

The Tension between Professional Control and Open Participation:
Journalism and its Boundaries

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Abstract

Amid growing difficulties for professionals generally, media workers in particular are negotiating the increasingly contested boundary space between producer and user in the digital environment. This article, based on a review of the academic literature, explores that larger tension transforming the creative industries by extrapolating from the case of journalism—namely, the ongoing tension between professional control and open participation in the news process. Firstly, the sociology of professions, with its emphasis on boundary maintenance, is used to examine journalism as *boundary work*, *profession*, and *ideology*—each contributing to the formation of journalism’s professional logic of control over content. Secondly, by considering the affordances and cultures of digital technologies, the article articulates open participation and its ideology. Thirdly, and against this backdrop of ideological incompatibility, a review of empirical literature finds that journalists have struggled to reconcile this key tension, caught in the professional impulse toward one-way publishing control even as media become a multi-way network. Yet, emerging research also suggests the possibility of a hybrid logic of adaptability and openness—an ethic of participation—emerging to resolve this tension going forward. The article concludes by pointing to innovations in analytical frameworks and research methods that may shed new light on the producer–user tension in journalism.

Keywords

Boundary Work, Digital Culture, Institutional Logic, Journalism Studies, New Media, Newswork, Participatory Journalism, Professionalism, Sociology of Professions

The Tension Between Control and Participation: Journalism and its Boundaries

In any profession, particularly one that has existed long enough that no one can remember a time when it didn't exist, members have a tendency to equate provisional solutions to particular problems with deep truths about the world. (Shirky, 2008, p. 59)

These are challenging times for professions. While occupational groups such as financial planners and translators attempt to professionalize for purposes of status and control (Noordegraaf, 2007), the very groups they seek to imitate—the classic professions such as law, medicine, and academia—have sustained a withering “assault” (Freidson, 2001, p. 179) on their authority and autonomy from a confluence of forces: e.g., neoliberal market demands for cost-cutting and consumer control; growing managerial and accounting oversight; and a do-it-yourself culture that challenges traditional forms of elite expertise. This trend toward “deprofessionalization” (Tuchman, 2009, p. 42) poses a threat to professional self-determination. If professions, by definition, have jurisdiction to govern a body of knowledge and the practice of that expertise (Abbott, 1988), with a normative interest in doing “good work” for society that transcends a corporate imperative (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2001)—then threats to the profession are primarily struggles over boundaries (Gieryn, 1983): about the rhetorical and material delimitations of insiders and outsiders, of what counts as ethical practice, and so on. These are questions, ultimately, of *control*, and of professions' capacity for flexing and legitimizing that control to fulfill their normative functions.

In seeking to maintain control, all professions engage in some degree of boundary maintenance, whether in “jurisdictional disputes” with neighboring professions or through tactics aimed to marginalize nonprofessionals encroaching on their turf (Abbott, 1988). In the digital media era, and in the context of the creative industries, the latter engagement—this relationship between professionals and amateurs, or producers and

users, or the hybrid blurring of distinctions evident in pro-am “produsage” (Bruns, 2008; see also Bruns [2012] in this special issue)—deserves the most scrutiny, for it has become an increasingly contested space for media workers who specialize in creating, filtering, and distributing information, and for whom professional identity, authority, and expertise are linked to their central role in directing those (mass) media production and circulation processes. Digital technologies and their associated digital/participatory cultures (Deuze, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, forthcoming) both enable and encourage end-user participation, challenging the socio-cultural rationale for professional control over such content creation, filtering, and distribution. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the case of journalism.¹ While it is true that other media professions are redefining their roles in a participatory media environment—e.g., as public relations transitions from press relations to direct public engagement (Jenkins et al., forthcoming), and videogame production engages co-creation (Banks & Potts, 2010) with “modders” (Postigo, 2010)—journalism, perhaps because of its enduring self-presentation as the “primary sense-maker ... of modernity” (Hartley, 1996, p. 32; see also Zelizer, 2004a), has found digital media and digital culture to be particularly unsettling to its professional paradigm.²

It used to be that news professionals solved the “problems” that Shirky (2008) mentions above—the sheer difficulties of publishing to mass audiences. “The commercial

¹ This article refers to “journalism as a profession” as it is understood in the U.S. or western context. While it is acknowledged that much of journalism’s professional outlook, training, and routines are broadly shared around the world (Reese, 2001, 2010), nevertheless the challenges to journalism—its traditional models of funding and production—are most acute in the developed world, and in the United States in particular (Downie & Schudson, 2009; McChesney & Pickard, 2011; Waldman, 2011).

² Journalism, of course, is not just a profession but also a workforce. While this article takes up the professional orientation rather than organizational dynamics, it is important to note that in the manager-subordinate relationship professionalism can be invoked as a disciplinary mechanism (Fournier, 1999; Evetts, 2003), including in the case of journalism (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003). For instance, major corporations have used professionalism to justify charging users for online access and demonizing “free” content—even while they have de-professionalized their workforce by requiring more and faster output on the “hamster wheel” of digital news production (Starkman, 2010).

viability of most media businesses involves providing those solutions, so preservation of the original problems became an economic imperative” (Shirky, 2008, p. 59). Indeed, for much of the 20th century, both the business model and the professional routines of journalism in developed nations were highly stable and successful enterprises because they took advantage of scarcity, exclusivity, and control. In the local information market, news media dominated the means of media production, access to expert source material, and distribution to wide audiences—which translated to tremendous capital, both in gatekeeping authority (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) and economic power (Picard, 2002, 2006). The emergence of digitally networked media, however, has changed this equation, obviating many of the “problems” of publishing. In a world of ones and zeros, information is no longer scarce, hard to produce, nor difficult to repurpose and share.

