one take with music added on the beginning and end in post production. Once the project was underway some students were able to take on greater responsibility in their allocated roles. On one occasion when recording an episode, a student had to be directed over the phone on how to patch in a phone call to the radio studio for a guest being interviewed remotely. It proved to be excellent on the job

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training. Another took sole responsibility for researching and creating the show notes.

We recorded five episodes and the pilot before the coronavirus pandemic hit in March 2019. One guest had to cancel because they had symptoms of Covid-19 and were isolating. Our final recording in the radio studio was managed by one student who had made it in the week before lockdown. Our final episode was recorded on Zoom.

Overall students were involved in researching the music, liaising with guests, taking photographs, producing show notes, writing episode descriptions and driving the desk during the recording of episodes. Due to lockdown staff had to take on some of the roles originally planned for students such as promotion and website management. We also recorded three bonus coronavirus episodes in reaction to the rapidly changing situation. These were released prior to the full series. We also decided to substitute the law, rights and ethics episode with our pilot episode recorded with staff members, due to the pandemic shutting down the radio studio suddenly and our first Zoom recording having technical difficulties. However, once we mastered Zoom we were able to proceed with further series of the podcast online.

## Student benefits

The impact on student participants was multifaceted as they received active, passive and tangible benefits. By taking part in the different aspects of producing a podcast series they received hands-on work experience. This involved working in pre-production sourcing music, liaising with guests and taking photos as well as live production work such as driving the studio desk and managing a phone in. There were also post production tasks such as writing show notes and producing episode descriptors.

During one recording Richard Wilson, the staff member responsible for producing the show, was unable to attend due to coronavirus-related issues. Since one of the guests had travelled to Sheffield specifically to record the show we had to continue with the recording. Second year BA Journalism student Ben Dodd stepped in and took control of the recording, driving the desk in the radio studio and co-ordinating a phone in.

Giving feedback on the hands-on experience Ben reflected on how he enjoyed rising to the challenge.

*I really enjoyed it, and found it really useful. Especially the day where Richard (staff member) wasn't there and I had to figure out the phone in software, it was great experience and I enjoyed learning on the job. (Ben Dodd, personal communication, February 2 2021)*

For third-year BA Journalism student Kendra Nix simply being in the radio studio and observing the operations was a valuable experience.

*I didn't really have previous experience with podcasting so it was interesting to be behind the scenes and see the ins and outs of how things worked. Lily and Emma bounced off each other so well and were very engaging and made the podcasts and behind the scenes fun. Working with Richard on the sound board was also really interesting as it correlated back to the radio module I was taking at the time. (Kendra Nix, personal communication, February 8 2021)*

By taking part in the production of a real-world artefact, students were able to have something tangible to list on their CV. One student contacted Emma Wilkinson directly to ask how to reference the work experience on their CV. We were able to list the names of all of the students in the show notes of each relevant podcast episode which they could then hyperlink to in their CV.

We also used Twitter to promote the involvement of students including their usernames so they had further evidence of their involvement in the project.

In their feedback both Ben Dodd and Kendra Nix confirmed that they linked to the podcast in their CVs, with Ben remarking: "I definitely do use it on my CV, it's useful to be linked to a property that's known by a lot of people in the industry and has had a lot of journalists on as guests."

Although the active hands-on experience was limited to a small number of students the resultant podcast series enabled a much larger body of students within Sheffield Hallam University and beyond, to passively learn about freelance journalism.

The episodes were embedded onto core Level 6 and 7 modules on Blackboard and also made widely available via podcasting directories including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts. The global reach of the podcast is demonstrated in the metrics which show it has been listened to in 93 countries and received more than 12,500 downloads. The second biggest audience outside the UK is India, followed by the USA.

## Personal and pedagogical lessons

As well as equipping students with podcasting work experience and advice on freelancing we also learnt many personal and pedagogical lessons from this project. Initially the most fundamental lesson was that we learnt how to launch, develop, promote and maintain a popular podcast series and the ingredients required in order to do this.

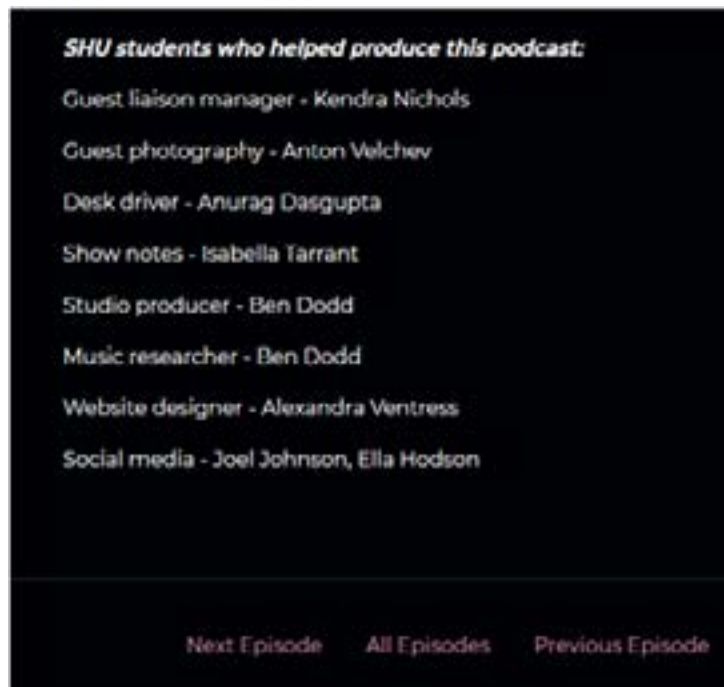
Without any prior knowledge in broadcast journalism, we were able to learn everything via our own first-hand experience from scriptwriting to recording to editing. But perhaps more importantly we learnt a huge amount about podcast branding, marketing and monetisation. The podcast is now in its fifth series having continued beyond the initial grant-funded project which created series 1. We managed to secure a sponsor for series 3, 4 and 5 of the podcast enabling us to produce the podcast outside of university hours (we are both part-time) and to continue paying our freelance guests. We also work in collaboration with the European Journalism Assembly, JournoResources and PressPad.

