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Journalisticas nyeste nummer handler om 'journalistik på kanten'. Det er en metafor, som forstås og behandles med stor variation i de seks artikler – i organisatorisk forstand som grænser for nyhedsorganisationer i en presset situation med blandt andet digitalisering og automatisering, som dækning af emner og fænomener 'på kanten' som fx racisme, metoo og fake news-medier og som journalisters overtrædelse af professionelle normer, som vi fx ser det i medieskandaler. Sigurd Allern fra Universitetet i Oslo og Mark Blach-Ørsten fra Roskilde Universitet, der er temanummerets redaktører, introducerer til både temaet og de enkelte artikler på de kommende sider. Vi har ligesom i sidste temanummer artikler med fra hele Norden – nu også Finland – og vores vision om at gøre Journalistica til et mødested for nordiske journalistikforskere synes virkelig at tage form.

Uden for temaet om journalistik på kanten bringer vi i dette nummer også **Ida Klitgårds** artikel om nyhedssatire. Klitgård analyserer og diskuterer, hvordan selvbestaltede sundhedseksperter, der i stigende grad er vundet frem på sociale medier under COVID-19-pandemien, har været genstand for satire hos det danske nyhedssatiriske website RokokoPosten. Klitgård argumenterer for, at 'eksperterne' bliver parodieret i en form for Orwellsk 'dobbelttænk' i et forsøg på at bidrage til befolkningens kritiske refleksion over eksplosionen af ekspertkilder og de mange (mis)informationer, der under pandemien har floreret på sociale medier. I en pandemi, hvor vi samtidig oplever en infodemi eller disinfodemi, argumenterer Klitgård for, at nyhedssatire ved selv at fordreje sandheden kan være med til at udstille netop denne praksis og måske derigennem tjene som en form for vaccination mod den massive informationsstrøm med mere eller mindre korrekte informationer, som mange mennesker giver udtryk for at være trætte af og måske har svært ved at navigere i.

Nummeret afrundes med en boganmeldelse af **Martin Eide** fra Universitetet i Bergen, der anmelder Victor Pickards *Democracy Without Journalism. Confronting the Misinformation Society*.

I den praktiske afdeling har vi siden sidst haft nogle udskiftninger i redaktionen, hvor Kim Andersen fra Syddansk Universitet er trådt ud, mens Lene Heiselberg fra Syddansk Universitet, Jannie Møller Hartley fra Roskilde Universitet og Steffen Moestrup fra Danmarks Medie- og Journalisthøjskole er trådt ind. Mette Bengtsson er i forbindelse med jobskifte fra Roskilde Universitet til Københavns Universitet ikke længere hovedredaktør, men fungerer nu som almindeligt redaktionsmedlem. Journalistica er dermed fortsat solidt forankret på de institutioner, der uddanner journalister og huser journalistforskere i Danmark.

Som det sidste kan vi fortælle, at Journalistica fra det nye år får en ny udgivelsesstruktur, der betyder, at artikler publiceres løbende og samles i et nummer ved årets udgang. Der bliver derved fremover en fast udgivelsesstruktur med ét nummer pr. år. Det, der tidligere hed temanumre, bliver erstattet af temasektioner, og ligeledes vil fx boganmeldelser blive markeret i særlige sektioner. Fordelen ved den nye udgivelsesstruktur er, at artikler kan publiceres med det samme. Det gælder både artikler, der er indsendt i forbindelse med og står uden for et tematisk call.

Vi håber, at I vil tage godt imod det nye nummer. God læselyst!

På vegne af den samlede redaktion,
Eva Mayerhöffer og Mette Bengtsson

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Journalism on the edge: Introduction to special issue

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Looking back to the beginning of the era of digitalisation, let us say the early 2000s, many voices were heralding the decline or even the death of journalism. However, this did not happen despite grave structural problems related to the loss of advertising revenues, investors' profit demands, and increasing competition with big tech actors. News media organisations were shrinking and weakened, and many journalists lost their jobs, but as an *institution*, journalism was able to adapt and find solutions to many problems and challenges. Some genres and reporting methods were even developed and revitalised in the news media's struggle for survival.

A part of this story is how 'critical incidents' during the last decades have shaped the history of journalism. Critical incidents serve as events that ignite debates about journalism and forces reconsideration, rearticulation, or reinforcement of boundaries, either by new legislation or revised ethical standards (Tandoc et al., 2019). In short, they refer to events or developments that lead journalists to reconsider "the hows and whys of journalistic practice" (Zelizer, 1992).

In journalism research, the concept of "blurring boundaries" and "boundary work" (Carlson & Lewis, 2015) has become a common way to address the challenges and changes journalism has endured, and still endures, in an age of increased digitalisation and commercialisation. The argument behind these concepts is that the many changes journalism is experiencing cause a constant reflection amongst practitioners and researchers about what journalism is today, what it is not, and what it should be.

In this special issue, the authors of six selected articles do just that; they investigate changes and events that have stimulated debates about journalism and its boundaries. However, the articles take up different topics and investigate the challenges in different ways, relating both to the effects of technological changes and commercial competition, and to new ethical challenges in a digital media environment.

Gunhild Ring Olsen's article discusses the quality of automated news and is based on an ethnographic case study in two Norwegian newsrooms. She explores how developers, editors, and reporters evaluate automated news and which logics underlie their assessments. The observation and in-depth interviews show that all three occupational groups define automated texts as journalism, but at the same time, they characterise automated news as simplistic, lacking both creativity and a critical approach. Machine-written texts are therefore incapable of fulfilling central professional ideals. This contradictory judgement indicates a growing gap between the media companies' organisational and financial requirements and what professional journalists ideally want journalism to be.

In her article, **Maria Nilsson** explores the impact of organisational changes on newspaper photo departments, an area of newsrooms that have arguably been particularly affected by the economic changes and challenges in journalism. The study is based on qualitative interviews with editors responsible for photojournalism at five Swedish newspapers that have experienced changes to photo staffing and routines for the sourcing of images. The findings indicate that newspapers still rely on staff photojournalist for unique and in-depth coverage, but less for routine and breaking news. Furthermore, photojournalism is seen as a competitive edge in some newsrooms, challenging a 'discourse of doom', while newsrooms lacking visual leadership show uncertainty about the editorial support for visual strategies.

Ollie Seuri and Pihla Toivanen look into the ongoing changes in today's hybrid media environment and investigate the battle over boundaries between legacy news media and so-called countermedia in Finland. The authors demonstrate how legacy and counter-media actors draw boundaries through vocabulary, institutional reflection, and demarcation practices. The findings illustrate how actors consistently assert the flawed foundations of "the other", fortifying boundaries instead of crossing or blurring them.

In their article, **Camilla Dindler and Bolette Blaagaard** use critical theories of race and racism in journalism to conduct a discursive analysis of Danish media coverage. The analysis is based on two collective case studies that combined encompass 56 articles and 23 Facebook posts. Focusing on the construction of knowledge about potential racism and on who is positioned as authorities on the topic of racism and who are missing among the potential actors in the stories, the authors argue that journalistic boundary producing practices and principles uphold a representation of racial disparity. A conclusion is that journalistic norms and practices now withstand the challenges posed by minority media's call to recognise structural racism.

The two last articles in the special issue both concern media scandals, i.e. scandals where journalists and news media organisations have been criticised and publicly condemned for violating professional journalistic norms.

Sigurd Allern and Ester Pollack discuss how the international #MeToo movement exposed the widespread structural problem of sexual harassment, a critique that also garnered widespread public response in Sweden and Norway. This perspective, however, was in some cases undermined in the public sphere when person-centred scandal stories lacking verifiable documentation took over, igniting debates about the ethical standards of professional journalism. The article analyses two alleged #MeToo cases: *Aftonbladet's* dramatic and unfounded accusations against the Swedish theatre CEO Benny Fredriksson and *VG's* misuse and manipulation of a 'bar-dance' episode involving the Norwegian Labour politician Trond Giske. Both media stories developed into 'critical incidents', resulting in public criticism, self-examination and discussions around ethical rules and regulation.

Mark Blach-Ørsten, Jannie Møller Hartley, and Maria Bendix Wittchen also analyse media scandals as critical incidents, i.e. occurrences that are made scandalous by journalistic misdeeds or ethical lapses and resulting in discussions of the 'hows and whys' of journalism. The purpose of their article is twofold: First, theoretically, to link this understanding of critical incidents to the study and theory of the scandal. Second, empirically, to analyse how different news media scandals lead to reflection and debate about journalism. To achieve this purpose, the article focuses on two specific types of news media scandals: the fabrication scandal and the erroneous information scandal. The two types of scandals bring into question fundamental standards and norms of journalism, such as 'telling the truth', and 'basing stories on facts.'

In sum, the selected articles touch on entirely different aspects of 'journalism on the edge' in decades characterised by comprehensive technological and economic changes. This has resulted in a need for constant reflection amongst practitioners and media researchers about the boundaries of journalism in relation to other institutions and professional practices. We hope that this special issue will contribute to continuous reflection and debate.

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Accepting automated news as "low-quality" journalism

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Abstract

This ethnographic case study explores how developers, editors, and reporters in two Norwegian newsrooms evaluate automated news and which logics underlie their assessments. Despite automation being described as the most disruptive data-centric practice of journalism, the observations and in-depth interviews show that all three groups define automated texts as journalism. At the same time, they characterize automated news as simplistic, lacking creativity and a critical approach, and argue that today's machine-written texts are incapable of fulfilling central professional ideals such as critical scrutiny and advocating on behalf of the citizenry. Accepting automated news as journalism while simultaneously stressing its low quality shows a growing gap between what the newsroom groups are willing to accept because of organizational demands and what they ideally want journalism to be. The conflicting assessments may indicate financial motives gaining ground within Nordic media companies.

KEYWORDS
automated reporting, quality, professionalism, journalism, boundary work

Introduction

Automated reporting, informing the public about everything from sports results to the intensity of earthquakes, is currently being implemented by newsrooms all over the world (Carlson, 2014, p. 416; Van Dalen, 2012, p. 648). Despite being described as the potentially most disruptive data-centric practice of journalism (Carlson, 2014, p. 416), few empirical newsroom studies have explored how newsroom workers react when their newsroom starts implementing automated news and why they respond as they do. Text analyses addressing the topic have, however, found that the innovation is met with mixed feelings (Carlson, 2014; Lindén, 2017; Van Dalen, 2012). For instance, automated reporting is seen as a threat due to its low cost and ability to provide wide coverage in little or no time. At the same time, automating routine stories is believed to give human reporters more room for research and in-depth reporting (Van Dalen, 2012, p. 655).

Through an ethnographic case study of two Norwegian newsrooms in very different phases of the automation process, this study aims to broaden the knowledge of how newsroom workers relate to automated news. Applying the sociology of professions, the focus of the study is the evaluation of automated texts and which norms underlie the assessment. New technology is known to broaden the field of who might be considered a journalist and, of especial interest to this study, *what might be considered journalism* (Zelizer, 2004, p. 23). Studying the implementation of a technology known for its disruptive potential can therefore be particularly rewarding when attempting to understand how the boundaries of journalism are negotiated. The selected newsrooms of the study are the news agency NTB, which has been publishing automated news since 2016 (Michalsen, 2016), and the regional newspaper *Adresseavisen,* which published its first automated stories in 2019 (Lindebø, 2019). A total of 23 in-depth interviews were conducted with developers, editors, and reporters in addition to about a week of field observations in each newsroom.

Recent studies have shown that previously unthreatened boundaries between journalistic and business-oriented functions are dissolving, often rhetorically motivated by survival and an industry crisis (Appelgren & Lindén, 2020, p. 63). In this process, new technology has been a central tool allowing managers to make journalistic labor more cost-effective and more easily controlled (Örnebring, 2010, p.

64). This development has been particularly evident within the liberal press model, where the power of management and economic motives traditionally have been high (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In contrast, the media systems of the Nordic countries have been known as typical examples of the democratic corporatist model, characterized by a high degree of professionalism, a high level of autonomy, and low levels of perceived economic influences (Ahva et al., 2017; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Lately, studies have indicated that the model is gradually changing and that financial motives are much stronger within the Nordic media companies today than five to ten years ago (e.g., Ahva et al., 2017; Appelgren & Lindén, 2020; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Through exploring which logics underlie the assessment of automated news in two Norwegian newsrooms, this study can contribute to monitoring this development. The research question of the study therefore is: *How do reporters, editors, and developers assess automated reporting, and which logics underlie their evaluations?*

Throughout the text, labels such as automated journalism, algorithmic journalism, machine-written news, robot journalism, and computational journalism refer to the same phenomenon, where algorithmic processes convert data into narrative text with limited or no human intervention (Carlson, 2014, p. 416).

The rise of the market logic and the bureaucratic logic

As Freidson (2007) sees it, three opposing ideal-typical ideologies provide the rationale for the control of work: professionalism (the ideology of professional control), consumerism (the ideology of marked control), and managerialism (the ideology of bureaucratic control) (p. 106). In consumerism and managerialism, Freidson (2007) claims, work is valued primarily as a means of gaining a living or holding a job. While consumerism assumes that workers are primarily motivated by their desire to maximize their income, managerialism assumes that workers are motivated by their prospects within the organization. Moreover, both logics see any kind of work as intrinsically unpleasant. In contrast, professionalism (the "third logic") sees *work* as a good, as professionals mainly gain satisfaction in performing their work well (p. 108).

Going back to Zelizer (2004), who might be considered a journalist, and what might be considered journalism is thus dependent upon which logic is dominant. If the professional logic dominates, the collective values of the journalism profession will be central in defining what journalism is. Within managerialism, the definitional power lies with the state or with organizations and not the various groups within the organization. The same is the case in consumerism, where the power of definition is in the hands of the consumers (Freidson, 2007; Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Since the three logics are ideal-typical models, most work is controlled through a combination of the three (Freidson, 2007, pp. 106–108).

As mentioned above, several recent studies have indicated that professional control over the work of journalists is evaporating. According to Witschge and Nygren (2009), technical and economic changes are disrupting the established professional statuses, roles, and practices of journalists (p. 37). Since most journalists seem to view technology and technological development as inevitable, impersonal forces, managers can use technology as a tool to implement changes aimed at maximizing the income of the news organization, Örnebring (2010) argues. Typically, this is done by requiring journalists to "take on labor previously performed by relatively expensive technical specialists" or "by relieving journalists of work tasks that can be done by relatively inexpensive workers instead" (Örnebring, 2010, p. 64). As these changes are driven not by technological necessity but by the capitalist necessity to reduce overall labor costs (Örnebring, 2010, p. 64), the implementation can, applying the terms of Freidson (2007), be seen as consumerism and managerialism in disguise—challenging professional control over journalistic work.

Focusing on how reporters, editors, and developers assess automated reporting and the logics underlying their assessments, this study will explore whether the introduction of automated news results in an acceleration of the development described above. First, it is necessary to take a closer look at the phenomena of professionalism, professional-quality perceptions, and boundary work.

The professional logic and its quality perception

In short, the professional logic can be described as a collective occupational ideology of how things *should* be. The logic consists of values, attitudes, professional language, and symbols (Heggen, 2008, p. 323; Schön, 1988, p. 33; Witschge & Nygren, 2009, p. 56). It is important to note that the various practitioners included in a profession can have different professional identities despite sharing a common logic. Heggen (2008) explains the difference between a *professional* identity and a *profession's* identity. While the professional identity can vary from reporter to reporter, the profession's identity is, as described above, a group identity—characterized by common symbols more than joint action (p. 323). Between the two identities, there is a complex interaction. When the professional identities of enough reporters change—for instance, due to technological and economic changes—the professional identity will also be altered (Heggen, 2008, p. 323; Witschge & Nygren, 2009, p. 49).

Within the sociology of professions, the ideal-typical profession is often described as an autonomous occupation with specialized knowledge and special obligations toward society. Many scholars see these characteristics as closely linked and mutually dependent. In the same way as the essence of democracy has been described as the tension between liberty and duty, freedom and responsibility, the essence of a profession can be described as the tension between autonomy and obligation, work and integrity (Sullivan, 2005, p. xv). Following from this, professional self-regulation is not an automatic privilege; it is earned based on the profession's contribution to society. Hence, the phenomenon can be described as an exchange of mutual benefit (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2007; Schön, 1988; Sullivan, 2005). In return for access to journalists' expertise and community service, society has, for instance, granted the journalism profession privileges such as autonomy, special legal protection, and financial subsidies of various kinds (Eide, 2011, p. 19).

If following the logic of professionalism, a change toward more managerialism and consumerism can have dramatic effects. The social obligation of the journalism profession is often said to be the production of content of democratic importance (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). In this way, journalists position themselves as a key part of the democratic system (Petersson, 1996). For professions to maintain their privileged positions, ideology alone is not enough. They must also prove their value through actual work results. If too many members of a profession are unable to fulfill the profession's proclaimed aim over time, it could be accused of "treatment failure," which, in turn, can weaken the profession's jurisdiction over news production (Abbott, 1988, p. 46). In Dzur's (2008) words, professionals cannot just *say* that they serve vital social interests; "they must in fact do so" (p. 62). Put simply: to strengthen the profession's jurisdiction over news, journalists need to be better than other groups and the lay public at producing content of democratic importance.

Storytelling with a purpose

Following from the above, the professional logic has a great impact on what might be considered *real* or *ideal* journalism. In current Western journalism, the dominant professional logic is said to be the social responsibility theory (Benson, 2008, p. 2593). According to this logic, the main aim of the journalism profession is providing democratically relevant information that is as close to the truth as possible and holds those in power accountable (Downie & Schudson, 2009; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). This implies that the reporting provided should be impartial, neutral, objective, and fair and that the journalists are autonomous and free from ties. In addition, quality aspects such as immediacy, actuality, speed, and a strong moral and ethical foundation are often highlighted (Deuze, 2005; Downie & Schudson, 2009; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

Efficient communication is also an essential part of the profession's aim. Ideally, reporters should explain complicated events, issues, and processes in clear language to a broad public and provide information in such a way that people will be inclined to listen (Downie & Schudson, 2009, p. 10; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 189). In more concrete terms, this means applying storytelling techniques including character, a wide timeline, a broader analysis, and an inclusive reporting style. Predictable and formulaic storytelling should be avoided while illuminating a greater meaning and designing the information for a multiple audience is seen as a plus (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 196). The dominant professional perception of quality reporting can thus be summed up as "storytelling with a purpose" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 189).

As automated reporting is known for its disruptive potential, its introduction may alter the dominant professional perception of quality reporting over time. Through text analysis, Van Dalen (2012) has, for instance, found that journalists responding to automated news content highlight creativity, analytical skills, personality, and the ability to write linguistically complex sentences as more important—while factuality, objectivity, simplification, and speed are seen as less important (pp. 648–649). Hence, the introduction of automated news seems to make reporters favor ideals connected to skills that humans, according to Susskind and Susskind (2015), are better at than machines: cognitive capability, affective capability, and moral capability (p. 277).

Different groups with different logics

An interesting question for this study is whether there are notable differences between how reporters, editors, and developers assess automated reporting. When producing news together, the three groups can be said to engage in boundary work around a boundary object (news) (Appelgren & Lindén, 2020; Holton & Belair-Gagnon, 2018). This means that basic questions of definition—such as who counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism, what is appropriate journalistic behavior, and what is deviant—are raised (Carlson, 2015, p. 2). In this process, the underlying logics of the groups influence the groups' definitions.

As shown above, the professional logic of journalism is known to stand strong among Nordic journalists. But what about the two other groups? Starting with the editors, leaders in journalism are often recruited from the editorial staff and generally have experience of reporting before entering management (Waldenström et al., 2019). At the same time, they tend to be influenced by the positive ideals surrounding innovation, new technology, and change (Appelgren & Nygren, 2019; Creech & Nadler, 2018). Hence, it is likely that the assessment of automated news conducted by the editors in this study is highly influenced by managerialism and consumerism, building upon a basis of professionalism. Developers, on the other hand, are—not surprisingly—known to be highly technology-centered (Creech & Nadler, 2018, p. 182). Creech and Nadler (2018) labeled the developers' logic *entrepreneurial* and listed several characteristics. The logic, for instance, renders journalism's contemporary crises as merely technical, marginalizes normative concerns about journalism's democratic purpose, favors market-oriented solutions, and prioritizes technological advancement (Creech & Nadler, 2018, pp. 182–188). Of Freidson's (2007) logics, it is thus probable that the developers of this study are influenced more by consumerism and less by professionalism, compared to the other groups.

Unlike other occupational groups, such as doctors and lawyers, the journalism profession is said to have a weak material and structural aspect. There are, for instance, no absolute educational requirements to become a reporter (Waisbord, 2013, pp. 77–83). Because of the lack of credentialism, journalists are often forced to apply journalistic values in describing what sets them apart from other occupational groups (Waisbord, 2013, pp. 77–83). Hence, symbolic boundary work, based upon the professional logic of journalism, is said to be especially important (Singer, 2015, p. 22). If the profession cannot put these values into practice to the extent that they wish, and consumerism and managerialism instead become central in defining what journalism is, a redesigning of journalism will occur (Witschge & Nygren, 2009, p. 54). In the long run, the values can fade to such an extent that they do not set journalism apart from other media genres such as entertainment and fiction (Witschge & Nygren, 2009, pp. 54–57). How the newsroom workers of this study assess automated reporting, and which logics they are influenced by, is in other words part of a bigger picture, where their professional identities over time contribute to forming the profession's identity.