This shift is more than a challenge to an industry model built on scarcity. It also strikes at the heart of a model that was built on an implicit bargain between journalists and the public—an assumption about how society should handle the collection, filtering, and distribution of news information. In short: to the extent that digital technologies and cultures have upended this bargain by facilitating participation, how does this development strain the professional character of journalism? If professions are defined by a certain degree of control over an information domain, what happens to professional jurisdiction in the journalism space, and with what potential consequences? This unresolved interplay between professional control and open participation has received growing attention in the journalism studies literature (for a few examples, see Deuze, 2008; Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010; Neuberger & Nuernbergk, 2010; Singer et al., 2011; Williams, Wardle, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011), often through examinations of journalistic role perceptions (O’Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008), the blogging–journalism nexus (Lowrey, 2006; Singer, 2007), and change in news culture (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008). This paper intends to go a step further, however, in conceptualizing the nature of this professional-participatory tension from a sociological perspective,

drawing on the sociology of professions and its emphasis on boundaries as a theoretical lens for understanding this phenomenon.

Ultimately, through a focused review of the academic literature, this paper aims to explore the broader tension between producer and user transforming the creative industries by extrapolating from the case of journalism. Particularly as other forms of media work become professionalized (as in the case of web design; see Kennedy, 2010), it will become important to understand how the complexities of professionalism are embedded in and filtered through the ongoing negotiation of open participation on the part of users. And perhaps nowhere is professionalism within media work more evident and enduring than in the case of journalism.

To unpack this case, this article proceeds in three sections. The first introduces the sociology of professions, and brackets within that an examination of journalism as *boundary work*, *profession*, and *ideology*—each contributing to the formation of journalism’s professional logic of control over content. The second section steps away from journalism to explore the emergence of digital media and related cultures, articulating an underlying logic, or ideology, of openness and participation. The third section juxtaposes journalism-as-ideology and participation-as-ideology, assessing how the tension between them has been negotiated thus far in news work, and concludes by discussing how future research might better account for these dynamics.

1. THE SOCIOLOGY OF PROFESSIONS AND ITS APPLICATION IN JOURNALISM STUDIES

In this subfield of sociology that examines occupations and their professionalization, scholars initially identified professions by the extent to which they were self-governing and embodied certain professional traits such as formal education, licensing, codes of ethics, relationships of trust between professional and client, a public-service imperative over commercial interest, social status, and so forth (e.g., see Barber,

1963; Greenwood, 1957; Wilensky, 1964). However, this structural-functionalist “trait approach” generally was discarded several decades ago as sociologists moved “from the false question: ‘Is this occupation a profession?’ to the more fundamental one: ‘What are the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession, and themselves into professional people?’” (Hughes, 1971, p. 340).³

This turn to a Weberian study of professionalization—of examining *how* occupations attempt to claim status and authority—was pioneered, in part, by the work of Sarfatti-Larson (1977). Through her articulation of the “professional project,” she argued that “ideal-typical constructions do not tell us what a profession is, but only what it pretends to be,” and that it’s more appropriate to ask “what professions do in everyday life to negotiate and maintain their special position” (p. xii). For Sarfatti-Larson (1977), professionalization, as an ongoing *project*, is the extent to which social actors “attempt to translate one order of scarce resources—special knowledge and skills—into another—social and economic rewards” (p. xvii). Because “to maintain scarcity implies a tendency to monopoly,” occupations professionalize to the degree that they can build and sustain exclusive control over expertise in the market or status in a social system (p. xvii).

Expanding on this sociological shift from “professional traits” to “professional struggle,” Abbott (1988) downplayed the structural categorization of *occupational group* to instead focus on professional *work*. Abbott argues that, in the terrain of inter-professional competition, the struggle is one of *jurisdiction*—of claiming exclusive right to engaging in a particular task for society. When a profession can link its knowledge claims to its daily work practices, it can, in effect, ask society “to recognize its cognitive structure through exclusive rights” (p. 59)—and thus confer upon it the social authority that recognition deserves (see Schudson & Anderson, 2008, p. 95).⁴ In short, claiming

³ For additional background on this transition, see Schudson and Anderson, 2008.

⁴ As Schudson and Anderson (2008) point out, “Even journalists, who lack many of the structural advantages granted to other professional groups, have achieved some level of jurisdictional recognition via shield laws, for example, and privileged access to political leaders” (p. 95).

jurisdiction is about displaying what a profession *knows* (its system of abstract knowledge) and connecting that to what the profession *does* (its labor practices).

Linking this with the information professions, Abbott (1988, p. 225) argues that journalism remains “a very permeable occupation,” in that there is great mobility with and transferability to public relations, and that even while there are journalism schools, associations, and degrees, “there is no exclusion of those who lack them.” Nevertheless, whether journalism qualifies as a profession is not so important to Abbott as the extent to which it has gained “extraordinary power” through its jurisdictional claim to the collection and distribution of “factual” information about current events. Journalists have attained this power in part by invoking the occupational norm of objectivity, which itself is structured out of routines and narratives, and which historically has afforded journalists a monopolistic claim on expertise in communicating “truth” about the world (Schudson & Anderson, 2008, p. 96; c.f., Kaplan, 2006).

Before this article transitions to an analysis of the professional project in journalism, it’s important to note some recent developments in the sociology of professions. In particular, Evetts (2003, 2006) has helpfully distinguished between *organizational professionalism* (a discourse of control, external to the occupational group, that is used by managers to define professionalism as compliance with employer goals and standards) and *occupational professionalism* (the more traditional form of professionalism, internal to the occupational group, emphasizing individual autonomy, ethical standards, and broad socialization). As Örnebring (2009, p. 6) put it: “manager and managed very likely have different ideas about what professionalism means.” This article speaks to the classical occupational professionalism—or the synonymous *occupational ideology* (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003, p. 549)—while acknowledging the importance of organizational factors beyond the scope of this paper (see footnote 2).

