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Journalism Studies

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Abstract

This entry traces the history of journalism studies and asks whether journalism studies are a discipline or field or research method. Different interests involved in journalism studies – journalists, journalism educators and journalism scholars - make it difficult to find a single vision of what it entails. As a new field it requires its own methodologies even though these may be borrowed from other disciplines. It also requires its own body of literature. The origins of journalism studies are somewhat imprecise but we can identify five phases of evolution: normative, empirical turn, sociological turn, global-comparative turn, and digital turn. Journalism studies also encompass the education of journalists. Many journalism scholars now reside in journalism departments side by side with their practitioner colleagues. Historically the study and practice of journalism was entwined over the debate of whether the occupation of journalism should be regarded as a craft or a profession and indeed its place in the academy.

Keywords

[Include your keywords, at least three at the minimum and a maximum of eight]

Main Text

What are journalism studies? Or maybe a better question is: How do you do journalism studies? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to either question. It is not a discipline or a research method. Rather, it is an interdisciplinary field, which combines theory, usually conducted in the academy, and practice, previously learnt through apprenticeships in the industry but which is nowadays taught mainly in the academy, and functions outside of academic settings. Journalism studies has a relatively short history, but its embryology can be traced back not only to the beginnings of communication studies and later media studies but also to the disciplines of sociology, political science, history, law, English, and social psychology. Although not disciplines in the conventional sense, film studies and cultural studies should also gain honorable mentions when understanding journalism studies. Different interests involved in journalism studies make it difficult to find a single vision of what it entails. Three main actors involved in journalism studies – journalists, journalism educators, and journalism scholars – differ as to what is the field of journalism (Zelizer, 2009). An additional continuing conundrum facing the new

field of journalism studies is the nature of the occupation of journalism, a problem touched upon by earlier scholars. Is it a craft, a trade or a profession? Journalistic culture is constantly being transformed and the current 'de-professionalisation' of the practice in the information and digital age is further muddying the debate over whether journalism was ever a profession in the sense that the law and medicine are recognized. Unlike these classical professions, the depth of abstract knowledge on which the practice of journalism is based is limited while the emphasis on practical skills brings it closer to a craft than a profession. As a field advances and matures it develops its own body of theory and literature. It requires a body of primary and secondary texts on which to found itself. Books addressed to journalism scholars have mushroomed in recent years aiding the consolidation of the field and increasing the visibility of journalism studies texts around the globe. A new field also requires its own methodologies. Up until recently, journalism studies could hardly claim to have its own methodology. It has tended to borrow or import methods from other disciplines, such as ethnography, framing, content analysis, textual analysis, political economy, discourse analysis, focus groups, surveys. These varied methodologies are used in conducting journalism studies research, indicating the eclectic nature of journalism's scholarship. The changing developments in journalism, however, are necessitating the field to devise new methodologies, or bring back old ones, in order to research into areas such as data, and social media.

Origins of Journalism Studies

The origins of journalism studies are somewhat imprecise. Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009, p. 4) identify four phases in the history of journalism research – normative, empirical turn, sociological turn, and global-comparative turn. The normative theories of journalism studies research are generally viewed as emanating from German social theorists in the mid-19th century, who were more preoccupied with what journalism ought to be rather than the production of news. Classic studies on journalists and editorial structures such as those on gatekeeping, news values, and agenda setting signal the empirical turn in journalism studies alongside those studies that preceded them, which were based on administrative research and conducted by scholars such as Carl Hovland, Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin, and Harold Lasswell. Their work "within the social sciences had a profound impact on the production of knowledge about journalism... drawing on experiments and surveys to understand the working of the news media" (Hanitzsch and Wahl-Jorgensen 2008, p. 6).

Most of the work in the 1950s came from outside sociology, and it was not until the 1970s that sociologists' research in journalism studies began to emerge, producing crucial insights for the development of the field. Sociology built a body of work enabling a coherent narrative of existing practices in journalism and news organisations. Research in the 1970s and 1980s primarily focused on news production practices in the United States and the United Kingdom. Using interviews, direct observation and ethnography, researchers explored routinized practices, power relations and institutional connections from a critical perspective. It is a period often characterized as the golden age of production studies.

Increased globalization and the development of new communication technologies saw the 1990s identified as the beginning of the global-comparative turn, in which researchers began to conduct more international and comparative research, as Löffelholz and Weaver (2008:3) asserted

“journalism research can no longer operate within national or cultural borders only“. Questions were asked as to how can journalism studies be reoriented to the global in a way that does not conceive of ‘other journalisms’ as separate, nation-based sets of practices, institutions or ideologies but as globally interrelated? (Wasserman 2011).