Due to the pandemic we switched to online recording from series 2 and we intend to continue this indefinitely. This has widened the diversity of our podcast guests and we have been able to record with freelance journalists not just from all across the UK but also from America, New Zealand and Germany.

This experience has been invaluable in informing our own teaching practice particularly during the pandemic. We are now equipped with the skills and knowledge to teach podcasting online using tools such as Zencast, Cleanfeed and Zoom, and Lily Canter has also modified her podcasting module at Sheffield Hallam University to incorporate a business plan so students have entrepreneurial skills beyond just recording and editing. Emphasis is placed on branding and marketing to reflect the podcasting industry which is populated with hundreds of thousands of independent self-starters. This also complements our work on integrating more freelancing and entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum of which income generation is hugely significant.

The skills we have gained are also transferrable to other practical and academic modules and we have been approached by colleagues in journalism and media to develop further podcasting modules or to support the integration of podcasting as an assessment method. We are beginning a skills exchange to encourage lecturers to create podcast series around research topics and we are also supporting students who wish to set up their own podcast series outside of our dedicated BA Journalism/ BA Sports Journalism podcasting module.

The biggest lesson we have both learnt through this whole process is how impactful branding can lead a project to take on a life of its own. Initially we set out to produce six podcast episodes largely as a learning resource. At the time of writing, we have released 25 episodes including two dualcast collaborations and are planning a further 18 episodes planned for 2021. Freelancing for Journalists is now a widely recognised





brand and is considered to be the leading provider of educational resources on freelance journalism in the UK. This all occurred extremely rapidly and completely accidentally.

By commissioning a graphic designer to create the artwork for our podcast series we inadvertently created a brand. Within two months of the release of the podcast in March 2020 we were asked to run a four-week freelance training course for journalism.co.uk. We also received widespread coverage in the trade press and were invited to give numerous talks at universities. It was at this point that we realised we were no longer Lily Canter and Emma Wilkinson, freelance journalists and lecturers, but we were a brand. Together we were Freelancing for Journalists. Upon this realisation we decided to act quickly and start our own webinar training programme, remote work experience initiative and newsletter. Around the same time the Facebook group we had set up in March to promote the podcast was taking off and becoming a hub of conversation and advice sharing for freelance journalists in the UK and globally. To date the Facebook community has more than 3,200 members, with 420 posts a month on average.

What started as a pilot podcast project within the university has turned into an external small business which currently generates around 25% of our freelance income and continues to grow. We have hired a part-time research assistant and finally feel we are in a position to provide valuable, practical and up-to-date advice and support on freelancing which has been missing from much of journalism training and education. Through this process we have learnt about digital marketing, online event management, business partnerships, collaboration and sponsorship which will inform our teaching going forward.

## Reflections

As our graduates enter an extremely volatile job market it has never been more important to imbue them with entrepreneurial skills and the ability to create a sustainable and autonomous portfolio career. This could be through a range of skills such as podcasting, newsletter writing, freelance writing, freelance producing and/or copywriting.

There is a demand from students for podcasting skills and we have seen a surge in graduates launching excellent journalism podcasts such as JobsBored, Northern Natter and Views Our Own. As our world has shifted almost entirely online we need to recognise the need to teach podcasting outside of radio studios and equip students with online recording and editing skills. Alongside this there is a need to approach work experience in innovative ways and enable remote opportunities such as shadowing freelance journalists rather than the traditional approach of being a 'workie' in a newsroom.

Whether it is through freelance knowledge, podcasting skills or other entrepreneurial teaching we need to ensure that we equip our students with the tools, confidence and belief that career opportunities are limitless.

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# Reviews

The reviews pages are edited by Tor Clark. If you have a book you would like to review or have come across a new book we should know about please get in touch. Also if you have recently had a book published and would like to see it reviewed, please contact Tor on [tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk)

**Welcome to this bumper Journalism Education reviews section, with nine fascinating accounts of recent books which will be of interest to Journalism educators and their students. This month's selection is eclectic, but hopefully useful as Journalism lecturers start to turn their attention to what will be on their next sets of reading lists.**

We begin with Kerri Watts' review of *Freelancing for Journalists* by Lily Canter and Emma Wilkinson from Sheffield Hallam University, a book which is bound to be useful to students studying journalism and even more so to those who want to cut their teeth on their own merits as freelancers at a time when being an employee becomes less important in the world of commercial journalism.

Journalism Education's editor Chris Frost's latest book *Privacy and the News Media* is seen as incredibly valuable by its reviewer and AJE secretary, David Baines of Newcastle University. Professor Frost, of Liverpool John Moores University, is an authority on the ethics and regulation of journalism so his decision to delve deeply into privacy and set it in an international context is welcomed by Dr Baines.

Former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger has more recently been writing and lecturing from his new Oxford pulpit and his latest offering, *News and How to Use It* is considered insightful by regular reviewer Michael Foley of Dublin Technical University.

Also focusing on news, but questioning its value is Tony Harcup of Sheffield University. Harcup's interesting take on news and its relationship to ethics in the 21st century, the product of decades of journalism and research into this area, is welcomed and recommended by reviewer Chris Frost.

In a similar vein, Frost enjoys *The Roots of Fake News* by father and son academics Brian Winston of Lincoln University and Matthew Winston of the University of Leicester. The Winstons investigate the legitimacy of the oft-trumpeted search for truth and question whether journalism has any right to associate itself with objectivity. Frost notes the claim to objectivity may in itself have resulted in a wholesale damaging of trust in the supply of public information by legitimising dubious sources.