Additionally, scholars—including those in journalism studies (see the special issues introduced by Ryfe [2006] and Ryfe & Blach-Ørsten [2011])—have drawn on new

institutionalism and related approaches from organization studies to focus on the rise and dominance of professions as institutions, or a bundle of rules, norms, and beliefs that are both symbolic and empirical (Scott, 2008, p. 222). In this view, “professions as macrolevel institutions represent distinct and identifiable structures of knowledge, expertise, work, and labor markets, with distinct norms, practices, ideologies and organizational forms” (Leicht, 2005, p. 604; see also Leicht & Fennell, 2008). Scholars in this vein have given particular attention to the *institutional logics* (Friedland & Alford, 1991), or the overarching belief systems that both constrain individual and institutional action while simultaneously providing the source for agency and change (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 101). In this sense, journalism (like other professions) is governed by a distinctive logic—in this case, a professional logic of control over content. An institutional logics perspective encourages us to see how professions are both defined by and transformed through the negotiation of logics. For example, medical care has shifted from a professional logic of civic service to a market-logic of “efficiency” (Arndt & Bigelow, 2006; c.f., Scott et al., 2000), revealing a larger encroachment of the business management logic in the professions generally, superseding the traditional emphasis on social trusteeship (Brint, 1994; Scott, 2008). A similar change may be occurring as journalism encounters the “shock to the system” that is digital media (Peer & Ksiazek, 2011, p. 45).

Journalism as Boundary Work

Literature on the sociology of journalism, can be divided into two distinct yet complementary streams of thought: theories about how journalists construct the nature of *reality* in society, and theories about how journalists construct the nature of *themselves* as a profession (Anderson, 2008a). If the first strand of literature was dominated by critiques of journalistic objectivity, routines, and framing found in studies by Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979), Fishman (1980), and Gitlin (1980), the second strand was less concerned

with the press' representation of the "world outside" (Lippmann, 1922/1991) and more interested in understanding how the press could lay claim to being the legitimate conduit through which society's worldview *ought* to be shaped. Featuring the influential sociological work of Schudson (1978) and the cultural studies approach of Zelizer (1992), this second approach moved on to questions of how journalism became both codified and publicly legitimated. This paper, like most contemporary research (Berkowitz, 1997, 2010), takes this second perspective.

This process of codification and legitimation can be viewed as a form of what Gieryn (1983) famously called "boundary work." These are efforts to establish and enlarge the limits of one domain's institutional authority relative to outsiders, thus creating social boundaries that yield greater cultural and material resources for insiders. Because professional boundaries are always contested and transformed by tensions, Gieryn (1999) encourages a focus on their construction and negotiation; in his study of the science community, he examined "the discursive attribution of selected qualities to scientists, scientific method, and scientific claims for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative, residual non-science ... demarcating, defending, expanding, contesting the limits of legitimate science, the real scientist from the pseudo scientist" (pp. 4-5). "Journalist" can be substituted for "scientist" in the above passage to reveal similar processes at work in journalism (Fakazis, 2006). Boundary work is a rhetorical exercise taken up in all professions, but one in which journalism is particularly engaged, in part because of journalism's malleable, evolving character—especially in the digital era—and also in part because journalists tend to talk openly about such things, as in the highly public "battle" over blogging as journalism that played out in the trade press and at conventions (Lowrey, 2006). In journalism studies, scholars have followed the lead of Zelizer (1992) in invoking boundary work as a way of describing how journalists use narrative techniques

to construct their expertise and social authority, as in their response to blogs emerging as sources for news (Carlson, 2007).

Moreover, the concept of boundary work is critical for understanding how distinctions such as professional/amateur, producer/user, and journalist/non-journalist are forged, maintained, and continuously reconfigured amid changing circumstances—as evident in the evolving policies for reader comments on news stories online (Robinson, 2010). While the struggle over journalistic jurisdiction is not entirely rhetorical in nature, nevertheless it is true that much of the consternation in journalism today pertains to how the field is “constructing itself.” After all, what *is* journalism and what *qualifies* one to claim a place in journalism at a time when the means to publish and carry out traditional functions of journalism are so widely distributed among the populace at large? At a time when amateur video can win an award for the best of professional reporting (Stelter, 2010), the boundaries of journalistic work and professional jurisdiction become increasingly blurred amid the news industry’s “identity complex” (Robinson, 2010, p. 141). Such boundary fluctuations around the definition of news and jurisdictional claims to news work, viewed from a sociology of professions perspective, suggest an opportunity for rival professions (such as public relations) and their media activities (such as blogging) to benefit (Lowrey & Anderson, 2005; c.f., Dooley, 1999). While undercutting a profession’s public credibility, these boundary negotiations may also lead to an evolution of occupational norms and actors—just as chiropractors filled the void when doctors failed to address back problems, altering the boundaries of the medical profession (Abbott, 1988).

Thus, in the media sociology of the 21st century, locating *how*, *where*, and *why* jurisdictional claims are made is essential for capturing how the journalism field develops in relation to newer media. To cite one example (see Lewis, 2012): The Knight Foundation’s effort to broaden the boundaries from “journalism” to “information,” through both policy and rhetoric, connects with Abbott’s (1988) contention that

“jurisdiction has not only a culture, but also a social structure” (p. 59). Thus, studying boundary work in journalism must include but also go beyond the cultural studies approach of Zelizer (1992; 2004b) to account for material delimitations and their influence in shaping professionalism.⁵

Journalism as Profession

Occupational professionalism refers to the ability to “determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control the criteria by which to evaluate performance” (Freidson, 2011, p. 12). By that definition, journalism does not easily map onto the framework used by many scholars who study professions. Indeed, Noordegraaf (2007, p. 762) goes so far as to lump journalists among cartoonists, body piercers, and pet sitters as examples of occupational groups that have sought to portray and organize themselves as professionals, amid a “professionalization of everyone” (Wilensky, 1964) kind of environment.