Methods

To carry out an intensive and detailed study of how newsroom workers evaluate automated news, a case study was conducted. Case studies are useful in the study of human affairs, as they concentrate on small groups, communities, decisions, programs, organizational change, or specific events over time (Yin, 2014, p. 31). The fact that the unit of analysis is small makes it possible to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2014, p. 4). In addition to attempting to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the event under study, a case study also seeks to develop more general theoretical statements about regularities in the observed phenomena. Hence, it may be possible to acquire knowledge of a phenomenon from intensive exploration of a single case (Becker, 1970). In the case of this study, getting detailed information about how the news workers at *Adresseavisen* and NTB assess automated reporting can, for instance, broaden the knowledge of how professional values among newsroom workers in Nordic countries change with the arrival of new technologies.

Based on the resources available to the project, two Norwegian cases were selected through purposive sampling. NTB was selected since it is known as the first Norwegian newsroom to experiment with automation, starting the publishing of automated stories in 2016 (Michalsen, 2016). Hence, the newsroom is an example of a nontraditional actor that matters in journalism (Hermida & Young, 2019). Wanting to explore whether a newsroom's structure, tradition, or automation history affected the newsroom workers' assessments, *Adresseavisen*, a regional newspaper in the process of implementing automated news, was selected as the second case (Lindebø, 2019). Together, the two cases gave the empirical data the intended divergence.

A thematic and abductive qualitative text analysis approach

Due to the lack of ethnographic newsroom studies within research on automated journalism, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and observation were selected as the main methods. As classic qualitative approaches, these methods are reliable tools when attempting to gain in-depth information about social phenomena such as relationships, processes, roles, and responsibilities (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014, pp. 11–13). Three newsroom groups were identified to be of special interest to the study: editors (due to their role as decision-makers), reporters (representing the journalism profession), and developers (creating the algorithms). The development editors in each newsroom were asked to suggest candidates for each group and to make sure that the candidates differed in gender and age. They were also asked to suggest reporters from different newsroom teams. After minor refinements to ensure variety, 10 newsroom workers at *Adresseavisen* and 13 newsroom workers at NTB were selected for a total of 23 semi-structured, in-depth interviews. All groups were asked a set of common and customized questions. Altogether, eight reporters, eight editors, two project managers, and five developers participated. The interviews, each lasting about 35 minutes, were taped, transcribed, and anonymized.

The formal interviews were supported by field interviews and four days of observation at *Adresseavisen* (May 2019) and seven days of observation at NTB (September 2019). During the observation period, the newsrooms granted free access to all editorial meetings. This provided a fuller understanding of the relationships in the newsroom and an opportunity to control whether some parts of the information obtained during interviews seemed correct. In the meetings, editors and reporters were usually present, while the developers more often than not were represented by the development editor. Choosing an "observer as participant" stance, the overall aim was to influence the phenomenon under study as little as possible (Østbye et al., 2013, pp. 115–116).

To conduct a thematic analysis, the first step was getting familiar with the empirical data by reading all the transcribed interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). With the help of NVivo, different features were coded in a systematic fashion across the entire data set. While most of the initial codes were mainly descriptive/organizational (Fletcher, 2016, p. 6), the rest of the analyzing process consisted of collating these codes into potential themes with the help of the theoretical framework of the study. Hence, the analysis process can be described as *abductive*, defined as a combination of induction and deduction (Østbye et al., 2013, p. 114).

The algorithms of the two newsrooms

As intended, both the scope and complexity of the automation of the two newsrooms varied to a great degree. At the time of the fieldwork, the news agency NTB had been publishing automated reports from the professional Norwegian soccer league since 2016. Later, the agency had used algorithms in several contexts—for instance, covering national and regional election results (Johansen, 2017). In comparison, *Adresseavisen* had only one algorithm (named the "real estate robot") producing automated news (Lindebø, 2019).

Comparing the output of the most developed algorithm of NTB (the "soccer robot") and the "real estate robot" of *Adresseavisen*, the typical story from the "soccer robot" was about 150 words, providing information on the goals in a match, previous matches, the number of spectators, etc. In comparison, the stories of the "real estate robot" were only about 50 words and provided information on the address of the property, the sale price, the names of the old and new owner(s), etc.

In addition to the automated news, both *Adresseavisen* and NTB applied research algorithms to search registers and databases on a regular basis and send automated emails to the editorial staff if any irregularities occurred. The focus of this study is, however, the *automated* algorithms that turn data into narrative text with hardly any human intervention.

A dual attitude toward automation

In the analysis of the empirical material of the study, one of the most surprising aspects was how similarly the three different groups responded to the questions. This may, of course, be due to the quality of the questions or the selection of respondents. As the lack of variation was so significant, it may also indicate that the three groups (in both newsrooms) have adapted their professional identifies to function as a team. As underlined by several studies (e.g., Lewis & Usher, 2016; Karlsen & Stavelin, 2014), boundary work often functions as a means of coordination rather than mere disagreement, where "outsider" groups typically implement the dominant logic of the newsroom.

When the respondents were asked about the opportunities and challenges of automated news, the most frequently repeated argument across the groups was that the algorithms would free the reporters from repetitive, mundane work, making it possible to concentrate on "hard" and "important" reporting. In addition to real estate sales and sports reports, film premieres, ship calls, power outages, etc. were mentioned as suitable topics for algorithms. In short, the conviction seemed to be that everything repetitive and routine in character can and *should* be automated—as this would allow the newsroom to broaden its coverage at little or no cost. Some respondents also argued that algorithms make fewer mistakes than humans if the input data are of good enough quality, while others saw possibilities in atomizing the news.

Regarding challenges, some respondents mentioned that algorithms are expensive to develop, that they are "stupid" and inflexible, and that offering news produced by algorithms might lead to journalism losing credibility since people tend to mistrust machines. Some were concerned that a massive number of automated stories would take up space that could be used for other, more important types of journalism in the various distribution channels. With too much automated content, there is a risk of "suffocating our own service with stories most people find irrelevant," said Editor 1 at NTB. However, as later explored in more detail, the most common objections among all the three groups (including the developers) concerned the *quality* of the automated texts.

High hopes for the new technology

Taking a closer look at the logics underlying the above evaluations, several of the most frequently mentioned opportunities and challenges can be directly linked to the quality aspects of the journalism profession. The fact that machines make fewer mistakes can, for instance, help the newsroom provide information that is as close to the truth as possible. At the same time, it is perceived as a problem that people tend to mistrust machines, as the profession's social mandate (serving democracy) is based upon trust. Seeing atomization and algorithmic research as opportunities follows the same professional logic. To be meaningful, relevant, and engaging, it is better if the information is designed for multiple audiences (atomized). To provide democratically relevant information that powerful groups wish to conceal, reporters need assistance from sophisticated research tools.

At the same time, several arguments can be linked to the values of managerialism and consumerism. The view of automation as a way of broadening the newsrooms' coverage at little or no cost seems to be based upon the capitalist value of making journalistic labor more cost-effective. As put by Reporter 3 in *Adresseavisen*, "[Automated reporting] gives *Adresseavisen* an opportunity to give the readers information they are very interested in, which generate income for us. Because it sells. We even sold subscriptions on robot texts. And that is absolutely crazy, but we have." The fact that algorithms make it possible for news organizations to offer customers more stories, increasing the produced quantity, is in other words seen as positive.

The argument of algorithms freeing reporters from repetitive, mundane work, making it possible to concentrate on "hard" and "important" reporting, seems to also be rooted in consumerism. Relieving reporters of work tasks that can be done instead by relatively inexpensive algorithms echoes the above description of changes aimed at maximizing the income of news organizations. In contrast, the second part of the argument, freeing time for more "important" reporting, appears to be inspired by professional values. When the respondents from NTB were asked if the tasks of the reporters had changed during the years of automation, the answer was, however, "No." "When people ask what the automatization has meant for the everyday life in the department, I have to be honest and say that from day to day, and from week to week, the automated stories do not mean much," Editor 4 in NTB said. Instead, the respondents described a rather dramatic change toward poorer working conditions. In line with most traditional newsrooms in the Western world (e.g., Kleis Nielsen, 2016), both NTB and *Adresseavisen* have experienced significant downsizing over the last decade. "We are far fewer than we were just a few years ago. It influences our journalism. It influences the opportunity to do big projects, to investigate, and to get outside the editorial office," Reporter 5 at *Adresseavisen* said. Reporter 1 at NTB described today's tempo as "absolutely insane." "Compared to what it was ten years ago, when I started, we hardly spend time on the stories anymore," the reporter said, describing a feeling of always being short of people.

The fact that the respondents argued that the algorithms freed up time to concentrate on "hard" and "important" reporting, while they also stated that the introduction of automated news had not led to any positive changes, showed a surprisingly positive attitude toward the new technology. When confronted with the reality of their statements, several respondents argued that the algorithms would evolve and become much more sophisticated in a few years, which in turn would lead to better work conditions in the *future*. Instead of basing their arguments upon the real qualities of automated news, these respondents seemed to base their arguments upon their hopes for automated news. Interestingly, and as later discussed in more detail, this optimism was also shared by reporters, not just the developers and editors.

Automated reporting as "low-quality" journalism

When assessing automated news, the most common concern among all groups was, as indicated above, the *quality* of the automated texts.

The overall argument was that the algorithms lack some essential human attributes. Because of this, they are bad writers, they do not have a nose for news, and they do not know how to analyze information and see new, surprising contexts. Moreover, they do not know how to communicate, they are not creative, they do not have a critical sense, they do not detect obvious errors, they cannot convey atmosphere and emotion, and they cannot sense and smell, make ethical assessments, bond with humans, react instantly when something happens, or be flexible. Editor 4 at NTB put it as follows: "According to the classic, traditional perception of what an article should look like, the texts are not good enough. At least not today, and the question is whether we will get there at all."

The claims concerning why algorithms cannot produce "quality news" can be divided into two overlapping categories: arguments directly related to the normative aim of journalism and arguments related to storytelling and form. The respondents' criticisms of the algorithms for lacking a "nose for news" can, for instance, be linked to the aim of finding relevant information—where the "nose" helps distinguish between irrelevant information and the information citizens in a democracy need to govern themselves. Reporter 2 at *Adresseavisen* stated the following:

In some areas, I think the human brain is superior—for instance, in the ideas phase. I do not understand how deciding what matters can be robotized. I do not say that because I personally feel threatened but because I am intellectually pretty sure that it is not possible.

The arguments that algorithms lack the ability to analyze information and see new, surprising contexts can also be traced to the aim of providing relevant information since much important information might be lost without these aptitudes. Editor 4 at NTB described *good stories* as nuanced and having a personal touch while at the same time providing analysis and understanding—all characteristics based on "variables that a human brain can connect." "An artificial brain can of course connect many more variables but not in the way we want," the editor added. Developer 1 at *Adresseavisen* simply said: "The human brain is much better. It does not need a specific list to draw comparisons with. Humans can associate freely, while a robot needs clear commands." The fact that algorithms cannot communicate or bond with humans, in addition to being inflexible and incapable of reacting instantly when something happens, is also connected to information loss. "In a conversation with a human being, a lot of exciting tips and things can arise that a robot cannot register," said Reporter 1 at *Adresseavisen*.

Furthermore, several of the arguments can be linked to the professional aim of holding those in power accountable. If one does not have a critical sense or the ability to detect obvious errors, it is hard to conduct critical scrutiny. Developer 1 at *Adresseavisen,* for instance, described automated news stories as "lower-quality reporting, in general," before stating that algorithms "might produce the kind of news alerts and short news stories that you find everywhere all the time but can never produce the thorough, investigative stories. That requires too much, I've figured out."

When it comes to arguments relating to storytelling and form, skills such as creativity, good writing, observations of atmosphere, and reports of sounds and smell are often linked to the aim of providing information in such a way that people will be inclined to listen (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Reporter 4 in *Adresseavisen* put it as follows:

What makes a text good? Often, it is the ability to associate that helps make a text come alive: the fact that you can describe things in several ways; you color it in a way. In feature writing, the saying is "show, don't tell." A robot will probably only "tell."

Based on the above, editors, developers, and reporters in both newsrooms seemed to assess the quality of automated reporting as low because it does not live up to journalism's professional ideals. At the same time, they seemed to think that what the robots produce *is* journalism and not just information. As an example, Reporter 2 in *Adresseavisen* described the texts of the real estate robot as journalism because the robot's programming is based on journalistic principles and evaluations:

It is journalism because it provides information of interest to society: who buys and sells properties, and what the acquisition price is. […] It is not journalistically processed, although it has journalistic assessment as a premise. The robot is given a command. So even though it is not journalistically processed, there are some journalistic principles that make it journalism.

The respondents thus appeared to see automated stories as journalism—but journalism of a *low order*. This seems to be a variant of what Carlson (2014) called "good enough" journalism, meaning that the texts are capable of meeting the minimum expectations of news writing—that they provide clear and accurate information—but nothing more (pp. 424–425).

Stretched between organizational and professional needs

The respondents' assessments of automated reporting seem to be highly inconsistent. Representants from all groups accepted automated reporting as journalism while at the same time highlighting its low quality. Without further human development, the respondents argued, the stories cannot live up to the ideals of the profession.

Based upon the above analysis, the double and conflicting assessments seemed to be caused by a set of incompatible logics: (1) the professional logic of journalism, defining the quality ideals of the groups, and (2) the market and bureaucratic logics, where the prioritizing of the needs of the news organizations leads to the acceptance of low-quality output as journalism. To better understand the underlying motivations for standing in this split, the following section will explore the conflicting logics in more detail.

The "low-quality" label: For keeping privileges and standing out

Starting with the professional logic, the journalism profession has, as described above, traditionally gained its privileges because it is trusted to provide information of democratic importance. As shown above, automated news is ranked low in the professional hierarchy because the respondents did not believe that the algorithms can provide information of high public value. Allowing algorithms to produce a large proportion of a newsroom's output could thus result in the profession neglecting to fulfill its societal obligations. Since failing to fulfill societal obligations over time can result in a "treatment failure" (Abbott, 1988, p. 46) followed by the loss of jurisdictional control, the respondents' assessments of automated news as "low-quality" reporting make sense. When a respondent worries about the massive number of automated stories suffocating the newsroom's platforms with stories "most find irrelevant," the concern of being accused of failure is probably the cause. The logic is simple: if the public affairs reporting becomes less visible, and the audience associates journalism with simpler stories produced by algorithms, the jurisdiction over news could be weakened.

Following the professional logic of journalism, another possible assessment of automated news could have been that the algorithms increase the profession's opportunities to provide information and thus strengthen its social mandate. The ideals related to in-depth reporting do, however, seem to have a higher symbolic value than ideals related to extensive, instant reporting. It is the investigative, creative, and analytical stories the respondents wanted to be associated with. In comparison, qualities associated with machine-written texts—such as factuality, accuracy, objectivity, simplification, and speed—are rarely mentioned.

In addition to the social mandate, a central part of news workers' professional logic is claiming to be experts in providing news (Folkerts, 2014, p. 228). This implies that journalists need to provide better reporting than regular citizens. Embracing the simple and factual reporting produced by algorithms would thus mean vouching for a type of journalism that many groups could easily reproduce. Protecting the status of skills that are hard to acquire can therefore be a wise strategy. In a time when new technology has blurred the line between journalist and citizen, and the skilled work of trained reporters is being challenged by untrained groups (and by algorithms), this approach may be especially important (Kleis Nielsen, 2016, p. 89). This may be the reason why most of the quality aspects highlighted by the respondents involve several of the "human" capabilities emphasized by Susskind and Susskind (2015) and Van Dalen (2012). The importance of being critical, having a nose for news, putting information in context, seeing unobvious connections, and the ability to associate are strongly correlated with the *cognitive capability* of humans (Susskind & Susskind, 2015, p. 277). Moreover, the importance of writing with a personal touch; describing feelings, noises, scents, and atmosphere; understanding human interaction; and finding the right way to tell a story is related to *affective capability*, while the ability to conduct ethical assessments is linked to *moral capability* (p. 277). Interestingly, the developers also seemed to favor human skills for the simple reason that "the human brain is much better." This argument indicates that this "outsider" group has implemented the dominant logic of journalism (see also Karlsen & Stavelin, 2014).

The journalism label: For keeping their jobs

Despite the strong position of the professional logic, representatives from both newsrooms and all three newsroom groups defined automated reporting as journalism. When asked why they answered that the programming is based on journalistic principles and evaluations and that the information is of interest to society. Both arguments are in line with the professional logic. The first argument referred to the autonomy and expertise of journalism, as the algorithms are based on *journalistic* principles and evaluations—and not, for instance, the logic of developers. The second argument referred to the societal obligation of journalism. By focusing on autonomy and social obligation—and not, for instance, creativity, watchdog potential, and analytical quality—the respondents thus found a way of justifying that automated texts can be called reporting. At the same time, the texts deviate from the professional ideal to such a degree that they are labeled *low quality*.

The distance between ideals and automated reporting raises the question of *why* the groups chose to accept automated texts as journalism. It would, after all, be easy to find dismissive arguments. The answer can probably be found in the statements describing today's tempo in the newsrooms as "absolutely insane," making it hard to spend time on any story. As several respondents emphasized, automation can broaden the newsrooms' coverage at little or no cost. Moreover, this expansion will hopefully generate income. Hence, the respondents seemed to view the algorithms as possible saviors in a time characterized by poor working conditions within the organizations. In line with consumerism and managerialism, gaining a living and holding a job thus seemed to have higher priority than performing the work well. Put shortly, the groups seemed to accept what they saw as "low-quality reporting" conducted by algorithms because the downsized newsrooms needed to provide their readers an acceptable output. Hence, the choice seems to be between adapting the professional requirements to the reality of the newsroom or endangering the future of the news organization (and thus their own jobs).

Concluding remarks

By investigating how reporters, editors, and developers assess automated reporting and which logics underlie their evaluations, this study found that (1) the newsroom groups assess automated reporting in a surprisingly similar manner and (2) the conflicting logics steering their assessments make them accept automated reporting as journalism while simultaneously highlighting its low quality.

First, all groups of respondents, including the developers, seemed to hold traditional journalistic values in high esteem. In this way, the newsroom workers can distinguish between who is a journalist and who is not and what journalism is and is not. To all three newsroom groups, this was important because the weakening of the jurisdiction over news, in the long run, could lead to journalism losing privileges. Such a loss would affect not only the reporters but the whole news organization. Hence, it is understandable that developers and editors would advocate for the professional logic of journalism. After all, if everybody was a journalist, surviving as a journalistic organization would prove difficult. In this perspective, claiming to produce quality news of democratic relevance through a skillset held only by trained workers of the newsroom seems wiser than embracing quantity and more easily obtained skills. As a result, automated news is labeled *low-quality journalism*.

Second, all groups, including the reporters, accepted the low-quality reporting of algorithms as journalism, as the downsized newsrooms need to provide their readers an acceptable, low-cost output. Hence, economic and managerial considerations seem to be strongly emphasized in everyday production. This might not be surprising, as commercial requirements in news production are an old phenomenon. What is surprising is that the profit and production demands of the news organization seem to be adapted to the same degree by all three newsroom groups. While editors and developers are known to prioritize revenue and technological advancement, Nordic reporters are characterized by their strong professional orientation. The fact that this group accepted machine-written texts of "low quality" as reporting and highlighted the value of journalism that sells can indicate financial motives gaining ground within Nordic media companies. This finding echoes the previously mentioned studies of Ahva et al. (2017); Appelgren and Lindén (2020); Witschge and Nygren (2009); and Örnebring (2010), where formerly unthreatened boundaries between journalistic and business-oriented functions have been shown to be dissolving, often rhetorically motivated by survival and an industry crisis.

To summarize, there seems to be a growing gap between what the newsroom groups of this study are willing to accept as journalism because of organizational demands and what they ideally want journalism to be. The result is a contradictory assessment of automated news. If this development continues, and most stories produced have less and less in common with the ideals of the profession, the result may, ironically, be a weakening of the organizations that the respondents aim to save. Moreover, *quality news* may come to mean automated reports published in "real time" at no particular cost.

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Expendable or valuable?
Photojournalism in five Swedish newspapers affected by organizational changes

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of organizational changes on newspaper photo departments, an area of newsrooms that has arguably been particularly affected by structural changes in the field of journalism. Through qualitative interviews with editors responsible for photojournalism at five Swedish newspapers that have experienced recent changes to photo staffing and routines for the sourcing of images, the study explores the following questions: Which routines do the newspapers have for sourcing images, in terms of in-house staff and external sources? How do notions of visual quality and external factors, such as audiences and competition, contribute to shaping the newspapers' visual strategies? Findings indicate that newspapers rely on staff photojournalists for unique and in-depth coverage, but less for routine and breaking news. A certain expansion of photojournalism was found in some newsrooms where it is seen as a competitive edge; which, in part, challenges a "discourse of doom." An uncertainty about the support for visual strategies in newsrooms lacking visual leadership was also found. (163 words).

KEYWORDS
photojournalism, visual journalism, photo editors, newspapers, de-professionalization, journalists, digital news, competition, audiences

Introduction

The short documentary "The last photographer," (Johnsson & Nesser, 2018), chronicling the final year of a staff photographer at *Upsala Nya Tidning*, was received by some commentators and members of the Swedish photo community as yet another sign of photojournalism's demise (ibid). With the retirement of this photographer, the regional newspaper would no longer have a photo department, a development mirroring an international trend in recent years. Perhaps most famously, in 2013, *The Chicago Sun-Times* eliminated its entire photo staff, including a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer (Memmott, 2013). The Chicago newspaper's stated reasons included a shift to video, freelance contracting, and contributions from the public.