In the final of his trio of reviews for this edition, Chris Frost recommends *Murder in Our Midst Comparing Crime Coverage Ethics in an Age of Globalized News* by Romaine Smith Fullerton and Maggie Jones Patterson, which in taking a global view of crime coverage ethics comes to interesting and original conclusions, worthy of further study.

The BBC, home of one of the largest and most respected journalistic networks in the world, comes in for much scrutiny and not a little criticism. Broadcast journalist-turned-journalism educator and prolific editor John Mair has produced three books about the BBC in the last year alone, so is a good judge of another text on the Corporation. He finds much to commend *The War Against the BBC* by Patrick Barwise and Peter York. Barwise, a professor at the London Business School and York, the cultural commentator and president of the Media Society, have turned out a fascinating look at the BBC, which Mair recommends, though feeling York is a little more sympathetic than he need be.

The political and media events we are now experiencing were set in train in what seemed at the time and has been proved to be an auspicious year – 2016. The events of that year and crucially their impact on journalism are examined by a fine array of chapter-contributing journalists and academics in *Brexit, Trump and the Media*, edited by John Mair et al, the first of a trilogy of edited collections offering scores of chapters from the informed, which Sara McConnell of Sheffield University enjoys revisiting. She finds much to inform the student of journalism or politics within its covers.

Finally, recent years have brought us the UK's most recent journalist-turned-Prime Minister in Boris Johnson. Indeed, though other Prime Ministers – notably Churchill – have done much journalism, it could be argued Johnson is the first for whom journalism was a career he had trained for and worked in professionally. As such he deserves the scrutiny of his former brethren.

And so to conclude this larger than life reviews section it seems appropriate to look in depth at the journalist-Prime Minister himself. John Mair finds Tom Bower's recent biography *Boris Johnson: The Gambler* to be an enjoyable read, which if anything tends to go easy on the former *Daily Telegraph* Brussels correspondent and columnist. And though it is unlikely to make it onto the reading lists of many Journalism courses, it offers a telling lesson in how distorted journalism need not necessarily be a bar to a career at the very top of public life.

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As always, the Journalism Education reviews section welcomes suggestions for reviews and reviewers for any books which may be of use to journalism educators and their students. If you would like to recommend a book for review or offer your services as a reviewer please email reviews editor Tor Clark at [tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk)

## Freelancing for Journalists by Lily Canter and Emma Wilkinson

*Review by Kerri L Watt, PR strategist and trainee journalist*

**In a world where a global pandemic has impacted many traditional jobs, going freelance has now become a viable option for many journalists. Freelancing For Journalists is the essential resource for paid employees wishing to take their journalism career down a different path into the freelancing world or those just starting out in the industry.**

Authors Lily Canter and Emma Wilkinson, both experienced freelancers and journalism lecturers, provide a detailed analysis of the media landscape and the routes to developing a successful freelance journalism career. The book has 12 chapters exploring:

[Introduction to being a freelance journalist](#)

[The training and experience required](#)

[Where to find freelance work](#)

[How to develop story ideas](#)

[Pitching and selling your story](#)

[Networking and growing your contacts](#)

[Writing great copy](#)

[Branding yourself](#)

[Tips to set up a business](#)

[Ways to supplement your income](#)

[Manage finances](#)

This book explains the types of freelancing opportunities available to journalists other than pitching your own stories including contracted work, shift working and becoming a stringer for a news organisation.

The authors are seasoned journalists with well-established freelance careers and both lecture at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. Lily Canter is a freelance money, health and lifestyle journalist working for a range of international newspapers, magazines and websites. Emma Wilkinson is a freelance journalist writing

about health, medicine and biosciences, working with several specialist websites, magazines and journals.

Based on the authors' extensive freelancing experience and drawing on 12 other case studies, the book offers a look behind the scenes of many established freelance journalist careers. In order to ensure prompt payment, and at industry standard rates or above, readers are shown how to combat the potential precariousness of generating a freelance income.

This book reveals what makes a good story to sell, where to find ideas and tricks for repurposing those ideas into multiple pieces; a feature, news story or opinion piece. Readers are treated to tried-and-tested email pitch templates to get on the radar of commissioning editors.

In 2016, the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) found that between 2000 and 2015 the number of freelance journalists had risen 67 per cent. This book brings hope to even more journalists now choosing to go freelance and shows there is a way to create both an inspiring career and a profitable business. With a whole chapter devoted to ideas to supplement income, readers are guided on how to design and juggle other money-making activities including copywriting, PR, blogging and even teaching.

I have been self-employed working within PR for a decade with a career in journalism always on my mind. After consuming this book, I finally took the leap and registered for journalism training. As well as the initial inspiration to join the industry, by using the advice and templates through the book, I have even secured newsroom work experience and freelance writing work as a trainee.

To continue the authors' dedication to supporting freelance journalists they also host the popular podcast *Freelancing For Journalists* and a free Facebook community with over 3,000 members.

Freelancing for Journalists offers an essential resource for established journalists and journalism students thinking of trying out freelancing.

**Freelancing for Journalists, by Lily Canter and Emma Wilkinson, published by Routledge, 2020, pp212, £32.99, ISBN 978-0-367-13555-3.**

## Privacy and the News Media by Chris Frost

*Review by David Baines, Newcastle University*

**It is a truism to remark that journalists today are working both locally and globally. The pandemic has surely underlined that.**

Alongside public health, the critical issues of our day all play out across our planet and across our national and local communities: the climate crisis, environmental degradation, migration, corporate accountability, the growth of populist politics... As journalism educators, we have a responsibility to equip our students – who are themselves an increasingly diverse and international group – to report on these issues, to render their complexities accessible and understandable. And a critical element of that preparation concerns the exploration and analysis of the legislative frameworks which constrain or facilitate their practice, the values that inform their work and their relationships with their communities.