Journalism, especially as it is practiced in the United States, lacks the trappings of a classical profession: It has no monopoly on the training and certification of its workforce, nor has the means to prevent others from engaging in its work, and, while it has self-policing mechanisms of ethical codes, its power to enforce compliance is minimal. As Kaplan (2006) concludes, “journalism distinctively lacks those attributes that would allow it to exercise an exclusive and unchallengeable franchise in narrating the social world” (p. 177), making it relatively “uninsulated” (Schudson, 1978). Because journalism is considered something of a hybrid “semi-profession” (Witschge & Nygren, 2009), researchers have attempted to “measure” the level of its professionalization by surveying journalists’ attitudes and values. The most famous of these efforts led the researchers to conclude that “the modern journalist is *of* a profession but not *in* one. ...

⁵ This emphasis on structure relates to the “field” approach to journalism studies inspired by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (for examples, see Benson & Neveu, 2005; Hovden, 2009; Schultz, 2007; Wiik, 2010), yet the scope of this paper does not allow for a full discussion in this vein.

The institutional forms of professionalism likely will always elude the journalist” (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996, p. 145).

However, the sociology of professions perspective encourages us to look beyond “trait” simplifications, to give up wondering where journalism falls on a professional spectrum between cardiologists and carpenters, and instead “inquire why and how the occupations of reporting and news editing achieved the professional status they did and how journalism may be attempting ... to raise that status” (Schudson & Anderson, 2008, p. 91). Cultural histories have explained how journalists adopted objectivity as a way of laying claim to social authority, being able to present their work as value-free and therefore credible, balanced, and “true” (e.g., Mindich, 1998; Schudson, 1978). Throughout much of the 20th century, journalism established institutional routines (e.g., the “inverted pyramid”) and organization-spanning norms (e.g., codes of ethics) that worked to accomplish the two purposes of professionalization (Noordegraaf, 2007): professional control (Freidson, 2001) and occupational closure (Abbott, 1988). Successful in their “professional project,” journalists could lay claim to greater social authority during much of the mass media era (Anderson, 2008b).⁶

This should not imply that professionalization is a stunt to fool the masses into subservience to a faux profession. On the contrary, there are many good consequences to professionalism as an organizing force: It socializes members to a collective identity and culture, lends autonomy and authority against outside critics, and emphasizes public service over financial profit—all of which benefit journalism (Beam, 1990). Of these features, autonomy has been considered the most essential in shielding journalism from the outside influences of government, sources, advertisers, and audience, enabling

⁶ Given the importance of specialized and “abstract” knowledge to the definition of a profession, journalism-as-a-profession has always been in an awkward position, as Schudson and Anderson (2008, p. 96) explain: “Journalism seems to simultaneously make a grandiose knowledge claim (that it possesses the ability to isolate, transmit, and interpret the most publicly relevant aspects of social reality) and an incredibly modest one (that really, most journalists are not experts at all but are simply question-asking generalists). Abbott’s framework, with its focus on knowledge and jurisdiction, helps us see immediately what makes journalism a sociologically anomalous profession.”

journalists to speak truth to power (McDevitt, Gassaway, & Perez, 2002). Such protection, however, never fully materialized for U.S. journalists, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of corporate mergers, cost-cutting, and managerial oversight—making journalists more subordinate to their organizational chieftains in comparison to their counterparts in law and medicine (Reese, 1999, p. 74).

In the years since, the threats to autonomy and authority have only grown. With the rise of digital media and “gotcha” comedy critiques, the legitimacy of journalists is being challenged on seemingly all sides by the likes of bloggers (Carlson, 2007; Singer, 2007), user-generated content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Robinson, 2010; Singer & Ashman, 2009; Williams et al., 2011), and satirical news anchors (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009). Related to these external forces are internal tensions, within news organizations, as professional desires collide with the interests of managers and technologists in the sensemaking and negotiation of digital and mobile media—including around the question of control vs. participation (Westlund, 2011, 2012). All of this stirs ongoing controversy about how to classify “good” journalism (Kunelius, 2006). Nonetheless, journalists have remained steadfast for decades in invoking professionalism as the basis from which to articulate, justify, and defend their claim to holding an essential position in a proper-functioning democracy (Deuze, 2005). In this sense, professionalism has an important part in the self-conception of journalists (Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008); it has guided them in discursively constructing their identity, expertise, authority, and power (Zelizer, 1992, p. 196), and thus in setting forth boundaries around their professional jurisdiction.

Society, on balance, has been the better because of journalistic professionalism, which generally has resulted in higher-quality news, gathered in an ethical fashion and with independence from corrupting influences. However, because professions, by nature, are closed to the outside world, they have been widely criticized as insular, ineffective, self-serving, and greedy (Noordegraaf, 2007). In the case of journalism, professionalism has been criticized as a means of social control (Soloski, 1989), hegemony (Reese, 1990),

and discipline by management (Evetts, 2003). Moreover, the professionalization process has made the press so inwardly focused on peer judgment and elite access—as professions are wont to do (Shirky, 2008, p. 58)—that it has lost much of its understanding for everyday people and their concerns; the essence of the public journalism movement was to correct this deficiency (Rosen, 1999). Finally, professionalism has led journalists to believe that they have exclusive claims on creating, filtering, and distributing something so sacred as “the first draft of history” (Edy, 1999). This has contributed to a mind-set of content control that, I argue, remains an enduring impediment to journalists’ capacity to change their perceptions and practices in the digital age. Indeed, this control logic is so deeply embedded it is ideological in nature.