Paradoxically, reductions of in-house resources for photojournalism coincide with an increased demand for images (Simonsen & Evensen, 2017; Vobic & Tomanić Trivundža, 2015). Newsroom staff cuts are frequently addressed in industry media as strategies aiming to reduce financial losses in the face of competition and loss of advertising revenue. However, research has shown that compelling images draw readers to news platforms, potentially offering a way to increase revenue (Khan & Mazhar, 2017; NPPA, 2015). Furthermore, predictions of increased contributions from members of the public have not been conclusively borne out by research. For instance, while eyewitness footage contributes to global crisis coverage, research has shown that the public does not appear to contribute widely to routine news coverage (e.g. Nilsson & Wadbring, 2015; Pantti & Bakker, 2009).

In Sweden, the downsizing of newspaper photo departments has been widespread in recent years. According to the trade publication *Journalisten,* there were about 60 staff photography positions at Swedish newspapers in 2018, down from hundreds a few years earlier (Johnsson & Nesser, 2018). Some newspapers have implemented a form of "multi-journalism" where reporters take on the additional tasks of photographing, capturing video and sound (Wadbring & Nilsson, 2016). Others, primarily larger newsrooms, have reduced their photo staff while continuing to produce visual content (Nilsson, 2017). While news organizations have reduced staff across the board, the redundancy in photojournalism has been especially noticeable since it is not uncommon that the entire area is removed from the newsroom. However, there are some signs of shifting strategies or at least reassessment. Returning to the international example: a year after letting go of its photo staff, the *Sun-Times* re-hired four of its former photographers (Kirkland, 2014). A similar shift can be seen in some Swedish news organizations, among those *Upsala Nya Tidning* (Journalisten, 2020) and *Göteborgs-Posten* (Fröderberg, 2018). According to the literature on the de-professionalization of journalism, organizational changes that create uncertainty about roles and skills, such as those described above, may produce an identity crisis among journalists (e.g Nygren, 2014; Wiik, 2009).

The empirical material of the study is drawn from interviews with editors believed to be in a position to address professional roles and skills, as well as what constitutes photojournalism in light of organizational changes. The editors interviewed currently hold positions at five Swedish newspapers, including the three leading-circulation broadsheets, *Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet* and *Göteborgs-Posten,* and two regional newspapers, *Upsala Nya Tidning* and *Västerbottens-Kuriren.*

The aim is to answer the following research questions:

1. Which routines do the newspapers have for sourcing images, in terms of in-house staff and external sources?
2. How do notions of visual quality as well as external factors, such as audiences and competition, contribute to shaping the newspapers' visual strategies?

The larger aim is to learn how photojournalism in Sweden is adapting to organizational changes and competition from digital media. Beyond the Swedish context, the study aims to contribute knowledge about how journalism navigates change. Furthermore, the impact of changes resulting in what Caple (2019) has labeled "photojournalism disrupted," has so far received comparatively little attention, an additional motivation for the study.

Literature review

Photojournalism and digitalization

Long-standing professional definitions of visual genres, ideals, and norms define visual quality in news photographs. An established view among visual editors is that a good news photograph should refer to an actual event and portray a significant moment and that it should communicate visually, through composition, framing, and technical aspects (Langton, 2009). Yet there are signs that this ideal, frequently referred to as "the decisive moment," is giving way to a new digital aesthetic. For instance, a "cinematographic" way of seeing and photographing has emerged with the use of rapid capture DSLR cameras and with the increased focus on video in the production of news (Láb & Štefaniková, 2017).

There are also changes in image sourcing, in part as a result of competition and increased demand for images for digital editions. For instance, a study focusing on the Australian context found that news organizations relied on photo agencies at the cost of their own, unique content for local breaking-news coverage (Caple, 2019). Other scholars have taken a similarly critical view of increased reliance on archival images and photo agencies, including in international breaking-news coverage (e.g. Gynnild, 2017; Machin & Niblock, 2008). One possible effect, according to this literature, is that news coverage across the board risks becoming standardized (Gürsel, 2012). Furthermore, generic images drawn from agencies, archives, or social media, may shift the focus from the specific to a general realm where the image does not refer to the actual news event, in turn eliding the expected eyewitness function of the news photograph (Klein-Avraham & Reich, 2016). Generic stock or archival images are not new to journalism. Yet they have become ubiquitous in digital editions where each story is accompanied by a photograph, and where the continuous uploading of stories increases the need for visual content as "clickbait," that is images meant to motivate readers to click and open the story rather than contemplate the image (Vobic & Tomanić Trivundža, 2015).

Yet digital affordances also offer new opportunities for photojournalism, for instance, in the digital presentation of images in online picture galleries (Caple & Knox, 2012). According to some scholars, photojournalism is currently an untapped resource, including in genres that were prominent in newspapers before digitalization, such as the photo reportage (Hardt, 2001; Klein-Avraham & Reich, 2016), but also in newer (for newspapers) visual forms, such as video and multimedia (Caple & Knox, 2012; Patrick & Allan, 2013).

Some scholars are quite critical of news organizations' lack of commitment to photojournalism in light of increased competition from other digital sites (Newton, 2009; Ritchin, 2013). A lack of support for visual storytelling has been attributed to a move towards a pre-planned "packaging" of news where images function as "complementary illustrations" (Lowrey, 1999, p. 13). Furthermore, with less time allotted to covering stories, editors have to choose which stories to assign photographers (Nilsson, 2017). Another challenge identified is a lacking strategy for disseminating photojournalism in new forms and venues where it may reach a wider audience (Newton, 2009; Ritchin, 2013). Meanwhile, research has found that audiences are drawn to complex news images that tell a story (NPPA, 2015) and that photographs may increase reader retention and interest in reading the articles (Khan & Mazhar, 2017).

These findings point to an apparent tension, between on the one hand an increasingly visual media culture and new technology providing opportunities as well as competitive challenges for photojournalism, and on the other hand an uncertainty about the place of photographs in the news due to a lack of commitment amongst news organizations.

Professional roles and perceptions of skills

Newsroom ethnographies conducted around the turn of the millennium found professional roles for photojournalism and visual expertise to be quite prevalent (Bock, 2008; Hansen, Neuzil & Ward, 1998; Lowrey, 1999, 2002), a contrast to some current newsrooms. For instance, visual editors were found to contribute expertise by "making visual sense" of images (Seelig, 2005, p. 10). However, scholars have also pointed to a history of marginalization and ambivalence about photography as a form of journalism (Zelizer, 1995). Photojournalists have historically had a lower status than reporters, in part a reflection of a prevailing view of photography as art (Lowrey, 1999, 2002), and in part of a later professionalization of press photographers compared to reporters (Wadbring & Nilsson, 2016). Even visual editors in leading positions have been found to lament a text-biased approach to news, according to a study on visual gatekeeping (Schwalbe, et al, 2015). There may also be relative invisibility associated with visual competence in newsrooms, as digital technology enables reporters to photograph and capture video, and web editors to select and upload imagery to digital editions (Nilsson, 2017). Furthermore, in some newsrooms, the job description of reporters has changed with the advancement of digital camera technology, including improved quality for image capture with smartphone camera technology. Some newspapers have adopted a form of "multi-journalism," where reporters interview, photograph, and capture video and sound while on assignment (Wadbring & Nilsson, 2016). However, according to some editors, smartphone image resolution is still inferior to the more advanced professional DSLR digital cameras, resulting in variations in technical quality (Nilsson, 2017).

Organizational changes affecting newspaper photo departments mirror staff reductions in journalism more broadly. However, cuts to photo departments may be more noticeable since, in some cases, an entire area is removed from the newsroom. At the same time, there is an increased demand for more and multiple visual skills (Láb & Štefaniková, 2017). In order to be hired today, photojournalists are frequently expected to have photography as well as video skills. Specifically, a study drawing on organizational psychology found newsroom culture and up-to-date skills decisive for how photo departments respond to change (Simonsen & Evensen, 2017). According to these authors, photo departments that were proactive and articulated a visual strategy were in a better position to remain relevant.

Members of the public have been expected to increasingly supply news organizations with imagery, according to scholarship and the media industry discourse (e.g. Caple, 2014; Patrick & Allan, 2013). The by now extensive literature on citizen photojournalism has focused especially on citizen videographers capturing protest (e.g. Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013; Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2011; Mortensen 2011), and eyewitness capture of crises (e.g, Allan, 2014; Brennen & Brennen, 2015; Mortensen, 2015; Nilsson, 2019). However, research has also found a low rate of such contributions, due to issues of low quality (Niekamp, 2011), ethical considerations and challenges to authentication (Nilsson, 2019; Sjøvaag, 2011) and regional factors, such as a lack of interest among a local readership to submit content (Nilsson & Wadbring, 2015; Pantti & Bakker, 2009). Nevertheless, a discourse challenging the power of journalism, in scholarship and the industry, may have resulted in uncertainty about the value of professional skills at a time of contraction on the job market.

These processes may be understood through the lens of professionalization and de-professionalization of journalism (e.g Nygren, 2014). Splichal and Dahlgren (2015) trace the emergence of de-professionalization to early journalism and connect it, in part, to technology which, they argue, circumscribes the autonomy of journalists. Nygren (2014), writing about the professional role in a contemporary Swedish context as well as in comparative contexts, refers to an identity crisis among journalists, caused, in part, by organizational changes resulting in a more heterogenous professional role.

While de-professionalization helps explain a loss of status and changing working conditions in commercially-driven news production, a recent growth of some photo departments, such as those discussed in this study, might also be understood as a negotiation and adaptation of roles. For instance, a survey among Swedish journalists addressed changing perceptions and, “the meaning of professional ideals in journalists’ struggle for legitimacy during a time when professions as collective fundaments are declining” (Wiik, 2009, p. 351). Based on the findings, the author suggests that a de-professionalization has in fact not occurred on an ideological level, but rather that journalists’ professional identity is going through a re-formation (p. 362).

The climate of uncertainty identified in the literature might also apply to the role of photojournalists and the function of the photograph in today’s news coverage. The notions of de-professionalization and re-formation, in turn, evoke the apparent contractions and expansions of photojournalism in the newspapers included in this study. In particular, it appears that processes of de-professionalization and re-formation appear simultaneously.

Method and study design

The selected method was the qualitative semi-structured interview, suitable when the aim is to capture perceptions, opinions, and discourses about a topic. Respondents were selected strategically based on their expertise and experience, as well as their centrality, that is their proximity to the topic at hand (Esaiasson et al, 2007, p. 291). The study aimed to ascertain the views of editors in each specific newsroom, but also to gain knowledge about the perspective of editors more broadly.

A total of five newspapers were selected, including national and regional dailies. The aim was to ascertain how editors tasked with photojournalism perceive current strategies for the procurement of images, visual skills, and the professional role. However, the position or function suitable for interviews varied between the newspapers. For instance, only three of the papers currently have picture editors or picture editor in chief as staff functions. Two respondents from each newspaper were interviewed, to allow for different perspectives, functions, and experiences to come forth. As the interviews progressed, various common themes emerged. Methodologically, this was interpreted as saturation, as respondents echoed each other in certain comments, indicating a shared discourse about photojournalism (ibid., p. 292-293).

Broadly outlined questions/areas of interest were sent to the respondents who had previously been contacted via e-mail and agreed to participate. The interviews took place between December 2020 and March 2021, with a duration between 42 minutes and an hour. All interviews were conducted digitally on Zoom or an equivalent digital meeting platform, with video and audio functions activated and recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher transcribed the interviews, analyzed them guided by the research questions, and translated the quotations inserted into the findings section.

The following newspapers and editors were selected.

- *Dagens Nyheter* (DN), the leading-circulation national morning newspaper owned by Bonniers AB, the biggest newspaper group in Sweden.

DN editors interviewed: Picture Editor in Chief, Picture Editor.

- *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD), a broadsheet-quality Stockholm-based national newspaper owned by Schibstedt of Norway, the second-largest newspaper group on the Swedish market.

SvD editors interviewed: Chief of the Visual Area, Assistant Chief of the Visual Area.

- *Göteborgs-Posten (G-P),* a broadsheet-quality daily located in Gothenburg and owned by Stampen (owned by the NTM consortium), the fifth-largest newspaper group in Sweden.

G-P editors interviewed: TV Editor in Chief, Picture Editor.

- *Upsala Nya Tidning* (UNT), a regional newspaper located in Uppsala north of Stockholm and owned by Norrköpings Tidningar (NTM), the country's seventh largest newspaper group.

UNT editors interviewed: Managing Editor, News Editor.

- *Västerbottens-Kuriren* (V-K), a regional daily located in Umeå, Västerbotten region in northern Sweden, and owned by VK Media, the ninth-largest newspaper group in Sweden.

V-K editors interviewed: Managing Editor, Photojournalist (in capacity as Picture Editor).

Limitations of method

The qualitative interview as method has various limitations. A respondent may be hesitant to express criticism towards the organization and may wish to appear in a positive light (Esaiasson et al, 2007, p. 291-293). Another challenge is that, as an extended conversation, there are inter-personal aspects that may affect the answers. As a result, the interview is not neutral, and the interviewee may, in effect "construct an identity" during the course of the conversation (Caple, 2019, p. 26). The researcher sought to address these challenges by asking open-ended questions that invited reflection, and by including the respondents' own words in the presentation of findings in order to achieve transparency. Furthermore, at the stage of analysis, the transcripts from all interviews were drawn upon to shed light on certain issues and common themes identified in the interviews. The presentation of opinions and perspectives, in particular in the second part of the findings section, aims to illuminate a discourse among editors working with photojournalism, rather than a detailed analysis of each newsroom. These shared perspectives and viewpoints found on various issues may lend credibility to the results.

Furthermore, it is difficult to determine cause and effect in processes of change. While strategies for photojournalism are considered in this study to be part of long-term processes in the field of journalism, the purpose of the study was to approach a context—a certain moment—with signs of a shifting discourse or approach. Furthermore, there is a difference between a discourse of change and actual change. These limitations were addressed in the section analyzing the findings. Furthermore, it should be noted that some strategies discussed by respondents are underway, while others were interrupted by the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic.

The circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic may also have had an impact on the results. The newspapers included in the study produced less unique content during 2020, because of the spread of the virus and due to restrictions, including travel restrictions. Furthermore, the newspapers relied more on agency photographs than previous years, according to respondents. These circumstances were addressed in interviews and are included in the presentation of findings in the following section.

Contractions and expansions: The view from five newspapers

The following section opens with results related to the first research question, concerning staffing and routines for visual coverage, beginning with the photo staffing of each newsroom followed by routines for image sourcing. The concluding part of this section presents findings related to the second question, that is factors affecting visual strategies.

Photojournalism staffing and routines

In-house photo sources

Dagens Nyheter currently has the largest photo department among Swedish newspapers with full-time 14 photojournalist positions and two picture editors that are part of a larger visual area with additional staffers, including in the areas of graphics, video, and social media. The entire visual area, which is led by the picture editor in chief, has experienced some cuts in the past decade. Yet, it has also expanded, including through recent hires of staff photojournalists to the paper's new Göteborg and Malmö bureaus. *Dagens Nyheter* has an acknowledged leading position in Swedish photojournalism, a status mentioned by respondents at the other newspapers. The comparable expansion notwithstanding, *Dagens Nyheter* no longer covers all news visually, much like the other newspapers. According to the picture editor in chief:

> We want to focus on what is unique and where our skills and strengths show and leave an impression. Of course, if there's a breaking story we always go out and deliver quickly. But our focus should not be to only deliver fresh daily pictures, but rather we should also focus on in-depth photojournalistic storytelling.

Svenska Dagbladet, known for its quality photojournalism, has reduced the number of staff photographers by half since 2013 to the current 2,5 full-time positions. The paper's current three picture editors are also photographers, reflecting a dual role and competence also seen in other newsrooms. The visual area, which also includes graphics and video and other functions, has gone through a reorganization in the past three years, with the position of chief of the visual area replacing the chief of photography position. The chief of the visual area stresses that the area is broadly visual, rather than specializing in photography or graphics: "We no longer work in silos. We need to work together to find the best visual solutions."

While *Svenska Dagbladet* does its own unique coverage, there are fewer in-house stories, a concerted strategy also described by respondents in the other newsrooms. For instance, the paper no longer covers press conferences visually. Referring to the paper's own visual coverage as "projects," rather than stories, which emphasizes their collaborative nature, the assistant chief of the visual area estimates that they do 10-15 such projects a week. These range from news and financial news to culture and reportage and may include photography, video, or other forms. This respondent attributes the shift to a different kind of coverage:

> We do fewer stories than we used to, and that's also a reflection of journalism that is changing, moving away from covering breaking news to explanatory and in-depth stories.

Göteborgs-Posten has gone through both a contraction and an expansion of its photo area in recent years. Around 2014, all but one of 13 photojournalism positions were eliminated and the newspaper turned to "quick jobs" contracted to freelancers. An improved financial situation at the paper led to a renewed focus on in-house journalism, according to both respondents (Fröderberg, 2018). This included photojournalism, and especially television journalism, according to the newspaper's TV editor in chief who was hired three years ago. Four recent photojournalism hires, bringing the number of staff photographers to five, are described as skilled image-makers proficient with video, a requirement also placed on new hires at the other papers. Though *Göteborgs-Posten* has increased its photojournalism staff, it is not returning to covering all news, echoing editors at the other newspapers. However, according to the TV editor in chief:

> We have a significant focus on breaking news, or rather our strategy is to be best at breaking news, but we shall also work in-depth. This is the chosen direction for the type of photojournalism we do.

A decade ago, *Upsala Nya Tidning* employed nine staff photographers. When the last photographer retired, in 2018, the vacancy was not filled. The paper had already implemented a strategy of tasking reporters with photographing and capturing video, also put in place in other, mostly smaller newspapers in Sweden, including those owned by the Uppsala-paper's parent company, NTM. According to the *Upsala Nya Tidning* managing editor:

> It is practically possible for everyone to photograph. That's why photography was the area deemed possible to de-prioritize in order to make it financially.

The creation of three new photojournalist positions at *Upsala Nya Tidning* in 2019 was part of a strategy to improve quality. While one position was filled, the others are currently on hold as a result of the pandemic. The managing editor contrasts the multi-skilled new hire with a narrower skill-set required of photographers previously.

In contrast to some other regional newspapers, *Västerbottens-Kuriren* has not eliminated its photo department, though there has been some reduction through attrition. The four staff photojournalists all have several years of experience at the newspaper. Says the managing editor:

> We have always felt that we have good photographers who have been forward-thinking and taking their job seriously. And throughout the time when everyone (else) was making cuts, the management always protected the photo area and felt that it was important. The photographers are good resources. They are out a lot in the area, they meet people and often come up with story ideas.

When the picture editor in chief retired, in 2017, the position was eliminated, a part of cuts affecting the whole newsroom, according to the managing editor. Now the photographers rotate as picture editors on a weekly schedule, a solution the photojournalist interviewed calls a "less-than-perfect solution," since it doesn't allow for developing a long-term commitment or strategy. The other impact of the chief's retirement has been the loss of a voice for the visual area on the management level, according to this respondent.

Reporters as photographers

Upsala Nya Tidning routinely relies on reporters to provide its in-house visual coverage. Currently, all reporters are expected to also photograph and shoot video, and most use smartphone cameras. As noted in the literature, a version of "multi-journalism" has been implemented in many newsrooms in recent years (Caple, 2019). The strategy has been held up by news organizations eliminating photo areas as a way to secure coverage at a low cost (e.g. Memmott, 2013). Assessing the outcome of the multi-journalism strategy, the *Upsala Nya Tidning* managing editor, who was formerly picture editor in chief, says:

> It didn't turn out that well initially. The image quality was clearly lower, without a doubt. But over time I think we have raised the quality again. But we have also adapted our journalism. It is not as visually driven as before.

Västerbottens-Kuriren reporters are expected to photograph and capture video, and they all photograph sometimes, such as when photographers are not available or when a reporter is first on the scene of a breaking news story. However, editors' first choice is to assign photojournalists to do photo jobs, according to the managing editor:

> The staffers that are best at something should do the task, that's how we see it. But you also need the skills, which means everyone has to have training to be able to do this, learning how to photograph with the mobile camera, capture live and transmit.

While *Göteborgs-Posten* reporters are not expected to photograph, they may provide visuals from the site of a breaking-news story, which is valuable for its high news value rather than for visual quality, according to the TV editor in chief. *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* are both newsrooms with highly specialized functions where it is not part of the job description of reporters to provide visuals. Nor is it expected for photojournalists to write, according to respondents.

Sourcing from the outside: Agencies, freelancers, generic imagery, and the public

A large part of breaking-news imagery for all newspapers is supplied by the TT news agency, Sweden's largest news agency, and by international agencies for global news. An increased use of agency imagery by the national-circulation papers is a continuation of a shift to digital editions at the turn of the last millennium, as major international image brokers consolidate their position and increase their reach globally (e.g. Gürsel, 2012; Gynnild, 2017). Like the other papers, *Göteborgs-Posten* relies on agencies for national and international news and its digital site. All papers turn to agencies for sports, although all, except *Svenska Dagbladet,* cover sports to varying degrees. *Upsala Nya Tidning* has contracted its visual sports coverage to Bildbyrån agency that specializes in sports and supplies content to other newspapers in the study. In contrast, *Västerbottens-Kuriren* photographers cover local sports, an important topic in this northern region.

All newspapers use freelance photographers but in different ways. *Svenska Dagbladet* currently has an increased freelance budget parallel to a reduction of in-house staff. *Göteborgs-Posten* turned to freelancers when the photo area was reduced a few years ago, and editors still contract freelancers, though less than previously. As previously noted, a turn to a freelance economy has been part of a discourse motivating reductions of photo departments more broadly. However, according to respondents in Göteborg and at *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, freelancers are not necessarily lowering the cost.