The global turn also involved work which called for a “reaction against the self-absorption and parochialism of much western media theory” (Curran and Park, 2000, p. 2). There was a reaction to dominant debates in journalism studies still largely centred on challenges and dilemmas faced in the Global North. Other scholars extended this call across the journalism curriculum, as well as the research agenda, to include a reorientation towards the global rather than just give a nod to the rest of the world by having a module on global journalism or international reporting (Wasserman 2011). Perhaps the only niche looking South was the work on development journalism conducted during the 1960s and 70s. The majority of this work concentrated on normative ideals suitable for newly independent countries rather than copying the types of journalism left by imperial empires. In recent years the debate about development journalism has centred on its definition – journalists as: agents of social change; nation builders; partners of government; watch dogs; guardians of transparency; non adversarial; communitarians. (Romano 2005; Waisbord 2009) Even the term itself has been criticised as being “hollowed -out and an anachronistic concept” (Waisbord (2009, p153).

The global turn has also witnessed a growing body of research from outside the Anglo American sphere. In the 1990s European journalism scholarship for example began to grow out of the interest in comparative media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004) with a special interest in media policies and the nature of a European public sphere and the role and place of journalism in this development. The 2000s saw many studies examining European journalism reporting on Europe and the EU with a proliferation of Europe-wide comparative research projects on news and journalism (Ornebring 2017).

The digital turn

It is possible now to identify a fifth phase – the digital turn – which is mostly framed around a crisis in journalism. “Digital media have disrupted journalistic practices, upended economic models, introduced new voices, challenged normative commitments, and offered novel ways of accessing news” (Carlson and Lewis, 2018, p. 3) The response from the academy to these changes has been threefold. The first is a re-assessment, or rather a replay, of the sociological turn, to fit the new environment in journalism. The lack of sociological theory and methods with which to engage in the analysis of new media forms, new practices and structures is noted in recent work. A recent collection edited by Waisbord (2014) provides a disparate and comprehensive reappraisal of media sociology and journalism and its possible use in analyzing contemporary phenomena of journalisms institutions, industries and audiences, representations, and digital technologies. A further volume edited by Alexander, Breese and Luengo (2016) proposes a cultural-sociological approach to the crisis of journalism that “draws attention to the cultural commitment of journalism itself” (p. i). Within the sociological response, journalism studies are also seeing the return of ethnography and network ethnography. Whether sociology can ever be truly reconciled with media and communication generally, and journalism studies in particular, remains in doubt because of sociology’s previous abandonment and loss of interest in

the topic of communication (Pooley and Katz, 2006), and also in the “opening of journalism and communication departments over subsequent decades offering a home to media sociologists” (Waisbord 2014, p. 2).

The second response signals attempts at new definitions and theories of journalism. Scholars searching for a framework to analyse new forms of producing news in the digital age argue the need for multidisciplinary work to comprehend a new paradigm. This multi-disciplinary approach has led to new work, for example, on hybridity, which focuses on the heterogeneous domain of news and journalism and time. It argues that “traditional journalistic values of impartiality and objectivity, and fixed notions that confine journalism to ‘news’ and ‘information’, have lost much of their credence and authority. These categories have come to coexist and interact with other notions and values which have emerged, like immediacy, appeal and affect” (Mast, Coesemans and Temmerman, 2017, p. 3). The ‘digital turn’ has led to other scholars proposing new definitions or classifications of journalism such as ecologies of news and boundaries of journalism, new normative perspectives, new theories and reimaginings, and journalism and democracy.

The third response is shaped by the political context of particularly populism and in some cases increasing authoritarianism, in which journalism currently operates. Here, the main focus is on trust and secrecy, with research concerned with topics like fact-checking, fake news, secrecy, whistleblowing, transparency, surveillance and big data. A final element of the political sphere are the dangers that journalists face not only in covering war and conflict but also by the attacks on them by governments, organised crime, and terrorist groups (Cottle, Sambrook & Modsell, 2016). Multidisciplinary research is evident in the attention paid by journalism studies scholars together with law academics not only in documenting deaths and injuries to journalists but also to the culture of impunity that exists among many states who are either unwilling or unable to deter crimes against journalists by ensuring that the perpetrators are held to account. The culture of impunity infringes the journalist’s right to life, personal security and free speech, has a chilling effect on the media in general, and effects the public’s right to information (Drachi 2015).