Journalism as Ideology

Deuze (2005) argues that the whole arc of 20th century professionalization in journalism can be seen as “the consolidation of a consensual *occupational ideology* among journalists in different parts of the world” (p. 444, emphasis added). This occupational ideology of journalism (c.f., Golding & Elliott, 1979; Raaum, 1999; Reese, 1990; Schlesinger, 1978; Sjøvaag, 2010; Soloski, 1989; Zelizer, 2004b), which connects with Evetts’ (2003) conception of occupational professionalism as being ideological in nature, is defined as a representation of the values, strategies, and formal codes that most characterize journalism and the way its members “validate and give meaning to their work” (Deuze, 2005, p. 446). Regardless of media type, format and genre, all journalists “carry the ideology of journalism” (p. 445), which in part explains how they are able to coordinate their approaches around the globe (Reese, 2001), and why they often more readily identify with the profession than with their organization (Russo, 1998; Ryfe, 2009).

Deuze (2005) categorizes this ideology as a set of five discursively constructed ideal-typical traits: public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics. The

implicit thread underlying them is that professional journalists derive much of their sense of purpose and prestige through their *control of information* in their normative roles. In other words, they take for granted the idea that society *needs them* as journalists—and journalists alone—to fulfill the functions of watchdog publishing, truth-telling, independence, timeliness, and ethical adherence in the context of news and public affairs.⁷ Deuze calls this “one of the most fundamental ‘truths’ in journalism, namely: the professional journalist is the one who determines what publics see, hear and read about the world” (p. 451). This notion of journalistic control serves to tie together the essential elements of professionalism, forming the basis of what I refer to elsewhere (Lewis, 2010; 2012) as a *professional logic*—the collectively shared and taken-for-granted assumptions underlying the belief that journalists, acting in their normative roles, ought to wield gatekeeping control over news content on behalf of society. This professional logic serves as a general conceptual frame through which to organize the discourse on journalism’s norms, routines, and values.

Connecting this to the discussion of boundary work above, it’s important to note that an occupational ideology, as it changes over time, excludes or marginalizes certain ideas or values just as surely as it codifies and makes salient others (Deuze, 2007, p. 163)—in effect, reinforcing boundaries of who counts as a journalist (Weinhold, 2010). Likewise, as debates regularly circulate through the profession—e.g., on the pursuit of audience metrics (Anderson, 2011a), the incorporation of social media (Braun & Gillespie, 2011; Hermida, 2011b, 2012; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Kaufhold, 2011), and other adaptations associated with new media—journalists generally return to ideological values that “can be deployed to sustain operational closure, *keeping outside forces at bay*” (Deuze, 2005, p. 447, emphasis added). In this sense, the professional logic of control is closely associated with the boundary work of journalism, the former acting as the anchor

⁷ For a related and thorough discussion on the social contract of the press, see Sjøvaag (2010).

point around which to formulate the latter. This article is concerned with this interplay: how a sense of journalistic control is articulated, and how that articulation is connected with the forging of jurisdictional claims—and, ultimately, how such boundary maintenance occurs within the material and cultural framework of media digitization.

2. DIGITAL MEDIA AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

This struggle for control over content, sometimes depicted as a “war” between corporate and grassroots interests (Jenkins, 2006), might imply that audience activity has arrived with digital developments in user-generated content (UGC)—that all of this user engagement is somehow *new* (c.f., Peters, 2009). That, of course, is not the case. Van Dijck (2009) calls it a “historical fallacy” to assume that end-user participation is unique to the read-write web, noting that so-called “passive” viewership in the mass media heyday still afforded opportunities for active interpretation of cultural signs.

Nevertheless, what sets apart the present media moment is the *ease* with which individuals may participate in the creation and distribution of media, on a scale and with a reach unimaginable in earlier times, mainly because of the internet. This shift has been particularly evident since the mid-2000s emergence of what O’Reilly (2005) called Web 2.0—a second generation of internet applications focused on participatory information creation, tagging, sharing, and remixing—as well as the present fascination with social media spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus. The overall Web 2.0 paradigm, wherein tech companies rely almost entirely on user-generated content for monetization, has become “*the* cultural logic for e-business—a set of corporate practices that seek to capture and exploit participatory culture” (Jenkins et al., forthcoming). This reconfiguration of the relationship between producers and audiences raises concerns about digital serfdom to corporations; it also points to the unsettled tension around control, as Web 2.0 sites, with their dynamic interfaces and low barriers to participation,

encourage users to feel very much in control of their self-presentation, even as they operate within the (unseen) constraints of the platform (Gillespie, 2010). In this way, “users actively apply the affordances of new technologies in the service of *their own creative and instrumental objectives*, and ... the desire to do so seems to be literally distributed among those online” (Harrison & Barthel, 2009, p. 161, emphasis added).⁸

These changes in media life (Deuze, 2012) can be viewed through the lens of what Henry Jenkins (2006) calls “convergence culture,” which recognizes that longstanding distinctions between media creation and media consumption are becoming increasingly fluid. Convergence culture acknowledges the top-down, corporate-driven acceleration of media content across multiple channels. On the other hand, it also recognizes bottom-up, grassroots influences whereby “users are learning how to master these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their *control* and to interact (and co-create) with other users” (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008, p. 6).