All five newspapers use generic and archival pictures for their digital news sites. This is similar to international developments when it comes to digital news sites (Solaroli, 2015; Vobic & Tomanić Trivundža, 2015). For instance, *Dagens Nyheter* respondents explain that they used considerably more archival and generic images as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has affected coverage in the other newsrooms as well. After a *Svenska Dagbladet* staff photographer passed away from Covid, the paper adopted a cautious posture and has covered fewer stories this past year, according to respondents. Respondents at other papers describe similar strategies during the pandemic.

However, agency and generic pictures, which also were widely used prior to the pandemic, can pose a challenge in local news, according to the Uppsala news editor:

> We can't really visualize our local news with TT pictures. They don't fit our local context. So especially during the pandemic, we have used our own archive pictures perhaps more, and it's unfortunate when you have to run the same picture more than once.

Visual contributions from the public are not actively solicited by the three largest newspapers. For instance, the *Dagens Nyheter* picture editor expresses little interest in visual contributions from readers, citing problems of verification as one reason. This finding was expected since research has indicated that visual contributions from the public are more common in tabloid newspapers focusing on breaking news (Nilsson & Wadbring 2015; Nilsson, 2019).

Upsala Nya Tidning relies more on readers for visuals than previously, according to respondents, a contrast to the other newsrooms. Local newspapers turned to their readers for visual content prior to digitization, a possible explanation for the difference (Nilsson & Wadbring, 2015). Furthermore, the Uppsala paper regularly uses a local photographer specializing in spot news. *Västerbottens-Kuriren* publishes imagery contributed by readers, mostly what the managing editor refers to as "comfortable and fun" topics, such as weather phenomena where readers are encouraged to send in pictures and video that the paper may build a story around. Such use of readers' pictures, as non-journalistic content, has been found to be quite prevalent (Brennen & Brennen, 2015).

Does it matter who takes the picture? Visual strategies in a competitive digital landscape

Several respondents believe that photojournalism is becoming more important. Some assert that a rock bottom has been reached and perhaps passed, specifically a point where it may not be possible to cut more in the area. While rejecting a discourse of nostalgia that "Everything was better in the past," the *Svenska Dagbladet* chief of the visual area believes that there has been a change in perspective in the industry: "The change is that photojournalism and the visual are now seen as a competitive edge, from (in the past) being something that cost a lot of money."

Digital subscribers are a driving force of this change, according to several respondents. Subscriptions have gone up for at least four of the papers preceding the pandemic, but also as a result of the pandemic. Subscribers have high expectations, several respondents note, an assertion echoing findings in previous research (NPPA, 2015). According to the chief of the visual area at *Svenska Dagbladet*:

> Readers are now expecting a high level in the visual material. If we do a reportage, they expect unique pictures, but also good editing, a variation in image selection, and no generic pictures. I think it has switched from not really caring that much a few years ago, to now looking for an experience that is 100%. Especially if you pay for a subscription. So that's why we need specialists who can deliver. Because everyone can photograph with their mobile, or they can google pictures. But that's not what they are looking for in our newspaper. They are looking for a selection of images that they pay for.

From the perspective of this respondent, the change is driven by a sophisticated visual media culture where newspapers compete with Netflix and other venues of visual storytelling. Other respondents, such as the *Dagens Nyheter* picture editor in chief, point to in-house knowledge and research showing that visual content leads to increased reader engagement with stories (e.g. Khan & Mazhar, 2017). In turn, this knowledge determines the *Dagens Nyheter* focus, according to this respondent:

> I know that visual journalism gives results. It gives reading, appreciation, and positive response. So of course we are going to work with it. I have never felt that this is a silent target group. People jump at it, and so of course that is what we focus on.

Respondents also express criticism of visual strategies as their newspapers turned to digital publication a few years ago. Says the *Göteborgs-Posten* picture editor: "The reduction of our photo area coincided with the chase for clicks online. There had to be pictures with every story. It didn't matter what kind of picture." Similarly, the paper's TV editor in chief draws a contrast between current practices and the early application of video where any type of moving image would suffice. Now, the stories need to be edited, and of high quality, according to this respondent. This comment echoes research on online picture galleries that found limitations in visual storytelling formats due to poor editing (Caple & Knox, 2012).

Reflecting on a lack of long-term visual strategy in general among newspapers, the *Upsala Nya Tidning* news editor states:

> We have known for a long time that the younger generation consumes information through visuals, but I don't think we (in the newsroom) have really understood how they consume news. And whether this is something we will have to adapt to, apart from producing more moving images…It will be interesting to see whether there will be completely new demands placed on us. And one has to hope that the press has not fallen behind, since we didn't invest in photojournalism for quite a long time. It worries me a bit, that we have fallen behind. But at least now we're back on track.

Another issue raised is that the nurturing of visual skills and creativity may be left to the individual due to a lack of resources, rather than being part of a concerted visual strategy. *Västerbottens-Kurien* respondents note that this newspaper has yet to find an interesting way to present visual stories digitally—an assertion addressing a need for innovation cited in the literature on digital photojournalism (Newton, 2009; Patrick & Allan, 2013; Ritchin, 2013). A lack of focus on areas that might be developed, such as video storytelling, is attributed to reader interest. Says the *Västerbottens-Kuriren* managing editor: "If we make videos and very few people watch, the question is if it's worth it. Then we would be better off placing our resources on something else."

An increased openness to photojournalism is also ascribed to economics. Says the managing editor of *Upsala Nya Tidning*:

> To put it bluntly, it's possible to publish a newspaper with only generic pictures, without your own unique visual content. But it would be a very poor newspaper. In the beginning, when we closed the photo department, we had so many generic and agency pictures, images that were not connected to the story. That was not good. You need photojournalism to get that edge.

Yet, the resources do not always match the rhetoric, according to other respondents. Says the *Västerbottens-Kuriren* photographer/picture editor, in a comment touching on the question of visual leadership and strategy (Simonsen & Evensen, 2017), and the risk of photojournalism losing its edge when relying on old forms (Newton, 2009; Ritchin, 2013):

> You almost get applauded when you do a photo reportage. But somehow, when you mention an idea to develop the visual area, people get excited but there is always something else that is more important.

All five newspapers rely on imagery that is not unique to the event of a story, including agency photos and generic and archival pictures. Research has found an increase in generic imagery to be part of a tabloidization and standardization of journalism (Machin & Niblock, 2008). Some respondents describe these images as a necessary part of the digital flow where each story has to be visualized. Furthermore, this type of imagery may function as visualizations of stories where editors choose not to assign photographers, such as in hospitals difficult to gain access to during the pandemic. However, the Uppsala news editor refers to generic and archival pictures as an issue of credibility at times, such as when readers complain of a recycled archival picture or inaccuracies: "Readers will interpret this as sloppiness, which hurts our image as professionals." Although this type of visualization is moving away from photography as "witnessing" (Zelizer, 2007), it is not new. Furthermore, archival imagery may challenge journalism's claim to report actual events. Several respondents lament the high use of archival material during the pandemic but assert that it is used widely in normal circumstances as well.

The reliance on news agencies for a large part of the coverage is stated as a fact and not a problem. An increased use of agency imagery, in general, can be seen as part of a shift away from unique local coverage (Caple, 2019). It should be noted, however, that live video and television are part of visual coverage to various degrees at four of the five newspapers. Furthermore, some of the newspapers cover less breaking news than before. Limited resources are another explanation offered by respondents. The managing editor at *Upsala Nya Tidning* calls it a necessity to hand over visual coverage of local sports to photo agencies, to focus resources elsewhere: "We don't need to be there if Bildbyrån is already there."

Fulfilling photojournalism's claim as witness is a challenge for editors at all five newspapers. According to the *Dagens Nyheter* picture editor in chief, selecting the visual aspect of stories and making sure it gets time is important. Although this needs to be continually asserted: "Not necessarily a lot of time, but all the time it needs." Furthermore, the notion that photojournalism is a form of journalism may need to be reinforced. The *Dagens Nyheter* picture editor edits a weekly page showcasing the work of staff photographers, a fairly new initiative: "People respond to the images, they critique them or they like them. That's good. That means they are taking the images seriously. They see it as journalism."

Respondents mention other challenges, including uncertainty about a newspaper's future commitment to visual coverage. Also mentioned is the question of what a shift to visual journalism actually means. Says the *Svenska Dagbladet* assistant chief of the visual area: "One worry is that if we go for a "catchy" visual presentation just to grab the attention of readers, we may risk losing visual quality if that happens."

Conclusion and discussion: Expendable or valuable?

Photojournalists play a role in all five newsrooms, though their job descriptions differ, according to routines, resources, strategy, and other factors, such as competition and audiences. Furthermore, the newspapers' own unique material, whether provided by in-house staff or freelancers, comprises only a part of the output, an indication of a niched journalism developing more broadly, not only in Sweden. Such a shift obviously has an impact on the direction of visual coverage as well.

All five newspapers rely extensively on agency imagery, a trend for several years and not unique to Sweden. This suggests that journalism is becoming less about being there (for the newspapers), paradoxically although respondents are "there" covering news stories but also frequently in-depth coverage. The effect of this development is perhaps most notable in sports journalism among the five newspapers, where an agency focusing on sports coverage provides one of the few visual perspectives of the topic in Sweden. Thus, the famous assertion that journalism is ceding its prerogative at witnessing rings true, at least partially, and in this case for different reasons than those suggested by Zelizer (2007).

When it comes to visual strategies, a move towards a different kind of photojournalism where photography is part of visual journalism, which has been in process for several years, has been embraced by some but not all of the five newspapers, though notably mostly in the newsrooms with the most resources. This has led to an increase in visual perspectives and forms of presentation. The larger newsrooms have added specialized editors and other staffers who edit the materials. Where resources have been implemented, respondents assert that visual quality has increased, although some strategies are in progress while others were put on hold during the pandemic. As a result, recent hires suggest a certain professionalization or restoration of professional roles, following the literature (e.g. Wiik, 2009). However, *Västerbottens-Kuriren* appears to have opted for continuity rather than change in maintaining its photo area, in itself unique among smaller regional newspapers in Sweden. As a result, rather than a re-installment of previously held positions and skills, findings suggest an addition of new skills, and in some newsrooms a continuity rather than abrupt change.

Thus, a de-professionalization may not have occurred throughout the newsrooms discussed here. Rather, it is possible that photojournalistic skills are valued, as image-makers are expected to possess multiple visual skills and work on in-depth projects contributing to a newspaper's unique profile. In some of the newsrooms, staff photographers have been trained to also work with video, while in others, this skill is lagging as a result of a lack of resources and, according to some respondents, a perceived low interest among readers. Thus, seen through the lens of de-professionalization, the circumstances described by respondents suggest a kind of re-assertion of skills in some newsrooms, yet also an uncertainty about the place of photography in the newspapers' strategies. A pervasive discourse of "doom" (Simonsen & Evensen, 2017) coupled with several years of reduction also found in international research, may help explain a low level of expectations among photojournalists in general, and uncertainty on the part of some respondents, echoing an effect noted in the literature on de-professionalization (e.g. Nygren, 2014).

The challenges of reaching audiences, and in particular new audiences, is a theme repeated in interviews, and, as a result, may be an important factor shaping visual strategies. While some respondents were confident that photojournalism will remain competitive, others were not so sure given the competition for the time of audiences. Respondents expressing most optimism on this point were the visual editors who work at the larger newspapers which, in turn, have the most resources. These findings confirm the argument that newsroom culture is decisive for how departments navigate change (Simonsen & Evensen, 2017).

Thus, notions of audiences, competition, media culture, and visual culture more broadly, rather than journalism, appear to set the agenda to some degree. Not all five newsrooms are in this arena, however. The regional newspapers discussed in this study appear to have a strong connection to their local audiences who turn to them for news coverage. Furthermore, a focus on a competitive visual edge might be a short-sighted commercial strategy rather than an investment in quality journalism. Further research might look into the implementation and outcome of such stated strategies. The internationalization of news, journalism, and the consumption of media discussed by respondents, might also be further examined by future studies. This could be explored, for instance, by looking into news organizations' visual strategies through a comparative perspective, in order to analyze the role of place in an environment where regional newspapers compete with global visual actors rather than domestic competitors.

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Fortifying boundaries
– The "how and why" of the Finnish media and countermedia from 2014 to 2018

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Abstract

This article examines how recent changes in the hybrid media environment have led media actors to define the "how and why" of their practices. We consider the discussion on the differences and similarities surrounding both the legacy media, and newcomers such as countermedia, to be part of journalism's boundary work: the ongoing, yet temporally fickle process of marking the boundaries between journalism and non-journalism. We demonstrate how both legacy and countermedia actors drew boundaries through vocabulary, institutional reflection, demarcation practices, and ethos. While the Finnish media underlined its institutional autonomy and dominance by defending the social good of journalism and dubbing countermedia as fake media, countermedia actor *MV-lehti* drew its own boundaries by ridiculing media professionals, media institutions, and journalists. Our findings illustrate how these actors consistently asserted the flawed ideological foundations of "the other," with the consequence that boundaries have become fortified, rather than crossed or blurred.

KEYWORDS
alternative media, boundary work, countermedia, fake news, hybrid media system, journalism, media work

Preface

Problematic online sites, sometimes dismissively addressed as purveyors of fake news, have become ubiquitous in the Western mediascape, creating a backbone of fringe media ecosystems (Välimäki et al., 2021) largely coalescing around the right (see Haller et al., 2020; Holt, 2020). Whilst these countermedia websites or actors differ across the spectrum of media culture, they do share some common characteristics. Arguably, they can be described as pseudo-journalism (see Schudson, 2020, p. 13; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 18) on the basis that they imitate the form and appearance of traditional journalistic media without conforming to its ethical standards and practices. The rise of these sites, and the mainstream interest in them, have occurred in conjunction with discussions on both fake news and disinformation, and have consequently been alleged, and found, to have disseminated false information (see Mourão & Robertson, 2019; Ylä-Anttila, 2017, p. 46).

These changes in the media environment have led journalistic ranks to strengthen their reputations by reaffirming their importance to the audience and society. Most notably in the US, *The Washington Post* introduced its slogan "Democracy Dies in Darkness" in 2017, and *The New York Times* launched a "Truth is Essential" campaign in 2020. In Finland, the editors-in-chief of most legacy media outlets made a statement in March 2016 to promote "reliable media," whilst two years later, the Finnish Council for Mass Media (CMM) launched a campaign for "accountable journalism." These initiatives underline how the discussion on fake news (including the emergence of countermedia) has been a so-called "critical incident" (Zelizer, 1992), which has led journalists to reconsider "the hows and whys of journalistic practice." In so doing, they have been driven to reflect on their values by reasserting the normative boundaries of their profession and practices.

We argue that the conversation around insulating the differences between the legacy media and the newcomer is consistent with the recurring fabrication of boundaries within and between journalism: in this case, the process of marking boundaries between journalism and non-journalism. Carlson (2016) writes that boundaries are powerful social constructions that affect the allotment of "epistemic authority," denoting knowledge practices accepted by others as legitimate. The scholarship on journalism's boundary work often cites the work of Gieryn (1999; 1983) on the boundaries of science. Even though there are notable differences between science and journalism, Gieryn (1983) persuasively captures the discursive means through which boundaries of social practices arise and face contestation (see Carlson, 2016). Gieryn (1983) notes how the construction of boundaries has become useful for scientist's professional goals such as the acquisition of intellectual authority and protecting the autonomy of scientific research. Following this, we will show how journalism's current boundary work is intrinsically related to a critical incident and embedded in journalism as a profession.

The research question in this article is: what kind of boundary work was stimulated by the fake news phenomenon and the new countermedia websites in Finnish media between 2014 and 2018? We address this question empirically, by analyzing how selected Finnish media reacted to the evolution of countermedia actors, and how the most prominent countermedia, *MV-lehti*[1], positioned itself with regard to journalism and traditional mass media outlets. We focus on a five-year period, which captures the period before and after 2016, the year which saw the popularization of fake news (Quandt et al., 2019). Finland offers an intriguing perspective on this period, as the most important of the countermedia websites emerged before and during the European-wide refugee crisis in 2015. In particular, *MV-lehti* (MV being the equivalent of the expression "WTF" in English) gained considerable traction. According to research carried out by Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS 18.12.2018), they recorded 18 million views in January 2016 alone, beating the second biggest daily newspaper *Aamulehti* with its online reach.

The theoretical basis of our analysis is established below, before contextually relating it to the temporal and qualitative features of boundary work and showing how fake news as a concept grew in popularity in the Finnish mediasphere within the chosen timespan. The "hows and whys" of both legacy and countermedia are explored to explain the similarities and differences of their boundary work. Finally, we outline the main findings of our empirical research, showing its relevance to the extant scholarship, and wider discussions, on the boundaries of journalism, countermedia, and fake news in a hybridized media system.

Theoretical context

Fake news and countermedia

This article explores the popular use of the concept fake news and how it was used to describe and analyze changes in the mediasphere, politics, and democracy in Finland. This means we are attentive to the use of particular Finnish terms related to the fake news phenomenon, and the ways they were attached to countermedia. While fake news is not in itself a new phenomenon – the term had already been used by the late 1800s to refer to made up or false news (Mohr, 2019) – it became a topic of global interest and debate with the increased reverberation of social media, especially surrounding the 2016 US presidential elections and Brexit (see Gelfert, 2018). More recently, the range of phenomena linked to fake news have included, *inter alia*: myriad forms of junk news or false information disguised as news; disinformation campaigns and computational propaganda; populist efforts to discredit legacy media by calling them fake news; and post-truth politics (see Aral, 2020, pp. 26–38; Howard, 2020, pp. 86–87; Bradshaw, 2019).

Notions of fake news then overlap markedly with other information disorders and, consequently, there is no singular definition for it (see Farkas & Schou, 2020, pp. 53–55; Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018). In mainstream discussions certain non-mainstream websites have also been clumsily categorized as fake news, prompting scholars to generate more appropriate formulations to capture variant actors, whose content is not all fake, as in "made up" (Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019). In contesting this narrative, these websites have been further defined as countermedia (see Toivanen et al., 2021; Hopp et al., 2020; Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019), alternative media (see Nygaard, 2020; Schulze, 2020; Holt, 2018), and hyperpartisan media (see Rae, 2020; Heft et al., 2020). These definitions also work as distinctions to more traditional partisan media (Levendusky, 2013) and populist media (Norocel et al., 2020).

We note that the term 'fake news' has become something that people increasingly want to avoid because it has become a disputed, politicized, and even "an infected concept" (Holt, 2020, p. 59). In spite of this, we understand the conjunction and importance of fake news and countermedia as reflective of three interrelated factors that shape our analysis. First, fake news as a phenomenon is a symptom of a wider systemic challenge around the value and credibility of information in society (Beckett, 2017). Secondly, fake news and countermedia actors have already intervened with journalism's privileged role as a mediator, analyst, watchdog of politics (Heikkilä & Väliverronen, 2019), or, as Holt (2020, p. 4) describes it, "an expression of the vulnerability of journalism in a globalized and digitized world." In this sense, traditional journalistic media has received a wake-up call and a test to show its worth and distinctiveness as a form of knowledge and social resource (Schudson, 2003). Thirdly, the fake news phenomenon writ large has been a relevant context in which to analyze the changes in the hybrid media environment during the period we are concerned with.

Blurring boundaries as a feature of journalism and the hybrid media system

The diffusion and rapid evolution of new communication technologies have already reshaped the media: first with the switch from analog to digital, secondly the rise of the social web, and thirdly the dominance of mobile technologies (Bell et al., 2017). Digital platforms have taken an increasingly important role in journalism by shaping the way people communicate and mediating the interaction between actors. It is certainly arguable, that the changes in both the media environment and the landscape of news, have amplified reconsiderations and rearticulations of what journalism is, and what its role in a functioning democracy should be. As Deuze (2019) argues, we have found ourselves "in a wonderful quagmire," where "journalism remains the same yet the conditions under which it is practiced have not only changed considerably, they are in permanent flux."

In attempting to bring order and clarity to this 'state of flux', Chadwick (2017) articulates the notion of hybridity. He notes that boundary drawing, boundary blurring, and boundary crossing are qualities of the hybrid media system. For instance, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish some political reporting in blogs from political journalism or to discern the contributions of various interlopers who populate newsrooms' digital practices. The journalistic community, and its challengers and adversaries, are in a constant discussion of what should be included inside the increasingly blurred journalistic boundaries. This is the primary puzzle. What counts as journalism and who counts as a journalist (Carlson, 2015)? However, below the surface there are many other related questions from ethics and practices to the means of interaction with stakeholders such as audiences, sources, and other non-journalistic actors.

In light of this, we argue that new digital publishers – including countermedia – have challenged, and will challenge, journalism in the short to medium term. Changes already seen in the media system indicate that changes in the context of journalism do shape its understanding and social locus. The rise of social media and digitalization, resulting in more fluid, decentralized, flexible, networked, and individualized modes of work (Deuze & Witschge, 2018), as well as the development of virality-fueled newcomers such as Buzzfeed (Tandoc, 2018), is also linked to the myriad of algorithmically-induced countermedia and junk news (see Bradshaw, 2019). So, blurring boundaries can be a feature of the hybrid media system, but it is also a feature of journalism itself. Deuze (2019) approaches hybridity by observing the messiness intrinsic to journalism and how its varied cultural practices are embedded within a complex social landscape; it is a constantly shifting denotation applied differently depending on context (Carlson, 2015).