But courses, modules, in law and ethics pose particular challenges when we seek to adopt a global perspective. Ethical, legal, political, social, cultural, religious (and though we might be reluctant to admit it, commercial concerns) intersect. These vary from nation to nation, region to region, legislature to legislature. There are natural pressures to prepare students for employment in their home regions – and accrediting bodies such as Britain's National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) demand a place-based curriculum that meet the needs of industry stakeholders. As a result, most such courses adopt a narrow perspective. Few English and Welsh journalism schools pay much attention to even the Scottish legal framework.

So it is a delight to be presented with this volume. Frost does have a critical focus on privacy and the news media in Britain. But in both structure and content it is an interrogation of the field – and a guide through its many difficult patches – that allows us to adopt a more global perspective. It is a very welcome addition to our toolboxes as we seek to enhance the international relevance of our programmes.

Structurally, the volume is informed throughout by two critical strands of law and ethics: the former by grounding it on the international and national approaches to the development of universally acknowledged frameworks of human rights, the latter by exploring the conceptual foundations of ethical inquiry. Though it is fair to say that while the rights to privacy and freedom of expression are traced from the global (the UN Declaration) through the regional (the European Convention) to the national (the UK Human Rights

Act), the foundations of ethical inquiry draw exclusively on the philosophical traditions of the West. Nevertheless, this foundational work on first principles establishes the context for a closer interrogation of the manner in which privacy has developed as a legal and ethical concern. It allows the reader to adopt a greater universality of perspective as she or he follows Frost into the more specific concerns relating to celebrity, gossip, data protection, new technologies and media regulation.

The content is again predominantly focused on the UK context, but it does draw throughout on case studies and examples from different countries, different regions. And it includes two very valuable chapters on the traditions – social, cultural, legal, ethical, and professional – that prevail across Europe and across the USA and Canada.

Frost takes us through the efforts by unions, industrial bodies, politicians and judges to regulate the work of journalists and coherently to codify professional values in order to balance the right to free expression, a duty to serve a public interest and hold authorities to account – and maintain respect for privacy. He critically analyses the tensions that exist and the power-plays that shape the debate when journalism is undertaken predominantly as a commercial enterprise and private lives hold the potential to become marketable commodities. Where commodities are concerned, there is likely to be a struggle for their control. Defamation and privacy tend to be treated as separate elements on course curricula, but both relate to reputation and often that struggle hinges on where the power lies to make, and break, reputations. This book does us a service in its exploration of the intersections between privacy and defamation as the law in this area continues to develop.

For our students, for us all, these concerns are more than topics of academic inquiry and the development of professional skills, knowledge and understandings. Digital and social media have blended the professional and the personal and all of us now live our lives in media.

Frost investigates the challenges and opportunities new technologies have brought to journalists when so much that we would once have considered private is on public view. Much of this can be a conscious crafting of identity by sophisticated adopters of modern media platforms. But other lives are unwittingly revealed by people with vulnerabilities and Frost reminds us these are vulnerabilities to which journalists should be alert. And he is also alert to the susceptibility of journalists to invasions of their personal and professional privacy by police and other state agents who are able to trace their contacts with few restraints.

Ethically, legally, one area of our lives which tends to attract the greatest protection from intrusion relates to health and medical matters. Yet, for the past year and more, the media spotlight has been on health – public and private. And that story has also encompassed the climate crisis, environmental degradation, migration, corporate accountability, populist politics...

Frost has brought original and illuminating research to this timely work and gathered in one place much that is often widely dispersed and the international perspective is particularly valuable. A very useful addition to the reading list on law and ethics.

**Privacy and the News Media by Chris Frost, published 2020 by Routledge, pp211, ISBN 9780367140236**

## What's the Point of News? A study in Ethical Journalism by Tony Harcup

Review by Chris Frost, Liverpool John Moores University

**The news, as traditionally identified over the past century, is facing a serious crisis according to Tony Harcup. Its crucial link to democracy and equality in a free society in providing accurate information on which people can base their opinions is no longer so clear to many people.**

This is never more true that at election times, and it is clear that recent election examples in the US and the UK are showing a serious democratic deficit as traditional news carriers fail to provide trustworthy news and people come to rely more and more on social media and fake news that at least gives them news they can believe in, even if it is wrong.

With the swirl of fake news and conspiracy theories all around us providing excuses and comfort to those who need it a book that takes back to the reality of why we have news is well overdue. Consequently this is an extremely useful and timely manuscript that will play a significant role in advancing the various analyses and arguments required to ensure 'the news' once again gets to play its vital role in presenting accurate information, but more importantly information people feel they need and want.

The pandemic is another excellent example of why news is important, watching the various arguments play out from the mainstream concerns about how soon, how hard and for how long we should lockdown, through constantly updated science about transmission of the virus, to the conspiracy theories of the wilder parts of the web that deny the virus, or claim it to be a tool of the elite and the antivaxxers who seek to deny what is probably our best tool to defeat it, balancing small risk against the giant risk of a rapidly evolving virus.

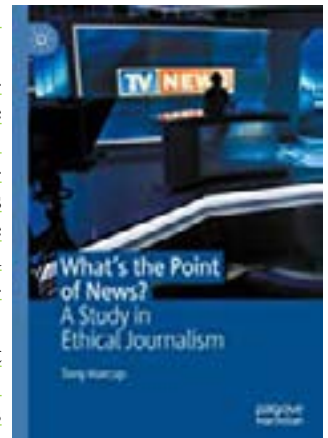
As with all Harcup's work, the monograph is well written and well structured allowing the reader's entire concentration to be brought to bear on the information, critiques, evidence and analysis contained within each chapter. Unlike many academic authors who like to flaunt their vocabulary and learning in a way that often hides their lack of analysis, Harcup's writing is as transparent as ever allowing him to present directly to the reader what he wants them to understand and explore. It is a pleasure to read the book and brings clear insight and understanding making it ideal for students and teachers alike.