Perhaps the most significant element of this convergence process is that it’s not merely a technological phenomenon, but also a cultural one as well. This cultural element is often referred to as *participatory culture* (Jenkins, 1992; Jenkins, 2006) or *digital culture* (Deuze, 2006; Karaganis, 2007), and it emphasizes the extent to which end-users feel enabled and encouraged to participate in the creation and circulation of media. Jenkins (2006) argues that the “power of participation comes not from destroying commercial culture but from writing over it, modding it, amending it, expanding it, adding greater diversity of perspective, and then recirculating it, feeding it back into the mainstream media” (p. 157) (e.g., Dena, 2008). Elsewhere, this concept of blending production and consumption of information is referred to as “produsage” (Bruns, 2008), and is evident in hybrid user-contributor communities such as Wikipedia and Second Life. However, this convergence—of digital technology and culture, of production and

⁸ For a further discussion of controversies associated with Web 2.0 applications, see Fuchs (2011).

consumption processes, and of corporate and grassroots interests—is not without its discontents (Van Dijck & Nieborg, 2009); they argue that internet hype serves to hide the political economy implications of a co-creation model encouraging free-labor exploitation (e.g., see concerns expressed by Allen, 2008; Scholz, 2008; Terranova, 2000). Moreover, critics charge that user-generated content represents little more than amateurish reactions to professionally produced content, as opposed to media creations that are original and culturally valuable (c.f., Keen, 2007). Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that users enjoy participating in co-creation, or at least see it as something other than labor exploitation (Banks & Deuze, 2009; Banks & Humphreys, 2008), and user participation has contributed to the overall breadth and diversity of media representation—including the enhanced reach afforded by citizen journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009).

At its core, media participation is about collectivism and equal contribution (or potential there for) on the part of all users. The theoretical roots of participatory culture can be traced to Pierre Lévy's (1997) notion of collective intelligence, which posits that knowledge is richest and most accurate when it reflects the pooled inputs of a distributed population, as opposed to the expertise of a single agent. This concept has been popularized as the “wisdom of crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004), and has been employed by organizations to harvest collective intellect through outsourcing corporate activities to the public through an open call—a process otherwise known as crowdsourcing (Brabham, 2008; Howe, 2008; Muthukumaraswamy, 2010). Because “no one knows everything, everyone knows something, [and] all knowledge resides in humanity” (Lévy, 1997, pp. 13-14), digital technologies have been instrumental in lowering the cost of coordinating human wisdom and action across time and space (Brabham, 2008, p. 80). This, then, becomes the ultimate forging of technology and society in participatory culture: Digitization *enables* greater user participation on a seemingly infinite order, and the

socio-cultural context of this technology has *encouraged* greater participation to achieve normative aims of collective wisdom and well-being.

Participation and its Ideology

Many scholars and commentators (e.g., see Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Negroponte, 1995; Rheingold, 1993) have claimed that the changes wrought by the internet architecture of participation are no less than “epochal” (Shirky, 2008, p. 18), contending that when the means of communication dramatically change, societies inevitably change. As Shirky (2008) has argued, the big switch is the sudden ease with which formerly atomized individuals may connect and collaborate.⁹

Participation, in this socio-technological view, is a function of *individual* agency engaged to address *collective* concerns, using the mix of motivations and affordances of digital cultures and technologies to solve group problems. Inherent in this is a de-institutional emphasis that puts power and control in the hands of end-users, *with the normative aim of achieving collective intelligence*. I would suggest there is a logic to this: If the ideology of professionalism is one of expert control, then the ideology of de-professionalized participation may be one of distributed control, of facilitating and fostering engagement through an open system of communication. I put special emphasis here on *engagement*, as a normative concept of this ideology, suggesting that good societies are engaged societies—they are robust and active, dialogical and diverse, freely sharing ideas and information. We might think of this as a “networked” variation on Habermas’ idealized public sphere (1991), featuring the same animated deliberation, but with a network arrangement that is more horizontal (peer-to-peer), and more representative of marginalized voices vis-à-vis “coffee house” interests.

⁹ Shirky (2008, pp. 17, 21) writes: “We are living in the middle of a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations. ... Now that there is competition to traditional institutional forms for getting things done, those institutions will continue to exist, but their purchase on modern life will weaken as novel alternatives for group action arise.”

Thus, as an undergirding philosophy of the culture described by Jenkins (2006), participation-as-ideology encompasses the idea system of distributing control over content to end-users for the normative purpose of achieving a more engaged, representative, and collectively intelligent society.

Perhaps the best example of participation-as-ideology in action is the free and open source software (F/OSS) movement (Coleman, 2004). It is about both “operating systems and social systems” (Kelty, 2008, p. 57)—both architecture and culture, both peer-to-peer networks (Benkler, 2006) and a communal ethos embedded in them (Turner, 2005b). F/OSS relies on non-monetary forms of reward, and is galvanized by the idea of working in the open, being transparent, and serving public interests rather than proprietary-focused profits—as in the case of computer programmers imagining themselves as warriors against the evil forces of Microsoft (Weber, 2004). This common-cause kind of ethos is important for understanding how collaborative projects like Wikipedia can grow and succeed (Reagle, 2010). Even though members of any network have uneven claims to social, financial, and reputational authority and capital, nevertheless the *rhetoric* of communality allows participants to construct an ethical framework in which “they can be imagined as peers devoted to a collective mission” (Turner, 2009, p. 77).

This article is concerned with how open participation is framed in discourse and deployed in practice, and how it relates to the professional logic of control in the boundary work of journalism. If the former represents an open system of distributed participation, the latter is a closed system of professional jurisdiction. In the case of journalism, this is not a normative statement about which kind of system is right, for they each may be appropriate under different circumstances; rather, the open vs. closed dichotomy serves to cast in sharp relief the inherent challenges one poses to the other. From the perspective of journalism’s ideology, the digitization of media and the forms of

participation together may well present a locus of *chaos* compared to the professional desire for *control*.

3. PROFESSIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY LOGICS IN JOURNALISM

Just as fan culture did not begin with the internet, participation in the news process has long since been part of journalism. However, such feedback was always limited in scope (e.g., confined to the letters-to-the-editor page) and subject to editorial purview in the publication process (hence the power of gatekeeping control). What is different about digital forms of participation is the potential volume and scope that it entails: With the restraints of time and space removed from the “news hole,” there are seemingly infinite possibilities for user contribution to the news. As news professionals have wrestled with this emerging reality during the past 15 years (e.g., see O’Sullivan & Heinonen, 2008; Singer, 2010), they have confronted vexing questions about the degree and kind of participation to allow in their news spaces online—from the most basic level of comments on a news story, on up to wiki-style exercises in collective writing and editing (e.g., Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010; Singer et al., 2011; Thurman, 2008; Wardle & Williams, 2010). The underlying question is rarely stated but certainly implied: *How much control over content should we give up, and why?* After all, as a newspaper editor told Robinson (2007), “Someone has gotta be in control here” (p. 311).

The question of control arises out of a longstanding tension for journalists: on the one hand, a deeply embedded desire to retain professional autonomy because news-decision judgment conveys status and authority; yet, on the other hand, a recognition that the public service role of the press entails encouraging civic participation and active deliberation (Williams et al., 2011). Much of the public journalism movement (Glasser, 1999; Haas, 2007; Rosenberry & St. John III, 2010) was engaged around rehabilitating

this second ideal, captured in James Carey's (1987, p. 14) contention that the public "will begin to awaken when they are addressed as conversational partners and are encouraged to join the talk rather than sit passively as spectators before a discussion conducted by journalists and experts." With the introduction of citizen journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009)—in other places referred to as open-source (Deuze, 2001), participatory (Bowman & Willis, 2003), grassroots (Gillmor, 2004), and networked (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Jarvis, 2006) journalism—Carey's vision for a co-creative, conversational public suddenly became possible, at least for the digitally connected; with this too, however, came the specter of parajournalists threatening the jurisdictional claims of professionals by fulfilling some of the functions of publishing, filtering, and sharing information.

Thus far, the literature has suggested that, in the face of this perceptual and practical threat, journalists generally fall back on professional defenses: they cling to enduring values, take tentative steps to change, and then—even when opening the gates to participation—tend to co-opt participatory practices to suit traditional routines and ideals (Williams et al., 2011). This intractability, Lowrey (2009, 2011) argues, can be explained by new institutionalism, which theorizes that actors seek public legitimacy by sticking to core competencies, even when rational decision-making would call for change. Thus, even as journalists incorporate new media (such as Twitter) and related new practices (such as dialogue with social media users), the gravitational pull is toward normalization (Lasorsa et al., 2011)—the transfer of professional and organizational norms to digital media rather than rethink why those established conventions exist in the first place (Hermida, 2012). Likewise, the boundary work perspective suggests that professions naturally seek to patrol and preserve their familiar jurisdiction, while also colonizing activities occurring at the periphery, like blogging and user-generated content. Thus, as several key works have shown (e.g., Singer et al., 2011), a consistent theme found in empirical studies of the professional-participatory tension is that journalists respond by reasserting control—normalizing alternative media formats to meet existing

needs (Singer, 2005), approaching audience material opportunistically (Bruno, 2011), or otherwise allowing user content in but shunting it to the periphery (Domingo et al., 2008; c.f., Karlsson, 2011). In this aversion to opening up meaningful phases of the news process, journalists prefer to frame audiences as “active recipients” who act when news occurs and react when journalists report on it (Hermida, 2011a).

Yet, how long can such resistance persist? In the struggle between the professional logic of control, embedded in journalism’s ideology, and the participatory logic of free engagement, embedded in the substance and culture of digital media, surely something has to give, especially as journalists increasingly work with and through social/participatory media spaces. Indeed, there is emerging evidence—small but significant—that journalism’s ideological commitment to control, rooted in an institutional instinct toward protecting legitimacy and boundaries, may be giving way to a hybrid logic of adaptability and openness: a willingness to see audiences on a more peer level, to appreciate their contributions, and to find normative purpose in transparency and participation, à la open-source technology culture (Usher & Lewis, 2012). Hermida’s (2012) review of social media journalism suggests that as Twitter and Facebook become routinized elements of news work, “the affordances and culture of social media are influencing how newsrooms are reporting the news, leading to discussions on key principles such as impartiality, verification and professional behavior.” Typifying this renegotiation is NPR’s Andy Carvin and his work curating messages on Twitter, a process he refers to as “another flavor of journalism” (Farhi, 2011) and one that has garnered him celebrity status among fellow journalists. During the Arab Spring of 2011, he famously gathered and circulated bits of data from disparate sources on Twitter, often asked his nearly 50,000 followers to help confirm information, and altogether organized his tweet stream into a “living, breathing real-time verification system” and perhaps “the world’s best Twitter account,” in the words of the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Silverman, 2011). Carvin sees his work as “an open-source newsroom that anyone can

come and participate in, or observe the process” (quoted in Sonderman, 2011). While Carvin’s case may be relatively unique, the fact that his efforts have been widely lauded by peers as the model for social media journalism reinforces an emerging logic of openness to participation on the part of professionals.

Likewise, Robinson’s (2011) comprehensive investigation of the ongoing shift from “journalism as product” to “journalism as process” revealed that journalists and audiences both recognize, and respect, what citizens can contribute when news becomes a mutually shared *process*, requiring forms of “work” from both groups. Even while clinging to some “old-world standards,” journalists nevertheless opened the boundaries of their practice to lend “legitimacy” to participation, even showing enthusiasm for audience engagement (pp. 198-199). Finally, and at a more macro level, my own research (Lewis, 2010; 2011; 2012) has shown how the influential Knight Foundation (mentioned above) has altered the rhetorical and material boundaries of journalism jurisdiction—moving away from “journalism” and its professional exclusivity, and toward “information” and its openness as a way of seeking the wisdom of the crowd to solve journalism’s problems. By dropping its patrol of traditional professional boundaries, Knight has sought to create space for external actors (like technologists) to step in and bring innovation to journalism—while at the same time allowing concepts on the periphery of journalism, like citizen participation, to be embraced as founding doctrines of news innovation. The result, I argue, has been the emergence of an “ethic of participation,” seeded in a hybrid resolution of the professional–participatory tension, that envisions audience integration as a normative goal of a truly digital journalism. In short, Knight is helping to further the idea that journalism in this space not only *can* be participatory but indeed *should* be.