Our interest is on both traditional and countermedia and the boundary work which stems from their engagement and dueling. The extant research shows how traditional media, in times of media instability, commonly uses their normative standards and ethical principles to distinguish between insiders and outsiders (Singer, 2015). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the combination of fake news and new online publishers has witnessed the forced reconsideration, rearticulation, and reinforcement of boundaries in the form of new legislation and revised ethical standards (see Tandoc et al., 2019; Tandoc & Jenkins, 2018). Evidently there is an intrinsic tension between the ideological claims of journalists and how they live up to those ideals, or "the spirit that is expressed in practice" (Carey, 1997). Arguably, this explains why transparency is seen as an emerging ideal that configures the boundaries of journalism, possibly surpassing its ideological commitment to control (Hermida, 2015; Singer, 2015).

Research material and methods

The research material employed here was collected both from traditional Finnish legacy media outlets and *MV-lehti*. To get a comprehensive picture of the mass media discussion in Finland we have constructed datasets from four different media: 1) the Finnish news agency *STT*, 2) the main national daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS), 3) web-based articles in the Finnish public service broadcaster *Yle*, and 4) one of the two main Finnish daily tabloids *Iltalehti* (IL). Together, they represent major segments of the Finnish mass media system: a news agency, a daily newspaper, a public broadcaster, and a tabloid. The original datasets include all articles from each media from the beginning of 2014 to the end of 2018.

This was supplemented with 37 477 stories scraped from *MV-lehti* between 25.08.2014 and 03.03.2018 and includes all stories found on the website in March 2018. *MV-lehti* (MV) serves as a legitimate counterpart to the traditional media, publishing its original stories along with texts from other outlets. It also circulates social media and blog posts from different actors inside and outside the right-wing media ecosystem. Throughout the research period, it functioned as a sort of "alternative umbrella," although its radical right-wing and anti-immigrant tendencies became more pronounced over time.

In creating our dataset we downsampled the data with two rounds of forming search keywords. In the preparatory search in the first round, 28 search clauses for the legacy media outlets and 9 search clauses for *MV-lehti* were used. The keywords for the legacy media were related to different countermedia actors and fake news phenomenon in addition to media transparency and truthfulness in journalism. The first set of keywords in *MV-lehti* were related to the terms which *MV-lehti* used in referring to the journalistic media. After the preparatory search, we assessed samples of the resultant documents qualitatively and removed keywords that produced large amounts of irrelevant stories from the legacy media. For example, the word 'transparency' (*läpinäkyvyys* in Finnish) produced articles about transparent clothes and transparency in many other professional fields like flight safety and business. In *MV-lehti*, we also found and added more words related to the mainstream media. The second round, which we refer to as the formation of the research material, included 26 search clauses for the legacy media outlets and 10 for *MV-lehti*.

MV-lehti	Yle	Helsingin Sanomat	Iltalehti	STT	Total
984	423	434	526	1034	3401

Table 1: Article counts per media used in this study.

As Table 1 shows, we were left with 2 417 articles from the selected legacy media outlets and 984 from *MV-lehti*. This material was further divided into five sub-categories for the legacy media (Figure 1) and three for *MV-lehti* (Figure 2). The categories were constructed qualitatively on the grounds of our pre-analysis of articles during the preliminary round. We chose the sub-category called “fake news phenomenon” (n=807) to serve as an analytical core for the legacy media. This included the stories, which mentioned the words ‘fake news,’ ‘fake media,’ ‘post-truth,’ ‘post-fact,’ ‘countermedia,’ or ‘alternative media.’ This dataset was supplemented with sub-categories identified by qualitative reading on the preliminary round, consisting of articulations of designated persons and countermedia outlets, together with mentions of Trump and fake news, Russia, and disinformation in the context of media. In our analysis, we focused on three sub-categories in *MV-lehti*, comprising any mentions of journalism (n=411), of words referring to mainstream media (n=268), and of the journalist Jessikka Aro (n=305).

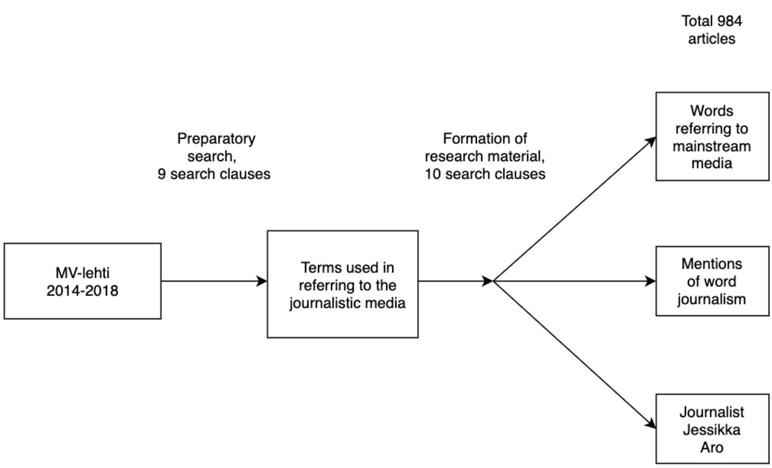


Figure 1: Downsampling process for MV-lehti dataset.

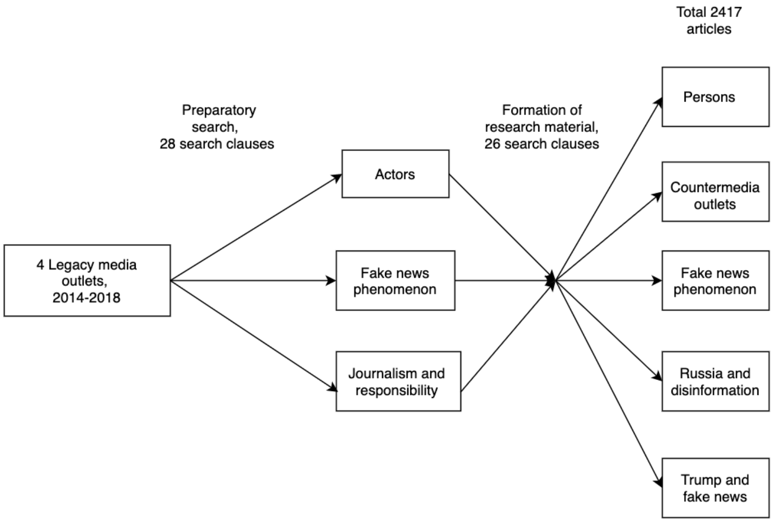


Figure 2: Downsampling process for the legacy media outlets.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were both used in our analysis. In addressing the prevalence of the fake news phenomenon in the Finnish media between 2014 and 2018, we employed computational frequency analysis to extract the occurrences of relevant discussions. The results of the frequency analysis enabled us to identify qualitative similarities and differences in the discussions. We supplemented the computational analysis with qualitative analysis to specify our findings. Additionally, to analyze boundary work in the chosen media we used qualitative methods. Following Gieryn (1983) we looked at the media actors' attribution of selected characteristics to their own publications and those of the other side. We focused on vocabulary, institutional reflection, demarcation practices, and ethos to make sense of the social boundaries between actors and to reconstruct how they distinguish between activities as journalism and non-journalism. These are not dependent on fixed characteristics, rather they should be understood as intertwined and overlapping, as, for example, institutional reflection and demarcation practices permeate the vocabulary and carry ideological implications.

Fake news phenomenon in Finnish media between 2014 and 2018

Case Finnbay: a precursor or a curiosity?

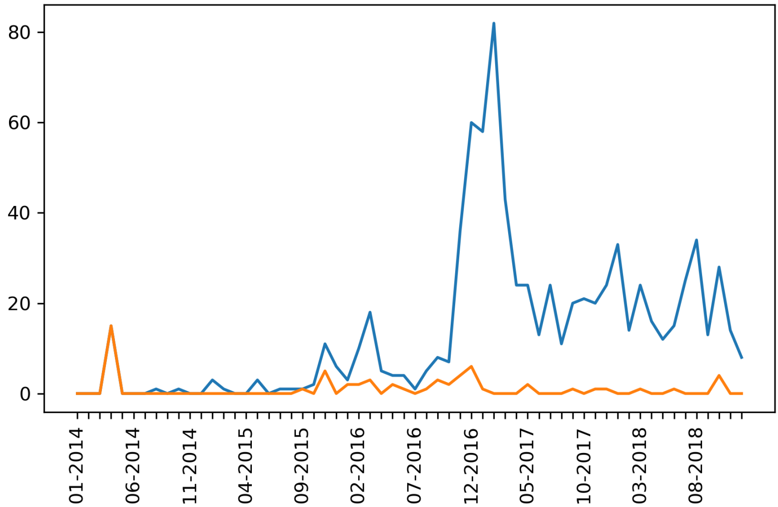
In Finland, there were already traces of "valeuutinen" (fake news) in the blogosphere, used in conjunction with false information circulating in the media and the social web, from as early as 2011 (Järvinen, 2011). In our data, the idea of fake news as particularly problematic, surfaces in 2014. In April of that year, a site called *Finnbay* was called a "fake news site" (*valeuutissivusto* in Finnish) by the then Finnish Ambassador to Russia on Twitter (HS 6.4.2014). *Finnbay* was an English language site, which claimed to produce news on Finland. Interest in the site was triggered by a controversial story stating that Finland would cooperate with Russia no matter what the EU or the US would say. This occurred after the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the story was mostly based on Russian sources such as Itar-Tass (Finnbay 6.4.2014). After the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to investigate the site's activities, questions were raised over the "authenticity" of the site: the site reported a fictitious address and declared neither a corresponding editor, nor a business ID, as required in Finland (IL 6.4.2014; HS 7.4.2014). Later, the Finnish authorities declared that *Finnbay* did not disseminate harmful information on purpose (HS 10.4.2014). However, this encounter of "fake news" as a concept in Finnish media demonstrated the political nature of discussions about new media in a hybrid media space.

Finnbay was not the first news-media-like site to be accused of disseminating problematic information in Finland. Before "fake news" was articulated in a contemporary context, a site called *Magneettimedia* (Magnet Media) had gained media attention because of its conspiracist writing, vaccination criticism, and promotion of alternative medicine and pseudoscience (see Yle 8.12.2011; STT 27.3.2013). Initially, *Magneettimedia* was distributed only in print form, primarily in regions of Northwestern Finland, before going online in 2010.[2] It has a profile that is distinct from *MV-lehti*, although its stories have been frequently published by them; they are commonly regarded as the most prominent countermedia actors, and are described by Heikkilä and Väliverronen (2019) as "the public enemies of institutional journalism in Finland." Compared to these actors, *Finnbay* is a curious case. It echoes elements found in later discussions, including the lack of transparency in publishing and its connections to Russia, but it is now somewhat forgotten as the site was later shut down.

The triangle: Countermedia, Trump, and Russian disinformation

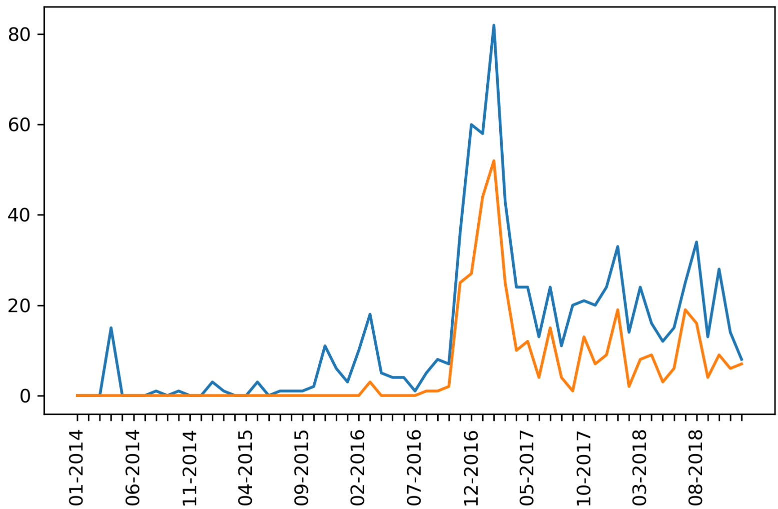
Our research indicates that domestic countermedia sites were only one of three main facets to the media discussion on fake news between 2014 and 2018. The other two were stories related to Donald Trump and his relentless friction with the media, and the Russian spread of disinformation. These three are not uniform. They each have their own particular characteristics, but they also represent different phases in Finnish media discourse on fake news. Qualitatively speaking, the cases of Russia and disinformation, as well as the one on countermedia actors, are more complex – and arguably more representative of the Finnish context – but quantitatively, Trump-related stories dominated the media discourse on fake news.

The timeline and prevalence of these phenomena can be seen in the three graphs below. They indicate how the so-called fake news phenomenon (blue line)[3] was covered or made reference to, in Finnish media texts. In addition, the graphs show how the volume of stories related to the three different contexts developed over the research period. For example, the appearance of *Finnbay* is clearly visible from the first graph, as all the earliest fake news-related stories in 2014 were tied to this one affair. After *Finnbay* there are few mentions of *Magneettimedia* and *MV-lehti* until the second half of 2015. Heikkilä and Väliverronen (2019) date serious journalistic interest in *MV-lehti* to early Spring 2015 when *MV* had published detailed stories on a (then alleged) case of rape, which pushed their readership up. Nevertheless, in our data, broader journalistic interest in *MV-lehti* only surfaced later, at the end of 2015, and stayed relatively stable until the end of 2016.



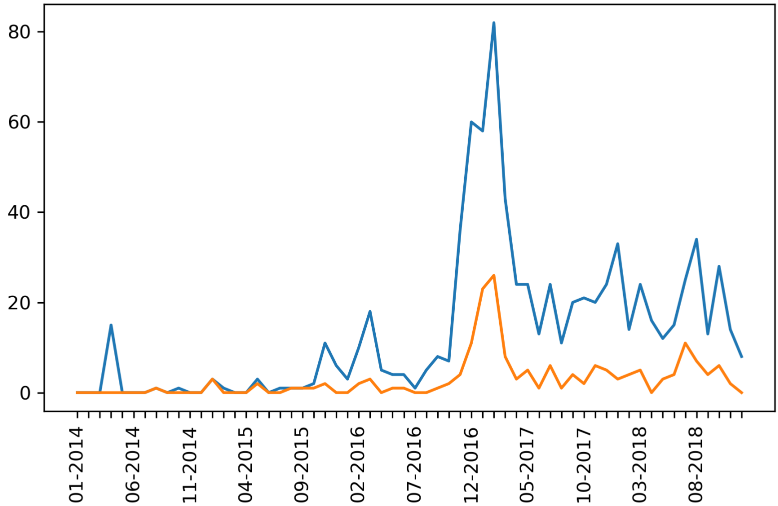
Graph 1: Weekly article frequencies of legacy media outlet articles containing the fake news phenomena dataset (blue line) and a subset with search words "MV-lehti" or "Magneettimedia" or "Finnbay" (orange line).

Notwithstanding this, the drastic increase in fake news-related content in Finnish legacy media occurred from approximately autumn 2016. This was almost entirely tied to the language used by the then presidential candidate Donald Trump and its subsequent reportage by the media. Graph 2 shows how Trump-related stories dominated the discussion on fake news throughout our period of research. Trump's frequent use of the labels "fake news" and "fake media" to address legacy media clearly permeated also Finnish media discourse. Boczkowski & Papacharissi (2018) stress that despite the deep historical roots of the tensions between Trump-like politics and the media, social media brought a new dimension to the equation. Our data also shows how stories covering the fake news phenomenon often include mentions to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media outlets. This resulted, in the internet, social media, and the hybridization of the media system, functioning as a cross-cutting context in the coverage of the fake news phenomenon.



Graph 2: Weekly article frequencies of legacy media outlet articles containing the fake news phenomena dataset (blue line) and a subset with the search word "Trump" (orange line).

The third facet, the case of Russia, is interesting because Russia's disinformation campaigns have been connected to both the 2016 US presidential elections and Finnish countermedia. However, in our data, this case offers a distinct twirl to Finnish media's discourse on fake news, in the context of emerging stories on Russia's hybrid strategy and propaganda campaigns in the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea, escalating war in Ukraine, and the shooting down of the plane MH-17 (see Graph 3). Finnish legacy media were slow to react to the pace of events in Ukraine, as the media struggled to name and define the actors and dismantle pre-formulated Russian metanarratives (Innola & Pynnöniemi, 2016, pp. 167–169). The peaks at the end of 2014 and early 2015 are related to the intensified reporting of Russian activities on different fronts, with the media using terms like "information war" (HS 19.1.2015), "hybrid warfare" (Yle 28.1.2015), and "Putin's propaganda" (IL 27.1.2015). This gradual shift was akin to the 'scales falling from the media's eyes' as they tried to come to terms with Russia's conduct in a new media environment.



Graph 3: Weekly article frequencies of legacy media outlet articles containing the fake news phenomena dataset (blue line) and a subset with search words "Russia" and "media" (orange line).

The reporting on Russian actions in early 2015 was followed by a reportage series on a Russian "troll factory," the IRA, and the extent of Russia's online propaganda on *Yle* (Yle 18.2.2015a; Yle 18.2.2015b; Yle 19.5.2015, conducted mainly by journalist Jessikka Aro. In retrospect, this series became symbolically significant, as Aro herself became a victim of a systematic smear campaign and severe harassment (see Heikkilä & Väliverronen, 2019; Hiltunen, 2017). The importance of her case was illustrated by the editors-in-chief's statement of 2016, which declared that journalists will not be silenced by abuse (Yle 1.3.2016). The founder of *MV-lehti* Ilja Janitskin was later accused – and found guilty in the district court before his death – of, amongst other charges, aggravated defamation (Yle 18.10.2018). We conducted a search with the name "Jessikka Aro" in our *MV-lehti* data which resulted in with 305 hits, meaning she was mentioned approximately twice a week on *MV* between early 2015 and early 2018.

Boundary work in the Finnish mediasphere

The content on Finnish legacy media and *MV-lehti* offers an interesting juxtaposition, as the extant literature suggests that these actors are in many ways incompatible yet intertwined. For instance, Toivanen et al. (2021) have noted how *MV-lehti* interacts with the legacy media through remediation of content. In addition, it is well documented how journalists default to defensive positions and retreat to their enduring values in the face of outside or institutional threats to journalism (see Carlson, 2015; Lewis, 2012; Deuze, 2005). Our research material – composed of media and journalism related content – yields an additional perspective to those of earlier studies. As shown in Figure 3, a more concise picture of the boundary work emerges through vocabulary, institutional reflection, demarcation practices, and ethos. Through an analysis that is divided between the two, we highlight the distinctive features and characteristics of boundary work, to show how both similarities and differences emerge. We begin with *MV-lehti*, because in our timeline it appears as a challenger which prompted a reaction from the media, which manifested as an attempt to monopolize the field and protect its autonomy (see Carlson, 2015; Gieryn, 1983).

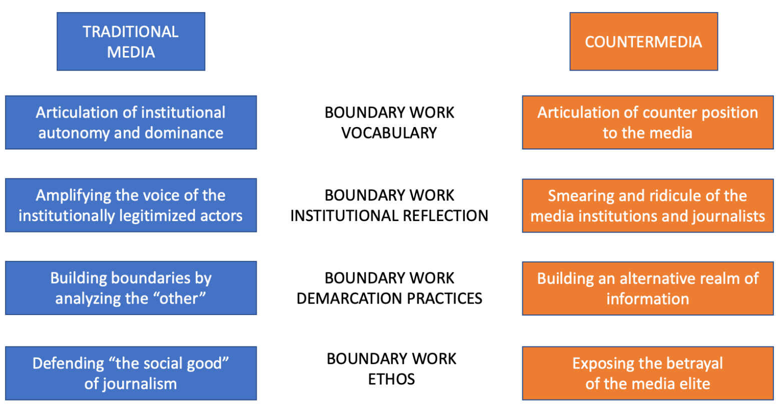


Figure 3: Analysis of the boundary work between the Finnish traditional media and countermedia.

Boundary work in *MV-lehti*: Exposure of political bias and betrayal of the media elite

The various names and descriptions conferred upon journalistic media in *MV-lehti's* vocabulary can clearly be interpreted as boundary work that illuminated different aspects of their opposition to, or contempt for, their 'adversary'. There are several renditions of mainstream media, with the term prefixed by terms such as lying, deceitful, and distorting (MV 29.11.2015; MV 27.9.2016; MV 7.12.2017). The media itself is reduced to simpleton media, agenda media, and a fairly Finnish version of social justice warrior media, *suvakkimedia* (MV 2.8.2015; MV 11.5.2016; MV 21.1.2017). In a rhetorical move reminiscent of Trump, the term fake media was turned against traditional media. In this sense, the verb use was critically important. For example, when searches such as "mainstream media AND lies," and "mainstream media AND falls silent" were used, they produced 97 and 52 hits respectively in our data.

In terms of boundary work, the language in *MV-lehti* was constructed to articulate its counter position and to challenge traditional media's rationale and authority. This was done by depreciating, ridiculing, and smearing the media, media work and media professionals (echoing the case of Jessikka Aro). The practice was evident in cases where writers denounced journalists in affective terms: there were references to fanaticism (MV 2.5.2016) and hystericism (MV 16.3.2016) as well as fussing (MV 14.2.2018) and crying (MV 30.3.2016). Despite this, a significant portion of journalism and media-related statements were targeted on journalism as an institution. The Finnish Council on Mass Media, journalism's ethical codes and the Finnish editors-in-chief statement of 2016, all serve in MV-lehti as symbols for the legacy media's biased foundations.