The manuscript is structured as a series of essays, laying out logically what the author seeks to examine, the detail of that examination and his findings, taking us from the introduction to analysis and conclusion through chapters that examine the evidence of news, its point and some of its impediments.

Chapters flesh out the different arguments and information appropriately and logically. The manuscript avoids being dragged into the many byways and backwaters that this important topic produces such as fake news or softer subjects such as consumer news, sport or celebrity. Harcup has concentrated on the key point of why we produce news – whatever its uses – and is to be praised for its tightly written and full examination of this purpose of news, ethically handled.

This is a book that should be on the reading list of every undergraduate and postgraduate Journalism or Media course, bringing a topic which is often underestimated in its complexity but is of vital importance, particularly as students start their move into professional journalism, to the forefront. Understanding what makes a story news can take students a long time to grasp. This book will help enormously.

**What's the Point of News? A study in Ethical Journalism by Tony Harcup, published 2020 by Palgrave Macmillan, 168 Pages, ISBN-10: 303039946X, ISBN-13: 978-3030399467**



## Brexit, Trump and the Media edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait

Review by Sara McConnell, Sheffield University

**The UK 's vote to leave the EU and the US's vote for Donald Trump as president came within months of each other in 2016. But the aftershocks of those twin political earthquakes are still being felt, in the rise of populism, the social divisions and the ugly manifestations of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment.**

It is no secret that the events of 2016 came as a shock to many journalists and academics on both sides of the Atlantic, comfortably cocooned in their Remain/Clinton bubbles, hearing only the voices of those



who thought like they did. The votes for Brexit and Trump came as a sharp reminder that millions of people despised the liberal media as part of an elite which had ignored them for years and rejoiced in making their voices heard. The calls to ‘take back control’ and to ‘make America great again’ resonated with people whose lives lacked control and greatness.

The value of Brexit, Trump and the Media, is precisely that it gives a range of perspectives on significant events outside the well-worn tracks of discussion in liberal media and university seminar rooms. It is one of the biggest selling of the ‘Hackademic’ series of books combining academic and journalistic analysis of events, written and published at a speed which would scare traditional academic publishers, but which is vital for swift and up-to-date commentary.

The same editing team produced *Brexit, Boris and the Media* in 2020 and are now working on a final volume, *Populism and the Media* due for publication in June 2021.

This book, the first in the trilogy, contains chapters from all sides of the political spectrum on the question of how and why Brexit happened as it did, how and why Trump won, and the role of traditional print media, broadcasting and social media in shaping these outcomes. There are chapters on pollsters’ prediction of results (spoiler alert: they got it wrong) and the future implications for the media in the aftermath of the seismic events of 2016. All these chapters provide important points for potential discussion in seminars and material for lectures, particular in modules focusing on the news industry, the way that journalists make news, and journalism ethics.

The first section of the book is in some ways the most interesting because it focuses on the Leave campaign during the run-up to the EU Referendum. The different players in the Leave campaign arguably played a blinder and succeeded in getting the vote to go their way with skilful use of social media, appearances in newspapers and on TV and some vigorous (albeit highly misleading) anti-EU slogans. But they have not always been willing to talk to academics or journalists they perceive (probably correctly) as being against everything they stand for. So it was a coup on the part of the editors to secure a chapter from Nigel Farage, who tells the media they are out of touch and that it was his use of social media which enabled the rise of UKIP.

It was also interesting to read the chapter by Hugh Whittow, editor of the Daily Express at the time of the Brexit campaign. For those journalists and academics (myself included) who come from a broadsheet background, the Express possibly represents everything that is wrong with the popular press but Whittow proudly outlines his paper’s work in ‘capturing the mood of the readers’, publishing content which ‘reflects then reinforces the views of its readers’ and turning this into ‘powerful and constituent advocacy’ and ‘intelligent analysis’.

It wasn’t clear if the authors intended a deliberate juxtaposition between Whittow’s chapter and the following two, by journalist and media commentator Liz Gerard, and Hugo Dixon, chairman of InFacts. But there was certainly a shift in perspective. Gerard points to the Express’s record on running anti-migration stories, its fact-free stories on the sunlit uplands in store post-Brexit, and most bizarrely, a front page lead claiming ‘EU Exit Boosts House Prices’ before the UK had left the EU, for which it was forced to apologise by IPSO.

Dixon’s chapter focuses on factual errors published in right-wing newspapers in the run-up to the referendum and InFacts’ attempts to get IPSO to take action. One such front page story in the Express had the headline ‘Soaring Cost of Teaching Migrant Children’ and a standfirst saying ‘£3 billion bill another reason to quit EU’.

It’s all about perspective.

**Brexit, Trump and the Media, edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait was published by Abramis in 2017, pp408, £19.95. ISBN 978-1-84549-709-5**

## **Murder in Our Midst: Comparing Crime Coverage Ethics in an Age of Globalized News by Romaine Smith Fullerton and Maggie Jones Patterson**

**Review by Chris Frost, Liverpool John Moores University**

**Murder – the ultimate human crime and one so awful that the very word is used to draw us in to read or watch anything. Search for the title of this book in Amazon and at least three titles pop up using the phrase Murder in Our Midst. It is the sub-title, unsullied by the publisher’s desire to sell more copies, that explains more clearly what can be expected within its 299 pages.**

This is an eight-year international research project examining crime coverage ethics in eight countries and their approaches to it in an era of globalization.

The authors acknowledge freely they follow the methodology of Daniel Hallin and Paulo Mancini’s *Comparing Media Systems: Three models of Media and Politics* which identify the different approaches taken by country groupings based on their political systems.

This is an important topic in an era of globalisation when many are suggesting there should be global codes of ethics trying to turn all journalism into a homogenised gloop of global journalistic goodness, ignoring entirely the enormous political, social and cultural differences that make visiting foreign countries and reading their media so rewarding. Nowhere, though, outside of tyrannical dictatorship-controlled media, are these differences more pronounced than in the reporting of crime.