Journalism studies, in the aggregate, thus suggests that the fundamental tension between professional control and open participation, or between producer and user in news, is one of mismatched ethics and expectations: Journalism’s identity and ideology remain rooted in a one-way publishing mind-set at a time when media are becoming a

multi-way network (Singer, 2010). The sociology of professions framework predicts that occupational actors do not easily abandon jurisdictional claims once they are established, much as journalists have been reluctant to relinquish the gatekeeping control so central to their identity and purpose. And yet, a trickle of empirical data is beginning to suggest a “slow philosophical shifting” (Robinson, 2010, p. 140) that could portend a resolution to the professional–participatory tension. This is more than simply making peace with participation as a fact of life on news websites (Singer et al., 2011), but hints at a deeper rethinking that may be occurring—among journalists and their organizations, and among institutional actors like Knight that help shape the profession’s discourse and culture. This, then, may lead to a revised logic for journalism: one that preserves certain ethical practices and boundaries that lend legitimacy, abandons jurisdictional claims that have lost their currency in the new environment, and embraces fresh values, such as open participation, that are more compatible with the logic of digital media and culture.

Going forward, the challenge for researchers will be to track the contours of this nascent boundary work: *How* (in what kinds of discourse and practice), *where* (virtually in digital niches, spatially in newsrooms, or geographically across regions and media systems), and *why* (under what normative considerations) does the professional logic of control become rearticulated (or not) in relation to the participatory logic? This broad framing of the question encourages us to consider both the cultural/rhetorical *and* structural/material nature of this boundary work (in line with Abbott, 1988), and to do so using traditional research methods such as newsroom ethnography (Cottle, 2007; Domingo & Paterson, 2011) as well as alternative approaches attuned to the many splintering forms of journalism as media work becomes increasingly precarious and contingent, detached from the stability afforded by institutions (Deuze, 2007; Deuze & Marjoribanks, 2009).

These alternative methods might include an actor-network analysis of news production (Anderson, 2011b; Hemmingway, 2008; Plesner, 2009; Schmitz Weiss &

Domingo, 2010; Turner, 2005a), which encourages researchers to consider technical artifacts as important “actors,” along with humans, in the shaping of technological systems (Latour, 2005). To this we can add an innovation in the study of boundary work: Star and Griesemer’s (1989, p. 393) notion of “boundary objects,” which direct attention to objects, abstract or concrete, that have different meanings to different communities but which carry enough commonality to allow translation between two social worlds. Combining actor-network theory (ANT) and the concepts of boundary work/objects, researchers of professionalism might fruitfully “follow the objects” as much as “follow the people” in attempting to understand how identities, norms, and jurisdiction are negotiated in the cultural and technological architecture of journalism and participation. Anderson (2011b) suggests that ANT can be used to study the dynamic production and diffusion of news by focusing attention on the entire ensemble of technological devices, human actors, documents, and hyperlinks—not merely the newsroom alone. Ananny (forthcoming) proposes that scholars examine online commenting systems, recommendation algorithms, and news aggregators as boundary objects through which to see the presence and influence of an intersecting group of actors: professional journalists, system designers, and participating readers. This attention to the diversity, or “heterogeneity” (Braun, 2011), of the actors and resources in play ultimately captures dynamics that might elude one using a traditional media sociology framework.

Beyond innovations in methods and methodology, we need a fresh set of analytical perspectives through which to organize and theorize the professional–participatory tension in media work. In this special issue, Loosen and Schmidt (2012) propose a model of audience inclusion in journalism that accounts for the enduring asymmetry between producers and users while also acknowledging the blurring boundaries between them. The power of their heuristic comes in providing the conceptual framework both to synthesize existing research and to operationalize elements that should be examined in future studies of participation in news and networked media broadly. This

includes assessing distinctions between *performance* (practices and their results) and *expectations* (attitudes, norms, and perceptions), both within and across the categories of journalism and audience, and even in comparison with other social systems. Additionally, Ostertag and Tuchman's (2012) case study, also in this special issue, reinforces the need for examining political-economic conditions that impede participatory journalism and reinforce the "ideological inertia of legacy, market-dominated models of newsmaking."

Ultimately, and extrapolating from this case of journalism's professional-participatory nexus, I argue that the study of the creative industries and their producer-user tension requires a theoretical and methodological toolbox oriented, first and foremost, to the study of professionalization—namely, its role in shaping the boundaries, both discursive and material, around control over content. Such a focus on the professional project, however, need not be limited to the more "classical" media professions like journalism, nor imply a sociology framework alone. Rather, this emphasis on professionalization points to the need for understanding media workers' sense of distinctiveness amid increasingly indistinct media boundaries. We might ask: How strong is that sense of professional distinctiveness—of exclusivity, authority, or expertise—and how is it associated with the management of user control in the context of different classes of media work? How is the professional logic of control negotiated within increasingly complex networks of users, digital media, and affordances of participation? Given the centrality of media in everyday life, and the expanding role for users to engage with and, as it were, live *within* media (Deuze, 2012), it becomes all the more salient to examine how media professionals—still the primary sense-makers in the information environment—make sense of control *vis-à-vis* open collaboration beyond the boundaries.

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