In our analysis, *MV-lehti* not only built boundaries as a counter actor, but also fashioned a secondary seam in which writers articulated the site as an alternative, a supplement, or a corrective to traditional mainstream news media (Holt et al., 2019). The writers[4] themselves underlined the independence of *MV-lehti* as a publisher when they called it independent media, or independent citizen media (see MV 24.2.2016; MV 5.3.2016.). The emphasis on independence here is suggestive that the legacy media are non-independent, or biased. There are strong suggestions of political bias, which is seen in the media's tendencies to lean left (also radical left and green-left) or to promote cultural liberalism and multiculturalism (MV 9.10.2015; MV 2.3.2016a; MV 27.9.2016). There was also the alleged bias of practices. The whole new media ecosystem they represented, was suggested to have grown because the media has failed the people, by ignoring themes such as immigration-related problems which they suggested were left unreported by the mainstream media (see MV 12.1.2016; MV 15.2.2016; MV 2.3.2016b). For instance, Finnish media do not traditionally publish the names of people who are suspected of crimes, so when *MV-lehti* publishes names and details of these alleged crimes, they offer an alternative channel of information.

The aspiration to build an alternative realm of information can be depicted as a demarcation practice, although the borders with the media remained somewhat blurred. *MV*'s ambiguity to journalism is palpable in the case of investigative journalism. Three distinct speech repertoires addressed investigative journalism in our data. First, there was the ridicule which typically referred to bad or trivial journalism or just the stupidity of journalists and their institutions (MV 20.9.2016). Secondly, the investigative journalism that the traditional media ought to be doing, but they were not (MV 31.5.2016), and thirdly, the investigative reporting *MV-lehti* was doing by exposing the so-called truths of immigration (MV 1.3.2016). While journalism as an institution is mostly deprecated, journalism was not argued to be completely corrupt. There were two cases in which journalists are thanked by name for doing proper investigative reporting in covering cases of Finnish corruption. These were certainly outliers, but it is nonetheless interesting how a departed journalist is generously thanked for her earlier award-winning work when the site expressed condolences to her family and relatives (MV 2.6.2016).

Nevertheless, there are strands of conspiracist thinking in *MV-lehti*'s opposition to the media, and it is evident in the ethos of *MV*'s boundary work that it stems from a desire to expose the betrayal of the media elite. *MV-lehti,* and its counterparts, suggest that they are lifting the veil of lies woven by corrupt elites (see Pyrhönen & Beauvois, 2020), which can be seen as a strategy to give the impression that they represent the legitimate power and moral authority of the people (see Norris & Inglehart, 2019). As Ylä-Anttila (2018) writes, conspiracist framing "should be understood as an absolutist orientation to power and democracy, one which divides the world into good and evil." In this sense, *MV-lehti*'s conspiracism is tribalist; it stands against all knowledge-producing institutions like the free press, academia, and expert communities within government (see Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2019). Hence it is not surprising that *MV-lehti* and its writers lambasted traditional media for a smear campaign – even a "war" (MV 23.11.2016) and a "witch hunt" (MV 25.10.2017) – which they perceived in journalists' repeated use of the term "fake media" as well as in journalistic coverage of the background and activities of those behind countermedia.

Boundary work in the Finnish media: The institution sending a message

MV-lehti's suggestion of a smear campaign was not entirely without foundation. The primary reaction to the rise of *MV* and the whole fake news phenomenon in Finland has been reminiscent of the media's tendency to raise its guard in the face of opposition (see Heikkilä & Väliverronen, 2019). This kind of general reaction can be seen in our data, and in its most quintessential form, it is very ceremonial. From the perspective of vocabulary, the central feature of this type of writing was to assert that *MV-lehti* and its counterparts were unequivocally "fake news" (*valeuutinen*) or "fake media" (*valemedia*). There was little or no room for conceptual contingency or leeway on the nature of these antagonistic actors, and the term fake news was deployed here as "a baseball bat to undermine the opponent's descriptions of reality" (Holt, 2020, p. 59). Furthermore, countermedia actors were depicted as profit-making and click-baiting cynics, who posed a threat to both public discourse and the civility of politics (see IL 1.11.2015).

In particular, the media's articulation of institutional autonomy and dominance emerged in two kinds of instances. The first was the statement from the editors-in-chief, which broadly covered all four examined media – each of them published at least three stories on it (including the original text). The second instance was the news written at the time of the appointment, or nomination, of prominent media figures such as the heads of the Council of Mass Media and public broadcaster *Yle*. These news stories, or interviews, were used as an opportunity to raise the institutional importance of journalism for society at large, with a tone of ceremonial speech that sought to (re)affirm the importance of journalism to democracy and to fundamentally distinguish it from antagonistic outsiders. The language is uniform regardless of the speaker, which makes it safe to assume their basic stance to countermedia is widely shared amongst the journalistic community. Journalists writing the stories did not confront this stance, rather they amplified the voice of the legitimized actors. The basic attitude was, these “fake sites” (*valesivustot*) exploit journalistic credibility, yet publish unverified, or false, information without “seeking truth." It was noted, however, that some interviewees did ponder journalistic practices when they spoke of the media’s self-regulation along with the importance of accountability and corrections. (See HS 2.11.2015; HS 4.11.2015; Yle 22.4.2016; Yle 6.2.2017; STT 17.4.2018.)

While the designation “fake media” in the context of countermedia actors was frequent, and its use rarely explained (HS 1.3.2016), not all the stories in traditional media described *MV-lehti* as being fake. Countermedia actors tended to be covered with greater nuance when research and polls were being reported (STT 14.11.2017), journalists’ own analysis was published (Yle 1.11.2015d), or interviews with experts or researchers (Yle 1.11.2015a) as well as countermedia readers and actors were explored. In these stories, the concept of fake news was usually unpronounced or problematized, which meant both expressions “countermedia” (*vastamedia*) and “alternative media” (*vaihtoehtomedia*) were used. The media did interview the so-called other side whilst seeking to understand the logic behind the consumption (Yle 1.11.2015b; IL 24.9.2016) and production (Yle 1.11.2015c; Yle 5.2.2016) of countermedia content. This kind of reporting is linked to the professional core of journalism, but much like other examples we have pointed to, can also be described as boundary work. This resembles Gieryn’s (1983) idea of the monopolization of professional authority and resources by excluding rivals. In this instance, journalists probed and explained the boundaries of different kinds of content production to the audience, and conspicuously depicted countermedia actors as “the other."

The ethos in Finnish media’s boundary work stems from a defense of journalism as “the social good” as part of a wider media assertion of their own importance to democracy. Simultaneously, the media suggests to the audience that this social good, protected by ethical standards and practices, stands in opposition to the ‘social bad’ of distributing false information. This is also present in media reports of the court cases centered on countermedia actors, the media institutions, and reporter Jessikka Aro. Although not all of these stories represented *MV* as fake media, there was an emphasis on the transgressions of the defendants and the harmfulness of their activities. In the context of the household reporting of a judicial case, there was special interest in *MV-lehti* and its founder Ilja Janitskin as “the other."

Discussion

We considered a period when the media landscape has been in turmoil. From 2014 to 2018 countermedia website *MV-lehti* was a thorn in the side of Finland’s legacy media. It was frequently berated for disseminating false information and commonly designated, rather simplistically, as fake media. Because of the strong institutional and societal position of legacy media in Finland, there was a certain asymmetry to the relationship between them. While *MV* had a relentless interest in the media – representing itself as David to the legacy media’s Goliath – for journalists, the countermedia was part of a bigger change in the information environment. We have shown how the fake news discourse in Finnish media has been dominated by three partially separate realms: countermedia, Donald Trump and his accusations about the media, and Russia and disinformation.

After conceptualizing boundary work, we considered the ways in which writers defined “the hows and whys” of their own work and how they described the other. According to Gieryn (1983) boundary work should be seen as a practical problem with ideological implications. What is common to both the legacy media and countermedia, is the representation of the other as an ideological or a cynical actor, whereas one’s own work, its core ethos, is presented as that which arises more from noble ideals and practices or the needs of the people. This, of course, is one way to fortify one’s own boundaries whilst simultaneously using reductive vocabulary to define the other.

Thus, we found that qualitative differences to actors' ideological positioning were nested within general boundary work. For example, journalists in traditional media defended the institution of journalism almost uniformly: it’s not about certain media, but the media, its institutions, and the commonly recognized journalistic practices and media ethics. In both Gieryn’s (1983) and Carlson’s (2015) terms, professional journalists both demarcated the monopoly of the institution in news publishing as well as defended the autonomy and professional activities of journalism whilst excluding *MV-lehti* as a non-professional troublemaker. While the media were keen on the manifest importance of journalism to democracy, they paid minimal attention to the ambiguousness, historically changing, contextually variable, internally inconsistent, and sometimes disputed nature of it. Arguably, this could be representative of the Northern European democratic-corporatist media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), characterized by a particularly strong formal organization of the profession of journalism. In Finland, trust in legacy media is comparatively high (Newman et al. 2020, 14), and polarization (in connection with media use) is relatively weak in Scandinavia (see Dahlgren 2021). It may be that this strong societal adhesion to traditional media thwarts more open and nuanced public discussion on issues like transparency, accuracy, and ideology in its institutions and actors.

We argue that our findings on the nature of *MV*'s boundary work are a significant contribution to the extant scholarship and wider public discussions on the nature of countermedia, or alternative, media (see Tuomola, 2021; Holt et al., 2019; Nygaard, 2019; Ylä-Anttila et al., 2019; Brinkschulte & Frischlich, 2018). We have shown, how *MV-lehti* had the qualities of both a counter actor (to that dominated by the so-called elite) and a constructor of an alternative realm of information. Therefore, both countermedia and alternative media are valid terms, yet they remain imperfect in describing an actor like *MV-lehti*. In our reading, *MV-lehti* and its writers have a complicated relationship with journalism. For the most part, they denounced journalistic institutions and ridiculed journalists, which can be seen as a feature of an antagonistic challenger to the legacy media (see Harcup, 2005; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Mayerhöffer, 2021). Still, they exploited the journalistic form, and in some cases referred to their own work as investigative journalism. More attention should be given to this relationship, on the basis that countermedia work in *MV-lehti* can in our reading be seen as much as a kind of pseudo-journalistic publishing, as it is – at least partly – a form of non-journalism (see also Schudson, 2020, p. 13; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 18). This is reminiscent of the deliberation about demarcation problems in science (see Hansson, 2011). Similar to pseudo-scientific ventures in relation to science, countermedia actors have sought to distort the traditional perceptions of journalism and the ideals related to it. This is a timely and ongoing discussion, as the boundaries are more complex in journalism than in science, and many scholars want to move past binary distinctions between the legacy media and its interlopers or alternatives (see Eldridge II, 2019; Harcup, 2013, p. 9; Rauch, 2016).

Finally, academic studies on fake news and the disinformation conundrum have seen a marked emphasis on problematizing the designation of the phenomena, as well as the criticism of the political and journalistic treatment of the problem (see Farkas & Schou, 2020; Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2018). This strand of research is singularly important, but, as we have pointed out, themes like countermedia, Trump's accusations on the media, and Russia and disinformation are deeply connected or intertwined in public discussions. Consequently, studying these connections remains more than pertinent. Drawing directly on our findings, we strongly suggest that greater attention be given to the nature of the boundary work, and the positioning of the Finnish media with respect to international politics in the future. An in-depth qualitative analysis of stories mentioning Trump and Russian hybrid campaigns may not only broaden the view of boundary work and the media's fake news discourses but also account for Finnish media's understanding of Finland's geopolitical position. Likewise, from a comparative perspective, this article opens options for different research compositions to understand our findings relative to other media systems and time frames. A historical perspective – a broader view of the demarcation of journalism in the way our analytical framework draws from the work of Gieryn (1983) – might be worthwhile. Our results could then be juxtaposed with other "critical incidents" in media history – and in different countries – such as discussions on citizen journalism in the 1990s or the changes in the public sphere in the 1960s to understand journalists' ongoing struggle for authority.

NOTES

1 Most researchers have used the concept countermedia to describe *MV-lehti*, so we follow this tradition without undermining the importance of other conceptualizations. What is relevant is that sites like *MV-lehti* combine facts with fiction and rumors, oftentimes intentionally blurring the lines or spreading lies, other times cherry-picking, coloring and framing

information to promote a right-wing or radical anti-immigrant agenda. (Tuomola et al. 2021; Ylä-Anttila et al. 2019; Ylä-Anttila 2017.)

[2] To get a concise picture of the emergence of fake news phenomenon we included all mentions of *Magneettimedia* in the researched legacy media outlets from years 2010–2013 to the research material.

[3] The mentions of fake news phenomena in four researched media with the words fake news, fake media, post-truth, post-fact, countermedia, alternative media.

[4] Only a proportion of the news stream is written by *MV*'s own writers, as they also circulate texts from other sites as well as bloggers, forum writers, readers and social media users postings.

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The colour-line of journalism:
Exploring racism as a boundary object in journalistic practice and principles

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Abstract

This article argues that Danish journalistic boundary producing practices and principles uphold a representation of racial disparity. Based on critical theories of race and racism in journalism and a boundary work framework, we conduct a discursive analysis of two collective case studies that encompass 56 articles and 23 Facebook posts. Focusing mainly on 1) the construction of knowledge about potential racism, 2) who are positioned as authorities on the topic of racism, and 3) who are missing among the potential actors in the stories, we identify meta-journalistic discourses and the (re)establishment of journalistic principles and practices. We conclude that journalistic norms and practices, for now, withstand the challenges posed by minority media's call for the recognition of race as structure by applying discursive strategies of firstly rejecting racism as structure and secondly asserting principles and practices of specific kinds of objectivity, utilising, for instance, elite sources.

KEYWORDS
boundary work, discourse analysis, journalism, race, racism, minority voices

Introduction

This article departs from the journalistic representation of two disparate incidents in Denmark during the summer of 2020. While different, they both point toward journalistic responses that continually reproduce and reimagine the boundaries of journalistic practices and principles. The incidents are, firstly, the death of a Danish-Tanzanian man who was killed on the island of Bornholm and, secondly, the publication of a study concluding that sports commentators' descriptive remarks are racially biased. In both cases, the journalistic coverage was questioned and discussed at length outside and within the journalistic institution. Both cases raise the question of how to cover race and racism in Danish journalism.

Bringing the critical history of racism and journalism to mind, this article explores racism as a boundary object that invites radically different meanings in public discourse (Carlson, 2015, p. 7), thus drawing up – what may be termed – shifting 'colour-lines' in Danish journalism. The article employs a discursive approach (Foucault, 1971/1994; Hall 1997/2002) to the two collective, critical cases (Stake, 1995, p. 4; Flyvbjerg, 1991) presented in a selection of print media published between 25. June and 31. August 2020, to ask and answer the question: How are race and racism expressed as boundary objects in the cases of the death of the Danish-Tanzanian man and the study on the racially charged remarks of sports commentators?

In the following, we proceed from a brief review of previous scholarship on the topic of racism and journalism to discuss the theories of boundary work before embarking on the discursive analysis. Finally, the article concludes with a combined theoretical and empirical argument for how Danish journalism may learn from the critical history of race and racism to reimagine journalism as a political boundary actor.

The racial challenges of white journalism

Race and racism in the press have been researched extensively, although not necessarily systematically, for almost a century. While comprehensive studies have been conducted in North America, in the early 1990s, Teun van Dijk (1991/2016, p. 20) found that European and Scandinavian studies lagged. However, several critical case studies have highlighted the continuously strained relationship between the white press and minorities in recent years. The studies may be divided into studies that, on the one hand, focus on potential racist discourses and their implications produced and promoted by the white press (e.g. Hall et al., 1978; van Dijk, 1991/2016; Said, 1997; Downing & Husband, 2005; Titley, 2020) and studies that, on the other hand, focus on the minority press and its importance for general journalistic practice and history (e.g. Vogel, 2001; González & Torres, 2011; Blaagaard, 2016; Richardson, 2020). In their separate ways, both traditions point to the limitations and challenges to professional journalism.

The white press' challenges

In his ground-breaking study of "how racism comes about and how it is perpetuated by the [white] Press", van Dijk (1991/2016, p. 5. emphasis in original) asserts that racism is produced and reproduced discursively, socio-culturally and continuously through talk and text. Because the media and, mainly, the societal elites, who are the primary sources of the press, control this (re)production, they "may be seen as the major inspirators of and guardians of white group dominance" (p. 6). Indeed, van Dijk's earlier research "strongly supports the [...] thesis that a country or society is as racist as its dominant elites are" (p. 6). In this earlier work on news journalism in The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, van Dijk finds that the media play a vital role in forming public opinions about minority groups. Thus, "the mass media provide an ideological framework for the interpretation of ethnic events" (p. 7). These sentiments are echoed in work by Danish scholars, exploring the history of representation of visible minorities in the Danish national newspapers and tv-stations (Andreassen, 2007), the discursive constructions of racist attitudes in the Danish public sphere (Hussain, 2000), and migrant media consumption (Christiansen, 2004). These studies position minorities in the role of 'a societal problem' and opposition to a national construction of 'us', i.e. the white majority (van Dijk, 1991/2016, p. 18; Andreassen, 2011, p. 238). Indeed, the stereotypical, criminalised and peripheral representation of minorities is an all too familiar and long-lasting discourse found in the research in Denmark and abroad.

For example, Stuart Hall et al. (1978) identify how news-making is an ideology-producing process that constructs newsworthiness according to an 'objective', but white perspective; Edward Said (1997) writes about the political discourse of the everlasting Muslim stereotypes in the news; and John Downing and Charles Husband (2015) argue that due to journalism's organisational structures it reproduces (negative) racial relations.

The racial history of journalism extends beyond the discursive meaning-making power of media (Hall, 1985). Reviewing early research on the relationship between the press and minorities, van Dijk (1991/2016) finds that in addition to a lack of coverage that takes the point of view of the minorities, the press consistently limits the access of minority groups in terms of hiring minorities in journalistic positions and promoting minority journalists within the profession (van Dijk, 1991/2016, p. 20-1). Similarly, less than 5.6% of the Danish media workforce has a minority background compared to 12.3% in the general workforce (Slots- & Kulturstyrelsen, 2020, p. 21). Ariadne Matamoros-Fernández (2017) argues that editorial practices and policies continue to be embedded in libertarian ideologies that privilege a white and western bias. These ideologies, she argues, are moreover extended into the digital realm. Clearly, from the perspective of the research taking the critique of the white press as a starting point and object of study, journalism is faced with challenges on organisational, discursive and ideological levels.

The critical memory of the minority press

Focusing on the minority press in the United States, Juan González and Joseph Torres (2011) cover an extensive but mostly overlooked part of the journalistic profession. At the turn of the century, the mainstream journalistic profession – challenged by new election laws and wider-spread literacy – re-invented itself in the image of science and objectivity (Schudson, 1978). However, underscored by the technological developments of the telegraph, which preferred short and easily digestible phrases, the re-invention resulted in a stereotypical representation of minorities and an exclusion of their voices (González & Torres, 2011, p. 137-160). Meanwhile, the minority press contributed to the history of journalism in wide-ranging but parallel publications, which covered the communities and their political and social struggles for civil rights. The black press distributed its first publications in the 1820s. The newspapers and pamphlets produced news on a range of topics concerning black America, and they were far from all about enslavement and emancipation, writes Todd Vogel (2001, p. 1). Throughout the centuries, the black press debated diverse topics, such as "trade unions, the Spanish civil war, and cold war consumer culture". In this way, the black press serves to stitch African American experiences into the fabric of the white mainstream. Likewise, in Denmark, David Hamilton Jackson produced and edited The Herald in the Danish colonies in the Caribbean (Blaagaard, 2018). On the pages of this newspaper, Jackson created a far-reaching community connected to the black press in the north while seeking social reforms akin to the reforms that developed in contemporary Denmark. Similarly, Connie Carøe Christiansen (2004) finds media consumption to be a transnational and social practice that "reveals the cultural-geographic orientation among individual consumers" (p. 186). Migrants in Denmark use transnational media to construct powerful imagined communities.

While these examples show the powerful social performativity of journalism, Allissa V. Richardson (2020) convincingly argues that in the current context, black journalistic community building takes place on Twitter by means of witnessing the implications of societal politics and policing. On Black Twitter, "black people are using smartphones to create video evidence for each other – especially in instances of documenting excessive police force", writes Richardson (2020, p. 17); however, "[they] are making these videos for external audiences too. They want to set the record straight in many cases". As Houston A. Baker (1994, p. 15, 31) puts it: "… there is a continuity in the development of black publicity rather than a recurrent novelty" that focuses on the critical and creative "efforts, strategies and resources for leadership and liberation". As the minority press and the minority communities that follow continue to insist on having their voices heard and their significance also recognised outside the bounded minority press, the white press is challenged from yet another angle: While the reproduction of racial structures persists on the organisational, discursive and ideological levels, white mainstream journalism is also facing the critical memory of minority communities disputing the very legitimacy of journalistic ideology and thus challenging its boundaries.

Building and breaking boundaries

The relationship between minority voices and the minority and the mainstream press continues to be relevant to understanding the performative process of journalism and how common sense is constructed – even if it remains invisible to many journalistic practitioners and scholars. Understanding this relationship as boundary work enables us to look at our chosen cases as possible boundary objects that are "at once something shared among disparate groups while holding sometimes radically different meanings" (Carlson, 2015, p. 7), and therefore have the potential to deconstruct common-sense.