Reporters, wherever they are based, say the authors, follow established patterns of reporting behaviour that are almost ritualistic, but are clearly based on how things are done in that jurisdiction. The authors acknowledge that even within a single country there can be completely different approaches to crime reporting both on a case-by-case basis and in differences between say print and broadcast coverage. Broadcasters may be more concerned at carrying horrific details and will keep reports short that cannot, by their nature, carry visual images. Print on the other hand may revel in the horrors revealed in the courtroom.

But what the authors were seeking and found was “a fundamental pattern about the values of ritual reporting patterns that spanned differences within each country and distinguished one country and one media model from the next. What we ultimately saw were three discernible, although loosely defined, ethical practices in our sample countries.” (p10)

The three patterns of behaviour they identify are first the *protectors of Northern and Central Europe* that include Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. Reporters here are as concerned to protect the reputation of the accused and their families up to and even after, a finding of guilt. The belief amongst the reporters and their readers is that rehabilitation and reintegration is as important as justice for the victims.

*The watchdogs of Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland* firmly believe in informing the public about the justice system and keeping a check on the police and courts. The drive is to give as much detail as possible and there is only limited concern for the reputation of the defendant and often the innocent relatives.

*The ambivalents of Southern Europe, Italy Spain and Portugal* are limited by police and prosecutors who keep arrest details quiet to protect the right to presumption of innocence but journalists often gain information from leaks.

The book goes into considerable detail about the approaches taken by reporters in the various countries examining key cases and identifying differences in approach as such cultural and legal differences become more difficult to manage. Globalisation can mean a big story breaking in one of the protectionist countries can mean news outlets there, seeking to keep details of a breaking story to a minimum can find themselves being scooped by websites based abroad publishing the details they were keeping quiet. An example is the attempted assassination of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands in 2009 that killed seven people when Karst Tate drove a car through police barriers. The story was carried worldwide, yet many Dutch newspapers only reported him as Karst T. to protect his family from harmful publicity.

For those who have not had a chance to study or consider these differences, the book is fascinating, analys-

ing these differences and how they are changing and indeed changed reporting over the eight years of the project. The book is a must for all journalism ethics bookshelves.

**Murder in Our Midst: Comparing Crime Coverage Ethics in an Age of Globalized News by Romaine Smith Fullerton and Maggie Jones Patterson published 2021 by Oxford University Press, pp299, ISBN: 978-0-19-086354-8**

## **Boris Johnson: The Gambler by Tom Bower**

**Review by John Mair, broadcast journalist, academic and editor of the 'Hackademic' series of books**

**Tom Bower is a journalistic wrecking ball. 'Britain's top investigative journalist' this book screams on the cover. He's taken on and wrecked or dented the public careers of Robert Maxwell, Richard Branson and Jeremy Corbyn inter alia.**

Having Bower after you can be the kiss of death to many a reputation. Bower is certainly Britain's best-selling investigative journalist, if not the best. Most recently he has turned his attention to the UK's most recent journalist-turned-Prime Minister.

Bower honed his agitational skills as a weekend student leader at the LSE in 1968 (I was there at the time) then at the BBC making impactful current affairs films for *24 Hours* and *Panorama* essentially chasing villains of one sort or another all over the world. The methods used to hook them were interesting. Tales of Bower's style abounded in Lime Grove.

Post BBC Bower has had a hugely successful career with his wrecking ball biographies. They are on the top shelf of bestsellers in airport bookshops and serialised in the *Daily Mail*. It helped that his wife Veronica Wadley was the features editor. She went on to edit the London *Evening Standard* which became a Boris fan club when he was the Mayor of London. Wadley became a senior adviser to Mayor Johnson in City Hall. Veronica is now Baroness Fleet, ennobled by PM Boris Johnson. Bower plays down her role in this book.

In this book he rather pulls his punches and heads for psychological explanations. Johnson's father Stanley comes in for much criticism and, worse, being a Eurocrat. Johnson was brought up in Brussels where at school he first met his long-suffering wife Marina, daughter of a great journalist Charles Wheeler. The Johnsons are a competitive family (Boris announced a young age that he wanted to be 'world king') but one riven with insecurities. Bower takes that as the Johnson leitmotif for life. The gambler with few friends (political or otherwise), who has won through force of personality, wearing opponents down and having the Teflon skin of a rhino when it came to disasters, of which there are plenty. But a man who has developed bumbling charisma to a fine art and persuaded the British public, who love a rogue, especially if clever and posh, to buy into the imperfect 'Boris', especially as that is not his first name. He was christened Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson.

Our esteemed Prime Minister has only really had one 'real' job, journalism, for the top end Tory papers *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*. Studying Classics at Balliol really does not equip you for life as a scientist or businessman. Hard graft is not Johnson's thing. Then and now. Like Donald Trump he, it is said, rarely gets to the bottom of a page on a document. Etonian arrogance allows him to bluff the rest. Latin and Greek aphorisms create a fog of competency.

Truth is not his strong point either. Johnson was fired from his first job at *The Times* for making up a quote about Edward II's catamite lover and attributing it to his godfather, the Oxford historian and Balliol Master Colin Lucas. Later, as the Brussels correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* he simply embellished if needs must. They did. He filed a series of stories about the EU, bendy bananas and other falsehoods about the size of condoms and many more. They were, in essence, the early salvos of the Leave culture war.

Some of those stories were true or partly true. Some were lies. They did register with Eurosceptics within and without the Conservative Party. But it went beyond the pale. So much so that his then editor Max Hastings reprimanded him and became a lifelong Boris-sceptic. When he stood for election as Tory leader in 2019 Hasting pronounced him 'unfit for national office'. His summary of the man expressed some years before was 'surely the British people deserve better than a comic cad and as serial bonker, however enter-

taining'.