Education

Journalism studies also encompass the education of journalists. Many journalism scholars now reside in journalism departments, sitting side by side (albeit sometimes uneasily) with their practitioner colleagues. Historically the study and practice of journalism was entwined over the debate of whether the occupation of journalism should be regarded as a craft or a profession and indeed its place in the academy. At the beginning of the twentieth century colleges in the United States began to formalize journalism education, introducing courses on journalism into their curriculum, but remaining largely focused on vocational training. The first evident changes began in 1910 with the Universities of Wisconsin and Missouri introducing specific course in the first departments of journalism. This was followed two years later with the beginning of journalism courses at Columbia University. Journalism as both a vocational and intellectual exercise is subjected to influences from both academia and industry. Journalism education has to incorporate ‘idealist and ‘realist’ aspirations and both ‘practical’ and ‘intellectual’ dimensions

(Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005, p. 69). Outside of the United States, journalism education was based on apprenticeships within news organisations, where training consisted of skills-based short courses such as shorthand and media law. Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009, p. 9) suggest that this training outside of the academy maybe one of the key reasons for the historically interdisciplinary nature of journalism studies. In countries where there was a separation of journalism training from the academy, most scholarship on journalism came from social sciences and humanities (ibid). In the twenty-first century, journalism schools are embracing other disciplines into their curricula as a response to the perceived crisis of journalism. Initiatives in the USA and Europe have sought to widen the curriculum in order to prepare future journalists and news industry leaders for facing both an increasingly complex world and the challenge of working in the new global information society (Tumber, 2005, p. 552). Schools of journalism have to prepare students for an uncertain future. New graduates are unable to rely on having a so-called job for life in traditional or legacy media. The new journalists are required to be flexible, work on demand, and develop digital skills to cope with constantly changing tasks. Portfolio careers will be the norm and entrepreneurial flair necessary for success in the industry.

Associations and Journals

Reflecting the increasing interest and subsequent autonomy of journalism as field of research and education, scholars set up a new interest group called 'Journalism Studies' inside the International Communication Association (ICA) in 2004. The intention was to promote journalism theory and research, as well as professional education in journalism. A few years later, the interest group, having become very popular among members, became a division of the ICA. A similar section and working group was also set up in the International Association for Media and Communication (IAMCR). The establishment of these divisions in the two premier global communications associations were followed by new groups in regional organisations, such as the European Communication and Education Association (ECEA). These academic forums for journalism scholars were preceded a few years earlier by the foundation of two new journals in 2000 dedicated to journalism scholarship namely *Journalism: Theory Practice and Criticism* (Sage) and *Journalism Studies* (Routledge). Their success measured by their growth and impact factors testifies to the growing influence of journalism studies within the communication field. Both these important publications added to the journalism studies corpus of mainly regional journals and reviews including: *African Journalism Studies*, *American Journalism Review*, *Brazilian Journalism Research*, *British Journalism Review*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Global Journalism Review*, and *Pacific Journalism Review*. All these new endeavors were the result of a number of factors including more academics self-identifying as journalism scholars, an increase in departments of journalism studies, and the increased pressure on academics to publish. Ironically, the well-documented crisis of journalism, whether caused by the globalization of the media industries, the development of new electronic communication technologies, the rise in new forms of citizen journalism, and the decline in public trust, or a combination of all four, has seen a consequent exorable rise in both an interest in and maturity of journalism studies.

So what is the future for Journalism studies. The most obvious point to make is that it is

inextricably bound up with the challenges and opportunities that journalism itself faces. Journalism studies will need to adapt and develop both concepts and methodologies to analyse the various elements that constitute the ‘crisis’ of journalism including the changing economics of traditional media, the casualization of labour, the of censorship driven by populism and authoritarianism, and the attacks on journalists by various actors, state and non state. Journalism studies must also contemplate becoming more inclusive to fields previously at the fringe of journalism scholarship including areas such as literary journalism and translation while at the same time drawing on law, business and computing to analyse the digital transformation of society.

SEE ALSO:

[Include cross-references here (related articles). See the cross-references list on the ScholarOne homepage.]

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Howard Tumber is Professor of Journalism and Communication, formerly, Professor of Sociology, and Dean of Arts and Social Sciences at City, University of London, UK. He is the founder and co-editor of *Journalism: Theory Practice and Criticism*, and the author, co-author, editor, co-editor of nine books including: *Routledge Companion to Media and Human Rights* (Routledge, 2017), *Journalism* (4 volumes) (Routledge, 2008), *Journalists under Fire* (Routledge, 2006), *Media at War: the Iraq Crisis* (SAGE, 2004), *Media Power, Policies and Professionals* (Routledge: 2000), *News: A Reader* (Oxford University Press, 1999), *Reporting Crime* (Clarendon Press, 1994), *Journalists at War* (SAGE, 1988), *Television and Riots* (British Film Institute, 1982).