The concept of boundaries has a diverse history in science. In studies of political communication, it was initially conceptualised as "boundary roles" that served to co-produce a shared culture by negotiating legitimate norms and practices (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, pp. 38-39). Recently, Matt Carlson (2015) has identified three forms of boundary work in journalism: expansion, expulsion, and protection. They refer to processes that either incorporate new practices and participants into ideal journalism (expansion), delegitimises (expulsion) them or at least keeps them off its fences (protection of autonomy) (p. 10). Moreover, Carlson (2015) observes a blurring of boundaries when traditional divisions between journalism and the public cannot be upheld (p. 2).

Focusing on boundaries presents opportunities to be sensitive towards how meaning is continually constructed in relation to other phenomena and social developments. While Pierre Bourdieu's (1989) field theory is a boundary theory in the sense that it analyses how social hierarchies and positions emerge in relation to each other and thereby bring symbolic capital to the actors of these fields, theories about the social construction of institutions (Berger and Luckman, 1967) focus primarily on how boundaries mark and characterise a specific domain more than how it defines the outside. Here, boundaries demarcate social domains consisting of values and norms that stabilise the social structure, secure continuity and authoritatively distinguishes between what is deemed legitimate and illegitimate. Changes in a domain can be explained by institutional shocks (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), external, critical, or unexpected events that demand reorientation and perhaps the adoption of new practices and demarcations. Carlson (2016) points to how meta-discourses may characterise such processes of reorientation, and in the case of journalism, meta-discourses about journalism as a "cultural practice charged with delivering valid accounts of the world" (p. 349). Power is, then, at play in these processes because boundary roles and boundary objects inevitably construct authority, rules, resources, and subjects (Hall, 1997/2002) that grant privileged positions to represent reality. In some instances, boundary work as power presents a blurring of boundaries (Amado & Waisbord, 2015). It is a discursive strategy that marginalises or confuses subjects and interests to preclude political voices and mobilisation.

The critical history of the interdependence between racism and journalism questions the idea that boundary actors construct shared culture. Instead, the history accentuates the question of how power relations come to defend and maintain boundaries. As the history of the minority press shows, boundaries around journalism – and thus journalistic practices and principles - are bound up with political epistemologies such as race. The critical history of racism and journalism illustrates how the defining power at play in the rearticulation of journalism's boundaries has as much to do with what is being said as with what is kept quiet. In this light, boundary objects become lenses through which the contingent nature of journalism's cultural reproductions become clear.

It could be claimed that since journalism is not a profession protected by authorisation, it is especially vulnerable to critical incidents such as new technologies and other societal changes. Journalism is a precarious and reflective practice, a discursive institution oriented towards itself as an ideal practice (Hanitzsch, 2017). Understanding journalism is thus a matter of discursive analysis. It seems that the delivery of valid accounts of the world is a nodal point in meta-discourses about journalism and its raison d'être. Therefore, using the collective of two critical cases, we explore if racism as structure is the boundary object at play and articulated by journalistic practices and rituals of expansion, expulsion or protection. On the one hand, it may compel journalistic practitioners, editors, and institutions to ritualistically re-enact journalistic practices and principles to reaffirm their profession's political and social role. On the other hand, racism as structure renders visible the contingent nature of journalism's representations of the world and thus may play a critical role in the necessary developments of the "hows and whys of journalistic practice" (Zelizer, 1992, p. 67).

Method

Following the theoretical discussions above, we proceed to answer the question: How are race and racism expressed as boundary objects in the cases of the death of the Danish-Tanzanian man on the island of Bornholm and in the study on the racially charged remarks by sports commentators? As collective, critical cases, these two events may be generalised to the extent that, if the conclusions hold true in such high-profile cases, they may hold true for journalistic principles and practices more generally (Flyvbjerg, 1991, p. 146). The following analyses are based on articles on the two selected events in major Danish national newspapers published between June 25 and August 31, 2020. The digital archive search for articles produced 51 articles and opinion pieces on the murder on Bornholm and five articles about the study suggesting racist language among sports commentators. The articles were retrieved by use of the digital archive Infomedia using the respective search strings: "mord" (trans: murder) and "Bornholm" for the articles regarding the murder on Bornholm, and "RunRepeat" (name of the company behind the study) and "Racial Bias In Football Commentary" (name of the study) for the articles on the study. Additionally, we found 23 posts by Redox collective and Black Lives Matter (BLM) on Facebook posted within the same time frame. Because this study focuses on professional journalism, these digital posts are discussed in the concluding remarks.

We employ a discursive reading of the newspaper articles focusing on two aspects of boundary work in journalism: meta-journalistic discourse and the (re)establishment of journalistic principles and practices. These two aspects help us identify, firstly, the construction of knowledge about potential racism in the cases, secondly, who are positioned as authorities on the topic of racism, and thirdly, who are missing among the potential actors in the stories. Inspired by Hall's (1997/2002) reading of the Foucauldian discursive approach, these points of reference help us identify how – by using journalistic principles and practices – racism as an object is discursively constructed within journalistic products and, in turn, how journalism is constructed in relation to racism or, indeed, through its relationship to racism and societal racial structures within meta-journalistic discourses. Finally, we illustrate the challenges to these discursive constructions coming from outside the journalistic profession and practice.

Analysis of the coverage of the murder on Bornholm

28-year-old Philip Mbuji Johansen was found lifeless on the morning of June 23, 2020 at a campsite in the woods on the small Danish island of Bornholm. He had been brutally beaten, tortured, and had had a knee pressed against his neck resulting in haemorrhages in his eyes. Combined, the injuries had led to his death. The police had already arrested the first suspect by the time the story was published in the tabloid newspaper Ekstra Bladet June 25. However, the case of the murder of the young man of Danish-Tanzanian descent emerged as a critical incident when the research collective Redox announced on Facebook and its website (25.6) that the murder bore similarities to the murder of an African American man, George Floyd, who had died in police custody in Minneapolis the month prior. Floyd suffocated when a police officer pressed his knee against Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes during the arrest. Moreover, Redox revealed that one of the suspects in the crime on Bornholm had ties to right-wing politics, had posted anti-black slogans on social media, and wore a tattoo of two swastikas and the words 'white power' on his leg. Following what appeared to the editorial teams as a coordinated campaign, the Danish press was "bombarded by emails" urging editorial action and sustained coverage of the case (DR 25.6; Politiken 26.6). Due to the racial nature of the crime, the murder warranted closer attention and scrutiny by the media, the emailers asserted. The critique of the journalistic and editorial choices became a pivotal and recurrent point in the coverage during the following weeks, thus challenging boundaries by forwarding a meta-journalistic discussion and discourse. The analysis of the murder on Bornholm begins by focusing on the meta-journalistic discourse followed by an analysis of the journalistic principles and practices.

Rejecting race

Arguably, the reason for the relatively heavy coverage of the murder was not its grizzly nature nor the potential racism involved, but rather the fact that the media stood accused of not doing their job properly, i.e., not naming the inherent racism involved.

Three main meta-discursive strategies were undertaken in the newspaper articles to counter the critique: Firstly, an approach that opposed critical voices with officials' counterclaims is identified in most, if not all, articles retrieved during the selected period. The articles mentioned the criticism of the media coverage laid out initially by Redox and later supported by BLM, political influencers, and public intellectuals online. However, these critics were cited using their social media accounts and online comments and were not interviewed or asked to comment directly. The articles, by and large, continued by presenting a defence of journalistic practice and coverage by referencing authoritative sources such as the police and the lawyers involved in the case. Indeed, the DR editor in chief argued that it is up to the authorities how the case is covered and investigated (DR 26.6). Thus, TV2 (26.6) headlined an article: "Chief prosecutor wants racism speculations about killing removed: - people should have the real picture"; BT (03.7) issued a "warning against a people's court"; Politiken (26.6) wrote: "the spokesperson for Black Lives Matter, Bwalya Sørensen, is convinced that the killing of a 28-year-old man on Bornholm earlier this week is racially motivated. The prosecutor, the police and the defence attorneys say that there is nothing to suggest that"; DR (26.6) argued that "chief prosecutor, Benthe Pedersen Lund, says that the killing probably happened because of a personal relationship between the two accused men and the victim that went horribly wrong"; and Jyllands-Posten wrote that the chairing judge found it "terrible that people are telling half-truths" (4.7) and "the police don't see a racial motive – but online another theory rules" (27.6). From these assertions, it emerges that in the eyes of the authorities, claims of racism is a personal 'conviction' or a threat to institutionalised rights. The demand posed by Redox and BLM to consider racism as structure and a historically shifting discourse practice is identified by Gavan Titley (2020) as a refusal by anti-racists to bend to the consensus of racism as personal intent. However, this "refusal is not a full stop, but a question mark. It is a pointed invitation to reflect on how boundaries to permissible speech are produced and policed" (p. 56). The journalistic discursive strategy explained above, in contrast, represents what Titley (p. 61) calls the "postracial denial", which allows an open debate about racism, as long as the authorities set the definition.

A second discursive strategy was initiated when in early July, The New York Times wrote an article describing the murder and how the Danish police had failed to investigate the racial relations between the victim and the perpetrators as a potential motive. This article, then, countered the Danish press' angle on the incident and was promptly critiqued by them. Because The New York Times was "seen as the world's most respected newspaper", this particular coverage left the Danish journalists "disappointed" (Information 2.7). The New York Times' article was said to "present factual mistakes and manipulative claims" (Bdk 1.7), "misrepresenting statistics about hate-crimes in Denmark" (Weekendavisen 3.7) and generally having "conducted a kind of journalism that doesn't live up to the paper's reputation" (Politiken 6.7). To support the critical assessment of The New York Times piece, the journalists interviewed statisticians to talk about the misrepresentation of data and colleagues to talk about the standard for good journalism. The practice of interviewing each other to defend journalistic choices is found in Kristeligt Dagblad (13.8), in which a journalist working at the competing newspaper Berlingske was interviewed. Likewise, the editor of Bornholm Tidende was interviewed in, among others, Bdk (1.7) about the journalism conducted in The New York Times. Although The New York Times is not personalised and called out as a threat, the Danish news articles did approach the critique using a similar strategy to the one used to oppose BLM and Redox: They reproached the New York Times' article using countering authorities' statements, leaving no room for the New York Times' journalist to defend his piece.

In a final discursive strategy, racism was relativised by focusing on the white suspects' rights. In one article, the defence attorney argued that he was "worried" about the charges of racism against his client because they could make it difficult for him in jail and cause a "failure to thrive" (Information 2.7). The charge of racism against his client is presented as a severe attack that almost seems to eclipse the crime of manslaughter, for which the attorney's client was later convicted.

Referring to an American study from the mid-80s, van Dijk (1991/2016, p. 14) argues that ”the concept of ‘racism’ remains taboo in the Press. Instead, euphemisms such as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘under privileged’ are used to denote the victims of racism. Indeed, racism for many whites is seen as a thing of the past.”. However, rather than using euphemisms for the ideas and consequences of race and racism, the Danish press, in this case, argued against its very existence and hence its relevance – making it redundant a priori. This argument, moreover, doubled up as a defence of their coverage. While racism was reluctantly discussed, the discourse of the social and political betrayal of the two accused men allowing them to grow up in a drug-infused stupor is forwarded in several articles (Information 2.7; Politiken 6.7; Berlingske 12.8). Indeed, while racism does not exist in the case, the readers are told, social inequality and lack of social responsibility are very much presented as a dark part of Danish society. A journalist, who is interviewed by Kristeligt Dagblad (13.8), wondered “why several [people] have chosen to read a political dimension into a speculative case such as this”. Thus, it could be concluded that, to the journalist, race is political, subjective and speculative and therefore out of bounds to journalistic factual representation, while social inequality is not.

In all three meta-discursive strategies, it is not journalistic choices alone but particularly the choice not to name the potential racism in the case which is at stake. The construction of racism lies in the rejection and reluctance to try to identify its structure and implications. The reluctance to name racism was supported by citations from members of public institutions and authorities as well as by the friends of the suspects, who vehemently argued against that at least one of the suspects had racist affiliations (Information 2.7). Ultimately, the meta-discursive strategies of rejection help to create racism as a boundary object.

Uses of sources as boundary work

Already it is clear that the meta-journalistic discourse is supported by distinct journalistic principles and practices. We have shown how the press used institutional and authoritative sources and sources close to the perpetrators as character witnesses and to understand the details of the case. The articles retrieved for this study largely made use of identical sources. They were the local police, the defence attorneys, Asser Gregersen and John Jørgensen, and the chief prosecutor, Benthe Pedersen Lund. But also friends of the accused's family, Sarah Krogh and Tobias Krähmer, were interviewed by several newspapers as were researchers and professors of law, ethics, and statistical methods. In addition, journalistic colleagues were interviewed to shed light on The New York Times article.

Common among all the sources mentioned above is that they defined racism as intentional harmful action to people of colour. The fact that one of the accused had swastikas tattooed on his leg was not evidence of racism in the legal system and hence not to journalistic practice. On this score, only three articles stood out: Articles by the socialist paper Arbejderen (7.7), the digital journalism website Zetland (3.7), and the conservative national paper Berlingske (12.7). The first publication published an interview with a researcher of racism, and the two latter contained interviews with people on Bornholm of other ethnic backgrounds than Danish, who had no personal connection to the accused. Not surprisingly, these three articles produced a different understanding of racism as structure and as the underbelly of Bornholm's public space. The fact that seemingly only one newspaper editor thought to ask a researcher and, indeed, an expert on racism, while researchers of law and legal matters were plentiful, clearly helps produce a particular kind of institutional discourse of racism married to a legal framework, and which perhaps hints at the implications and limits of journalistic principles and practices.

Few politicians, such as Roger Courage Matthisen (TV2 26.6) and Rosa Lund, made their way into the pages in these stories, and when they did, it was because they had been outspoken on social media concerning the case. For instance, Rosa Lund of the left-wing party, Enhedslisten, tweeted early in the process that she sensed a racial motive for the murder. Based on this tweet, she was interviewed by three different newspapers (DR 25.0; Information 3.7; Politiken 21.8) and asked almost identical questions. The questions focused on why she tweeted the way she did and if she regretted the tweet once the police and the defence attorneys had determined the motive to be a personal conflict. As a politician, Lund seemed somehow difficult to parse within the given set of journalistic principles. While she belonged to the preferred institutional and authoritative sources, she presented a different definition of racism from the legal lexis.

This dissonant position was what the repeated questions implicitly pointed to and tried to bring into tune in the three interviews she gave in the period.

By the end of the selected period, when the dust had settled, the spokesperson for BLM, Bwalya Sørensen, was interviewed (Bdk 19.8) and granted a voice in Politiken's debate section (25.8) in which she contextualised the events in historical and transnational terms. The victim's mother was moreover interviewed by Se & Hør (26.8), providing a personal portrait of Philip Mbuji Johansen. Because Bwalya Sørensen and the victim's mother entered the stage in late August, they became sources in the periphery of the news, relegated to the debate sections and as human-interest stories. Their voices softened the journalistic take on what had happened and the role that racism had played not simply by presenting another angle but also by offering a historically situated, personal and political context. Taken together, the positions of Rosa Lund, Bwalya Sørensen and the victim's mother disclose the boundary work of journalistic principles and practices.

The racial discourse of a murder

In the articles, knowledge about racism clearly followed and supported the legal discourse, which was continually underscored by the journalistic use of official sources such as the police, prosecutor, and legal scholars. This discourse was reinforced by, on the one hand, a rejection of racism as structure and, on the other, a journalistic affinity with the legal definition and ideology. The discourse was upheld by a selective choice of sources, who collectively vouched for the journalistic truth, while simultaneously quotes from social media posts and online comments were used to report on other angles and arguments – until quite late in the case. In turn an asymmetrical power relation was produced, which favoured the authorities. It is striking that the few articles that conducted interviews with people of colour presented a different definition and experience of racism. In the case of the murder on Bornholm, the journalistic practice was criticised for being insufficient as an inclusive public sphere. In its defence, journalistic practitioners and editors held on to the principles of journalistic trustworthiness by positioning their sources as authorities on the topic, which in turn was perceived in a legal framework deeming race as structure irrelevant. Indeed, in JP (2.8), a Danish poet called the murder a "modern-day lynching", only to see her piece annotated with an editorial notification disqualifying her statement with reference to the legal discourse. However, these principles were simultaneously questioned by the voices outside the public sphere, arguing for their right to be represented.

Analysis of the coverage of the study on racial bias in football commentary

Another critical incident in the summer of 2020 that more directly called into question the hows and whys of journalism was the publication of a study concerning skin colour bias in sports commentators' verbal remarks in Premier League's football games. The study was published June 21, 2020 by RunRepeat with support from The Professional Footballer's Association. RunRepeat reviews sports shoes and conducts analyses of issues concerning football and other sports with the aim "to understand running, soccer, basketball and other sports and their surrounding cultures more deeply." (RunRepeat, 2020). First, the study analysed the adjectives of remarks made in 15 minutes of 80 games (= 20 hours logged and coded). Next, it stratified the remarks as positive or negative according to the annotated player's skin tone (lighter/darker). Finally, the study cross-tabulated this with a range of coded variables. Some of the variables were "hard work", "intelligence", "power", and "quality" (RunRepeat, 2020). According to RunRepeat, the key findings:

> "show bias from commentators who praised players with lighter skin tone as more intelligent, as being of higher quality, and harder working than players with darker skin tone. Players with darker skin tone were significantly more likely to be reduced to their physical characteristics or athletic abilities -- namely pace and power -- than players with lighter skin tone were." (RunRepeat, 2020)

Five Danish media outlets took up the story. Firstly, despite the short length of the mention, the website plbold.dk (30.6) that covers Premier League issues, nevertheless formed a discourse that thoroughly placed racism as an undisputed and problematic media practice. The discourse was formulated by referencing The Guardian that called the study 'comprehensive'. Plbold.dk contextualised the study by moreover mentioning the work of the BLM movement. While this reference was also practised in subsequent articles, these later articles struck a more sceptical tone. The initial coverage in plbold.dk was followed by TV2 (30.6), DR (2.7), Berlingske (2.7) and the weekly conservative paper Weekendavisen (2.7). Whereas Weekendavisen assigned its article to the culture section (possibly because it does not publish a sports section), the others assigned their articles to the sports sections.

Self-righteous ambivalence

While British media were reported to initiate re-education of their sports commentators as a response to the study, the Danish media and their sources from the sports commentariat appeared ambivalent. In Berlingske, Danish sports commentator Flemming Toft was reported to be ''indignant" to the claims of racist bias and unable to recognise "this tendency – especially among Danish commentators, that he believes are always 'on the right side'". Also, in TV2, a Danish commentator and a Eurosport commentator were cited to believe themselves not to comment according to skin colour but to be "objective", comment on what they see in a game, and not have political intentions. Nevertheless, the Danish commentator in the TV2 piece was not surprised by the study results because he believed that there are indeed challenges concerning racism facing football and society. The same discursive strategy of ambivalence was employed by the commentator cited in Berlingske, who at the end of the article was quoted saying that the study should be taken very seriously, and action should be taken against the problem. Nevertheless, he added: if indeed the study's conclusions were valid.

The use of journalistic principles further underscored the ambivalence. Berlingske signalled its adherence to the principle of objectivity by directly quoting the commentator, Toft, when he uttered his indignation about the study in several cases. In another instance, however, Toft's knowledge about the alleged differences in physiology between people of African, Asian and European descent was written as an indirect but undisputed quote. This tension between refuting and engaging reflexively in the question of racial bias was solved in the articles by claims of intentions; instead of a reflexive dialogue with their practice, the commentators expressed their wish to be “colour blind” (TV2). Moreover, the racialised subjects did not figure as sources in the case material. Instead, authority to define the case of racial bias was primarily delegated to the sports commentariat, RunRepeat and to academics that commented on the quality of the study. In the latter case, three scientists in the piece from DR became primary definers of the “weak” (Weekendavisen), uncritically treated (DR) study that was merely the expression of a “zeitgeist” (DR).

Real science and political risks

The Achilles heel, so to speak, of journalism’s defence, was indeed the factual discourse of the study. This sore spot became visible both in avoiding certain topics in the meta-journalistic discourse and in the impact that DR’s article had on two following items: the item from Weekendavisen and especially the item from TV2, which was updated according to the academic critique of the study. Firstly, the study’s claim that white players are more often defined by intelligence than players of colour was not commented upon, although the related claim concerning physiology was. In the piece from TV2, a physiotherapist indirectly supported the study’s claims of racial bias by refuting the racist notion of physical differences between white players and players of colour. However, the issue of alleged white superior intelligence – which has a long political history – remained uncontested. In this way, it appeared as if the crux of the study was critically assessed and covered according to journalistic deliberative ideals. Secondly, the factual discourse of the study was challenged by three scientific sources in a piece from DR that was subsequently quoted in Weekendavisen and TV2, as mentioned above. According to a media researcher and a sports professor, the RunRepeat study would not pass a scientific quality test. Their remarks were highlighted on the DR webpage and framed by the storyline that media worldwide and even journalistic “heavyweights” had been quoting the study uncritically. Another scientific researcher who was said to undertake a research project about sports commentators was cited for saying that the study had some faults and didn’t point to the same results as his research. However, the article did not disclose the results of his research.

The scientific critique of the RunRepeat study became part of a discursive strategy in which the director of RunRepeat was held accountable not only for the research but for the consequences of the research and the motives of RunRepeat. He was asked whether the initiatives such as re-education of commentators were reasonable, and he was probed concerning the economic motives of the company. The critical angle of the article was: “How conclusive is the evidence? And can we trust its methods and data at all?” (DR). Critique concerning the actual content of the study was almost non-existent in the DR piece. In contrast, the concerns about academic criteria were quantitatively comprehensive, quoting three scientists and providing a bullet point summary of their seven “points of critique”.