This did not stop *The Telegraph* re-employing Johnson as a star weekly columnist in 2016 when he was in the political wilderness at a reputed quarter of a million pounds plus per year in remuneration. One observer calculated that was close to £5 per word. But even there his laziness shone through. Some of his columns involved stereotyping and casual racism, notoriously saying Muslim women dressed in burkas looked like 'letterboxes' and 'bank robbers'. But they kept him in the public and Tory MPs' eyes. Plainly it worked. He became leader and Prime Minister in July 2019.

His journalistic ethics are none too sound either. On the eve of the Brexit campaign in 2016 he sketched out two *Telegraph* columns, one for Remain and one for Leave. The Gambler struck lucky. He picked the latter and became the public face of the winning Leave campaign.

Journalists who become politicians are all too often hoist by the tendency to believe their own hype. They seem not to have the patience needed to govern well. Churchill, Johnson's hero about whom he wrote a biography, is an exception and the rule. He struck lucky with the Second World War. Johnson is hoping to repeat the trick with his war against Covid. Time will tell if it works.

Bower's tome is huge at 560 pages. It is well researched. It is well written, but has the great Bower, like so many others, fallen under the spell of the very clever Alexander Boris De Pfeffel Johnson? Nevertheless it is a useful account if you want to understand the journalist-turned-Prime Minister, the man who would be 'world king'.

**Boris Johnson: The Gambler by Tom Bower, published by WH Allen 2020, pp578, £20, ISBN 978-0-7535-5490-6**

## **News and How to Use it by Alan Rusbridger**

**Review by Dr Michael Foley, Professor Emeritus, Technological University Dublin**

**From A for Accuracy to Z for Zoomers, News and How to Use It, by former Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger, is an alphabetical glossary of journalism looking, sort of, at the decline in trust in news in a time of pandemic.**

He examines journalism and its best and worst, how it is paid for, owned and controlled and does so in an unusual format of small opinionated observations ranging from one small paragraph to long essays. What he decided to include are 'random and subjective', which makes the book engaging and surprising, but if there is an argument it is hard to discern.

This is Rusbridger's second book since retiring from *The Guardian* and taking up the headship of an Oxford college and the chair of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. His earlier work, *Breaking News*, was a reflection on journalism as it moved from hot-metal to the computer screen. It was an exciting read, notably the story about publishing the Edward Snowden leaks and the investigation into phone hacking. It was also an important and thoughtful journalist's memoir.

Some of the observations in his work are but a few paragraphs: 'Facts' gets seven, 'click-bait' merits one, 'Inverted Pyramid' – the graphic structure of a news story – gets one long paragraph. 'Investigative Journalism' and 'Journalism' are both short essays. But 'Metrics' – how audience is measured, and its implications on editorial content – is long and detailed. Fake News gets a short entry, but turns up in other entries, such as Brexit, one of the longer entries while 'Sources' gets seven pages. Some headings are decidedly eccentric. 'Freddie Starr' gets nine pars, but much of that is devoted to *The Sun*.

There is no specific entry for Covid-19, but the pandemic is included in other headings. Under Climate Change, a major entry, he compares the coverage of climate change and Covid-19. "In some ways the 2020 crisis can be seen as a dress rehearsal for climate change... In four months, we had a compressed version of how climate change has been playing out in the media over four decades. Ignore; deny; underplay; ghettoise; marginalise; question; disparage; balance; shrug; pay attention; pivot; reassess; jump."

He imagined a harassed news editor faced with news of Covid. It was far away and there appeared to be nothing, no metric to suggest it would drive clicks or subscriptions. It was a story that initially failed on every count and the warning that might have come from the health and science correspondents was no more, both had been let go in the last round of cuts. When things deteriorated, it was not easy to catch-up. By March 2020 the story swamped everything and was no longer just about health but politics, business, sport, food, economy and travel.

Suddenly, it was a matter of life and death. Some journalists did fearless public service reporting, investigated government inactions, offered simple, but reliable, explanations to complex concepts. “The best news organisations have performed a real, vital public service.” But there was also the bad, and here he singles out Murdoch’s Fox News, which he says will have a ‘special place in journalistic hell’. Its coverage, he said, contributed to ‘numberless deaths’.

He includes analyses of the work of some individual journalists, including a scathing piece on the climate change denier, James Delingpole; a sceptical piece on Seymore Hersh; Michael Wolfe, he says might be an engaging writer, ‘but ultimately lacks the reporting rigour to back up his prose’. He writes also of Robert Fisk, who died since the book was completed. Of Fisk he asks: ‘Why was he so mistrusted by so many of his colleagues and yet revered by so many readers?’

Curated is an over-used word, associated as much with menus or lists of cocktails as museums, but one could say what Rusbridger describes as subjective is curated, in the best sense, because of his own expertise and the intellectual interconnections he draws between what might appear to be random observations in the hands of another.

So, who might be a model reader? Maybe a student, who wants accurate and verifiable information about media and journalism – there is an excellent bibliography, most references are online and accessible – from a known, authoritative and reliable source.

**News and How to Use it by Alan Rusbridger, Published by Canongate, 2020, pp316, £18.99, ISBN 9781838851613**

## **The War Against the BBC: How an unprecedented combination of hostile forces is destroying Britain’s greatest cultural institution... and why you should care by Patrick Barwise and Peter York**

**Review by John Mair, editor of the ‘Hackademic’ series of books**

**The BBC has many critics and they are increasingly vocal. Its defenders are quieter and tend to be in a ‘liberal metropolitan’ groove. That hymn sheet is well worn, tired at times. I know, having edited three books on the BBC in the last year.**

These two BBC ‘friends’ are a strange combo. Front half of the tandem Patrick Barwise is Emeritus Professor of Marketing at the London Business School and a long-term academic defender of public service broadcasting. His work on Channel Four has been seminal. Peter York’s is a social commentator spotting trends and both writing about them and using them in his day job as a commercial market researcher. He is also President of the Media Society.

The unlikelihood of the partnership shows in the book. It’s a hybrid. Peter enjoys conspiracy theories especially if they come from the right and from the USA. Some of them crop up in disguise in this tome. Easy to re-produce, easier to knock down. Trump is dead, even if Trumpism is not.

They had a not an easy task getting this book to publication. It was like writing about an amoeba. Throughout 2019 and 2020 the story simply kept moving. The BBC, then under previous director general Tony Hall, was either cruising towards its 2022 centenary or being due to be smashed to smithereens. Which you believed depended on the whims of Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s then adviser Dominic Cummings. He

had a visceral hatred of the Corporation going back at least a couple of decades.

Lord Hall retired to be replaced by a sharper animal within the Corp, Tim Davie, head of BBC Studios, the commercial arm and a former Procter and Gamble/Pepsi Cola marketeer. Fortuitously (or not) he had also been an active Conservative in his early life. The stars were aligning in different directions. The BBC story lurching from crisis to crisis as ever. For Barwise and York their subject was a moving target.

Barwise and York are unashamed BBC fans. They see little wrong. A clue is in their subtitle. The BBC is a superb world-beating broadcaster which can make superb television and radio programmes. It is also always at the digital cutting edge first into catch-up with *iplayer* and online news. It serves many audiences and many niches very well.

Look at radio where Radios One to Five (plus digital additions) cover the piste very well. Commercial radio has never been able to match it. Today, it has been reduced to a juke box of greatest hits with few live voices and ‘shouty’ radio like *TalkThis* and *TalkThat*. Radio is a BBC masterclass in making the market.

But Barwise and York are a bit reluctant to admit the BBC has faults and longer-term structural problems. Is the licence fee safe for perpetuity or will it be replaced by a hybrid fee/subscription model after 2027? Is the BBC World Service doing any ‘soft power’ good in a world in which the huge and well-financed propaganda outfits like Russia Today and China Central Television dominate? Are the bourgeois niches of the expensive orchestras, the Proms and even, whisper it gently, BBC Radio Three, really value for money? The big questions are there to be answered by new DG Davie. The price of universality is spreading yourself too thinly. This is the era of *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime* and *Disney +* with bottomless pockets (or borrowings). They and Sky have turned the eyes and ears of much of the UK. The BBC has to make great, well-watched, programmes which punch through to survive. The pandemic has reinforced its position as the primary informer of the nation. That needs building upon. *Netflix* has no foreign correspondents, the BBC has many.

This is a good book if a bit dense. For academics and students studying broadcasting and broadcast journalism it is essential.

The BBC is the cornerstone of British broadcasting and to an extent British culture in these strange populist times. Cummings may have gone out of the Downing Street front door with his plans in a cardboard box but coming in the back door are many wanting to cut the BBC down to size. It has to adapt or die but not surrender. ‘Britain’s greatest cultural institution’ is entering its second century but in a dark tunnel of uncertainty. Tim Davie may have the Tory torch to get them out.

**The War Against the BBC: How an unprecedented combination of hostile forces is destroying Britain’s greatest cultural institution... and why you should care by Patrick Barwise and Peter York, published by Penguin, 2020, pp503, £10.99, ISBN 978-0-141-98940-2**



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# Style guide

**Please provide a title and an abstract and author details together with a 50-70 word biography for each author on a separate sheet to allow for anonymization. This sheet will be separated from the article before being sent to referees so please put the title only at the start of the article.**

- Sub-heads should be in bold
- Second order sub-heads should be in bold italic
- Please use single quotation marks (double quotation marks for a quote within a quote)
- Indent long quotes of two lines or more.
- Please do not insert additional paragraph spaces between paragraphs or headings.
- All illustrations, tables and figures should be sent separately either at the end of the MS Word file or as attached JPGs. Clearly label approximately where they should be placed with fig 1, table 1 etc.

**Citations and bibliographic references should be in Harvard style.**

## Part I: Citations

Place references in your work in the following order: Name, Date: page number(s)

For example,

1. Directly quoting an author

It is sometimes forgotten that 'English is one of the most flexible and expressive languages in the world' (Hicks, 1993, p.1)

He goes on to say, 'In brief, the reigning media consensus has been characterised either as overly liberal or leftist or as conservative, depending on the view of the critic' (McQuail, 1992, pp.255-6).

2. Indirectly quoting an author (where you sum up what is being stated in your own words). This must be grammatically correct, as well as accurate.

E.g.: Hargreaves (2003, p.47) believes that Henry Hetherington's populist journalistic techniques, employed by him in the 1830s, were the basis of tabloid journalism.

3. Referring broadly to ideas you have read in a publication (not to a specific point/quote). You don't need to cite page number in this case. E.g.: Franklin (1997) has highlighted the effects and reasons for so-called dumbing down in the media.

4. If the same person is referred to immediately after a previous citation, you can use *ibid*.

5. If there are more than two authors, you can use *et al*.

## Part II: Bibliographic References

A list of Bibliographic References is required at the end. Please provide the FULL name of the author (including first name) and provide references in alphabetical order of surname. With an author who has written a number of books and articles that have been cited, list them all separately, with the most recent first (see Manning).

Examples of how to present Bibliographic references for Journalism Education are given below

Bibliographic references

Franklin, Bob (2003) 'A Good Day to Bury Bad News?': Journalists, Sources and the Packaging of Politics in Simon Cottle (Ed.), *News, Public Relations Power*, London: Sage pp. 45-61

Hall, Stuart, Critcher, Chas, Jefferson Tony, Clarke John, and Roberts, Brian (1978) *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan

Harcup, Tony (2004) in Susan Pape and Sue Featherstone (2006) *Feature Writing*, London: Sage.

# Journalism Education

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## Volume 10, number one. Inside this issue:

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