The journalistic approaches thus designated authority and rules to the discourse of the case by their choice of sources, angles, and quotation practices. The discourse was ambivalent in many instances, thus expressing boundary work. The analytical article in Weekendavisen mainly unfolded how racism as a boundary object created oppositions between objectivity and politicisation, on the one hand, and between domestic knowledge and international politicised practices, on the other. Under the headline “Systemic regret”, the article in Weekendavisen reviewed current activist phenomena in the Western domain of sports in which individuals and organisations actively relate to structural inequalities. Activism had become a “transatlantic” enterprise, according to the analysis, and the “weak” study from RunRepeat that only analysed a “snapshot” of European football was part of that trend. On the one hand, this trend was described as overly sensitive to minor violations and, on the other hand, as constituted by a “fear of the ghost of the past” - the ghost being how discourses of sports have historically been formed by theories of race and imperial power manifestations. However, the analysis concluded that activism was too risky business and a problematic solution to the apparent colonial and racialised structures in the world of sports because it would invite sentiments that may not be legitimate, for instance, support for the Turkish military. In other words, the argument in Weekendavisen – as the last article published in the selected data - was that despite historical precedence of racism in sports, the solution lies neither in over-reactions nor belong in the domain of sports itself.

The role played by the journalistic practice was in this case being the primary definer of the field. Weekendavisen's analysis constructed politicisation as part of the history of sports but at the same time as an unwelcome player that could destabilise and challenge the status quo of the domain. By defining activism in sports as regretful and an enterprise that may have gone too far, the journalistic article thus defined its role as a conservative boundary actor.

A racial discourse of football

The case of the RunRepeat study about racial bias in the work of football commentators shows two main discursive strategies that articulated the colour-line of the journalistic coverage. Firstly, one dominant group of sources were Danish commentators. They were portrayed as rejecting claims of racial bias in their work while simultaneously reluctantly recognising the fraught issue of racism in sports and society in general. The latter was strengthened by sources that presented structural perspectives of racial bias in football. Secondly, another dominant group of sources were scientists quoted at length and with great authority questioning the scientific quality of the RunRepeat study, thus legitimising an institutional status quo in football commentary.

The ambivalence of both rejecting and recognising the issue at stake and the strategy of delegitimising the RunRepeat study forms opposition between journalistic principles of objectivity and politicisation. A notion of proper domestic knowledge furthermore strengthens the principles of objectivity as opposed to irrational and politicised transnational sentiments.

Concluding discussion

In the analysed cases, race and racism are expressed as boundary objects that challenge the journalistic discourse of mainstream, objective, and universal news. Rather than engaging in the possibility and challenge of racism, in both cases, the coverage focuses on the validity and reliability of the people who make claims of racism. In this way, it is a case of playing the man, not the ball, when the reliability of RunRepeat's data is given predominance over the substance of the study. Likewise, the opinions of BLM and other activist groups are instantly countered by questioning the validity of their cause and convictions.

The analysis has made clear that the cases reproduce discursive and ideological structures that favour a view of Denmark that is without racist structures. The challenges that van Dijk (1991/2016) identified 30 years ago and continuously discussed by Titley (2020) are still in operation in current Danish journalism. More interesting are the principles and practices that uphold this view and the boundary work it requires. On the one hand, in journalistic practice, racism is seen as an individual practice. We see this in the underscoring of racism as intent to harm rather than a social structure and in the sports commentators' personal ambitions to be objective. Alternatively, racism is seen as structure by academics, foreign media, and people of colour. The relative erasure of the latter perspective helps preserve the boundary of journalistic practice and move to close the debate on what racism is (Titley, 2020). On the other hand, the individualistic ideology also aids in underscoring the universal claims of journalistic practice by constructing them as a binary pair. Whereas journalism aspires to a universal, non-political perspective, the individual may hold political opinions. Concomitantly, what is seen as common sense to journalists – such as social inequality – is non-political, whereas claims of racism are perceived as a political and individual opinion. Here, it is the powerful position of journalism to define common sense that is kept invisible to keep up the boundaries. The boundaries are negotiated and supported by the choices of various authoritative sources, who also subscribe to the journalistic-individualistic ideology. Sources in less powerful positions are rarely heard. By not naming the political ideology underlying so-called mainstream reporting, the journalistic articles hide their own bias as well as their power. Finally, a sense of ambivalence is utilised in some instances to blur the boundaries and preclude political minority voices (Amado & Waisbord, 2015).

Redox and BLM represent the critical memory of minority media on Facebook. In line with the findings of Richardson (2020), minorities seek to hold mainstream, white media accountable online. About half of the 23 posts by BLM Denmark in the selected period are links to newspaper articles reporting on the story about the murder on Bornholm. The other half are comments and posts that utilise the creativity of social media to make arguments about the racial inequality in Denmark and its relation to the particular case. An example is the meme posted June 27 with the text “Bornholm authorities be like …” followed by a photo from the film American History X, which portrays the hate of white supremacists in the United States. The photo is, moreover, photoshopped to incorporate a placard with the words ‘white lives matter’. In this way, the meme calls on connections and structures within powerful cultural institutions and historical facts. Another post (30.6) features a gruesome image of the dead boy Emmett Till, who was lynched in 1955 in Mississippi. The critical memory of injustice towards and sufferings of African Americans is brought to bear in the contemporary, Danish context. The accompanying text says, “the image of Emmett Till is not coincident”, but doesn’t offer an explanation. The communication here is for the people already in the know about African American history and the details of the Bornholm murder. Finally, BLM posts visual and written commentary on the ongoing case, keeping their followers up-to-date on their alternative reading of the case. They use irony by juxtaposing quotes from authorities with images that tell a different story, such as the quote “nothing suggests that racism was a factor in the murder on Bornholm” with a picture of the swastika and ‘white power‘-tattoo on the leg of the accused. Part of this particular kind of communication is the emphasis on the connection across time but also space. The fact that BLM Denmark underlines their arguments with references from the United States precedes Danish colonial media in which transnational lines were drawn between the Caribbean colonies to Denmark and New York. The connections are not bound by national borders but by political rights claims, displaying a “continuity in the development of black publicity” (Baker, 1994, p. 15).

In this cursory review of the critical memory of minority media in Denmark in the summer of 2020, additional two factors emerge that position BLM in opposition to Danish journalistic discourse and ideology. One is the refusal to adhere to a preconceived communicative format, and another is the insistence on a transnational political subjectivity. This radical expression of political subjectivity presented by this minority community invites us to reimagine journalism as a political boundary actor that can negotiate the premises of public sentiments in a racially stratified society. However, it would take a daring kind of journalism that includes other expressions and let go of predominant national perspectives – in other words, an expansion of practices (Carlson, 2015, p. 10) linked to the coverage of race. This expansion may include reflexive stances towards how ideologically imbued practices of allocation of incidents are expressed in 'beats' - such as crime and sports – that favour certain sources and angles. For now, however, the colour -line of the Danish press is keeping safe the boundaries of conserving norms and practices.

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When journalists lose their foothold

Swedish and Norwegian verification scandals in #MeToo-movement coverage

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Abstract

The global #MeToo movement exposed the widespread structural problem of sexual harassment, which was also the case in Sweden and Norway. Across the various sectors of working life, women were able to identify with the call. This perspective, however, was undermined in the public sphere when person-centred scandal stories about a few powerholders and media celebrities took over. In addition, a lack of verifiable documentation – and uncritical use of anonymous sources – ignited renewed debates about the ethical standards of professional journalism. This article discusses two alleged #MeToo cases: *Aftonbladet's* dramatic and unfounded accusations against the theatre CEO Benny Fredriksson and *VG's* misuse and manipulation of a "bar-dance" episode involving the Norwegian Labour politician Trond Giske. Both media stories developed into "critical incidents", resulting in public criticism, self-examination and discussions around ethical rules and regulation.

KEYWORDS
#MeToo, scandal, verification, media ethics, market-driven journalism

Introduction

The international #MeToo movement, launched in the first weeks of October 2017, quickly garnered widespread public response in Sweden and Norway. After sharing their stories in closed forums on social media, women from a wide range of occupational groups and work environments made their testimonies public in legacy media under several related hashtags, among others #silencerecording (actors in film, theater and television), #withwhatright (lawyers/jurists), #whenmusicissilenced (music branch) and #inthecorridorsofpower (politicians).

Allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse were described as men's misuse of power concerning women in weaker positions, often women who were younger and dependent. In addition, personal experiences were linked to employers' social responsibility and the need for clearer norms against sexual harassment in society (Askanius & Hartley, 2019 a, b; Hansson et al., 2020; Lindqvist & Ganetz, 2020; Pollack 2019; Sletteland, 2018; Sletteland & Orgeret, 2019, 2020).

This development led to a stream of news reports and commentaries in the news media, a coverage that also put journalism, characterised as "a discipline of verification" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 79), to a decisive test. While the numerous public testimonies in different industrial and cultural sectors generally practised anonymity concerning both victims and abusers and pointed to sexual harassment as a *structural* societal problem, individual charges against some named and well-known public figures played a central role in many of the reports prioritised by news media organisations. In several cases, a lack of verifiable documentation – and the use of anonymous sources – ignited renewed debates about the ethical standards of professional journalism.

In Sweden, the widespread "outing" of names – followed by person-oriented scandal coverage and media hunts – resulted in a range of complaints to the Press Ombudsman (PO). Cases that the PO deemed to violate its rules were submitted to the Press Council

(PON) for review and decision-making.[1] Many of the accused in these stories were politicians, journalists, TV personalities, and persons in cultural institutions. In 22 #MeToo-related cases, the PON criticised the news media organisations responsible for violations of good editorial practice. According to the then PO, Ola Sigvardsson, a recurring theme in the critique was the publication of harassment claims targeting identified persons, despite weak evidence, often based on allegations from anonymous sources. These harassment claims led to unjustifiable reputational damage (Sigvardsson, 2018).[2]

One of the most controversial media reports was a news story published December 5, 2017, in *Aftonbladet*, the news outlet with the highest readership in Sweden. The CEO of *Kulturhuset Stadsteatern* (Stockholm House of Culture & City Theatre) in Stockholm, Benny Fredriksson, was on this front-page reportage, accused of being "an erratic dictator who pushed forward an abortion, sexually harassed staff and repeatedly let male actors commit abuse without action" (Kerpner, 2017). The severity of the accusations was underlined in two editorial commentaries. Two days after the publication, Fredriksson resigned from his position. Some months later, in March 2018, he took his own life. His death, which occurred *before* the PO and PON considered the complaint from his family about *Aftonbladet's* coverage of the case, sharpened the public debate about press ethics and publication practises.

In Norway, "naming and shaming" was less common in legacy media than in Sweden, and the relatively few highlighted cases in 2017/2018 concerned politicians (Sletteland, 2018). Different political parties and organisations reported, however, that they had received several internal notifications of harassment charges, but few of the names were published. Only one #MeToo complaint – related to publications in three news media outlets – was appraised in 2018 by the Norwegian Press Complaints Commission (*Pressens Faglige Utvalg*, PFU) (Jortveit, 2018). The three media organisations were all criticised for violating good press practices in their source work.[3]

One main exception to this relatively careful publication practice of "naming and shaming" was a comprehensive and intense media coverage of several party-internal harassment charges against Trond Giske, one of two deputy leaders of the Norwegian Labour Party, and a member of the Norwegian parliament, *Stortinget*. He was also the party's fiscal policy spokesperson and had previously held different ministerial positions in two Labour-led governments. Early in 2018, after weeks of media headlines about some charges, followed by discussions in the Labour Party's leadership, he resigned from his party leadership positions.

Approximately one year after his downfall, *VG*, Norway's market-leading online news outlet, presented a new negative story about Giske's behaviour towards women. The documentation was based on a six-second-long mobile video recording from a local bar in Oslo, which showed him smiling and dancing firmly behind a young woman.

However, this alleged "#MeToo story" was, as *VG* was eventually forced to admit, based on false premises. The #MeToo framing was misleading, made with the help of blurry video pictures and a constructed "citation" from the woman captured dancing with Giske. The new "Giske scandal" was quickly turned around into a journalism scandal, leading to sharp public debates and critique, not least from journalists in other media outlets.

These two cases – *Aftonbladet's* dramatic and unfounded accusations against Benny Fredriksson and *VG's* misuse and manipulation of the "bar-dance" episode – both developed into "critical incidents" (Tandoc et al., 2021), resulting in public criticism, self-examination, and discussions around ethical rules and regulation. Both cases were discussed by Torbjörn von Krogh (2020) in the context of the tools applied in the follow-up of serious ethical violations.

The news media organisations highlighted in the two cases, *Aftonbladet* and *VG*, have several features in common. They are owned by the Schibsted Media Group, a listed company based in Norway. Through their history as printed newspapers, they have combined the traditional "tabloid" priority of popular journalism (news, entertainment, and sport) with cultural pages, political commentary, and elements of investigative journalism. During the last decade, *VG* and *Aftonbladet* have both succeeded in establishing themselves as the leading online news media outlet in their respective countries. One difference concerning their ideological leanings, however, is that while *VG* can be characterised as a liberal-conservative news outlet, *Aftonbladet* has a social-democratic profile in its editorial commentary and cultural pages.

This article aims to compare and analyse the two above-mentioned cases and use them to reflect on ethical dilemmas that regularly arise in the news media's coverage of #MeToo-related cases, especially in news stories based on "naming and shaming". A central ethical question is how journalists can avoid revelations that violate honesty, sincerity, and verification norms.

Media ethics may be interpreted as an effort to *combine* the market objectives and competition requirements of news organisations with the basic norms of journalism as an institution. This is an often contradictory and challenging task and can easily lead to conflicting goals concerning editorial priorities and moral values (Allern & Pollack, 2019; Bjerke, 2011; Harcup, 2020, 2007; Phillips et al., 2010; Zelizer, 2017). Nevertheless, the press organisations in Norway and Sweden have traditionally had a pro-active profile in debates about journalism and ethics and have insisted on the value of a self-regulating system independent of government intervention.

The article is organised as follows: First, we further detail the inherent conflicts between different types of journalistic aims, norms, and practices. Second, we take up the ethical norms of truthfulness and verification and discuss how they can be interpreted. Third, we analyse and discuss the two selected cases: "Benny Fredriksson's lost honour" tackles *Aftonbladet's* unverified accusations, and "Trond Giske's scandalised bar dance" examines *VG's* attempt to create a political scandal involving Trond Giske through a leaked private video recording and manipulation of a citation. Fourth and finally, we conclude and discuss *why* news media from time to time lose their foothold and overlook ethical rules concerning fairness and accuracy.[4]

The dual nature of the news media

Our theoretical point of departure is the two-sided character of news media organisations. Like Janus – the Roman god of beginnings and ends – market-driven journalism has two faces pointing in opposite directions. On the one hand, they are patrons of journalism as an institution; they have ascribed a role as defenders of free speech and disseminators of fact-checked information, and they have an obligation to hold powerholders to account. But, on the other hand, they are competitors for audience attention on the news market and represent rival media houses engaged in the production and dissemination of information and entertainment.

In market terms, news media organisations are *enterprises* that produce and disseminate news content and other media products – including advertisements – to audiences. They include printed newspapers as well as online news outlets, television, and radio channels, and journalistic content encompasses different formats and genres. However, what sets the news media apart from other media organisations – such as film companies, subscription video-on-demand services, book publishers, and entertainment channels in radio and television – are primarily their links to journalism as an institution.

In institutional terms, journalism represents social patterns of behaviour spanning across organisations (Ryfe, 2006). These social patterns include genre rules, routines, and internalised norms concerning information gathering, source relations, editorial assessment, and publication. Such features, including ideas about professional, ethical norms, have developed over a long period of time, with expectations regarding the roles of journalists and editors.

In the second part of the last century, the development of press ethics codes in the Scandinavian media industry and higher education for journalists contributed to creating common professional perceptions of news conventions and "good journalistic practice". It also drew boundaries against other types of communication, such as public relations and marketing. A vital institutional feature also deals with notions about journalism as beneficial to society, which tends to be couched in self-imposed tasks such as societal information, stimulation of public debate, and critical scrutiny of those in power. The myth of journalism as a "fourth estate" (or fourth branch of government) has long been important for the legitimacy of the news media branch and for journalism as an occupation and enterprise (Roppen & Allern, 2010; Raaum, 1999).

In line with this reasoning, Høyer (2005, p. 10) described "the news paradigm" as a shared understanding of news values, basic genre rules, and tacit conventions about how news should be presented. Internationally, theories of news values have resulted in attempts at creating lists of the most important news factors.[5] However, a significant limitation of such lists is a tendency to overlook the significance of audience orientation and market strategies concerning newsrooms' specific priorities and news frames. While journalists in different media organisations may adhere to similar perceptions of general news values, their selection of stories and practical interpretations of newsworthiness may still vary. Moreover, international, national, and local news outlets must adapt to different audience expectations (Allern, 2002). In other parts of the news market, *exclusivity* is also an important goal in the newsroom, an aim for individual journalists, and a means to achieve recognition from peers within the journalistic profession (Willig, 2011).

Therefore, editorial organisations may represent different journalistic cultures and styles of reporting, which might influence their specific interpretation of news values. As mentioned above, both *Aftonbladet* and *VG* are popular news outlets, representing the "tabloid" tradition; crime, scandal, sports, and popular entertainment are an important part of the daily menu, but this is combined with reports and commentary about politics, current affairs, and culture. While all media – to some degree – use personification in their news reporting, commercial popular journalism prioritises, to a greater degree than other news outlets, what can be personalised and dramatised. As Eide (1995, p. 44-45) summed up in an analysis of two popular Norwegian news outlets, "It's all about people, experiences and feelings". Concerning news priorities and narrative techniques, "tabloid" newspapers (and their current online news sites) have usually represented a more dramatic (and melodramatic) type of storytelling than the informational model historically associated with the "omnibus" newspaper tradition and news outlets catering for up-market niche audiences.

The popular press has traditionally played a leading role in the development of mediated political scandals, especially in cases where personal morality is spotlighted. Political scandals are also prioritised because they provide journalists with opportunities to link commercial news priorities and questionable methods to a higher purpose: criticising powerholders' norms transgressions, revealing something that has been hidden, and legitimising themselves as morally responsible mediators fulfilling an essential societal role (Allern & Pollack, 2012).

In a book on reflections about the legitimacy of journalism, Rasmussen (2004) pointed to a latent contradiction between ethical prudence and the professional ideals of being pressing and investigative. Ethical norms and professional standards are not synonymous. An illustrative Norwegian example is VG's admired and infamous front-page story about a man who killed his wife.[6]

The newsroom illustrated the case with a wedding picture of the couple. The picture was symbolically torn in two, and the headline was a well-known part of the traditional wedding vows: “Till death do us part”. The front page was immediately regarded as skilled and effective professional journalism, both internally and in other Scandinavian newsrooms (Bjerke, 2005; Raaum, 1986, p. 123). However, many readers reacted differently and interpreted the front page as cynical and immoral. These reactions led to a spontaneous demonstration against *VG* outside the newspaper’s premises. Commercial news values and shared moral values were on a collision course. As a result, *VG’s* editors found it wise to apologize for the front page.

A conflict between “good journalism” and “good media ethics” also featured in the media coverage of a political scandal involving Tore Tønne, a former cabinet minister in Jens Stoltenberg’s first government. The popular tabloid *Dagbladet* led the news race, starting on December 4, 2002. Following his departure from government in October 2001, he applied for and received three months’ severance pay as a former minister. This scheme is intended as compensation if the person in question has no other job income during this period. *Dagbladet* showed that, in the same period, Tønne had worked for a large industrial company, later receiving a large “success fee” for this task. He was, therefore, accused of abusing public support schemes. The case dominated the Norwegian news landscape for two weeks after that, with frequent critical articles and commentaries. Then, on December 21, it was announced that Tønne had taken his own life. The media hunt abruptly ended.

His suicide also led to intense public reactions against the press. Initially, the revelation about Tønne and his “double pay” was generally considered an example of good investigative journalistic work. Inside the media branch, many reckoned that *Dagbladet* – the news leader in the case – stood out as a candidate for a journalistic award for its coverage. However, the overall *amount* of negative coverage was extensive, and in most articles, the accused was denied the benefit of the doubt.

The criticism levelled against the press was directed at what many readers perceived as a campaign-oriented and one-sided media hunt. Influential politicians joined the chorus. In response to these public reactions, the Norwegian Press Association commissioned three academics to review the media's role in the case. Some months later, they delivered a thorough, reflective, and critical report. One of their general conclusions was that "There must be limits to brutal, disrespectful and anti-human journalism, regardless of whether the person in question is guilty or not guilty" (Hjeltnes et al., 2003, p. 10). They also suggested that in sensational cases – when "the heat is on" in the newsroom – there is a need for counter-perceptions, alternative views, and an internal critical voice, characterised as the need for "a Devil's advocate, a cold brain inside the newsroom" (Hjeltnes et al., p. 83).

While this advice is sensible, following up on it is very difficult since it requires both an assessment and a decision from each independent publisher. The news media have no common super-editor-in-chief. Discussions around editorial priorities and resource use are also far beyond the mandate of the ethical councils of the Swedish and Norwegian news media branches.

Media ethics and the difficult art of verification

As the British moral philosopher Bernard Williams (2002) summed up, the norm of truthfulness is of great importance in all human and social conditions, a prerequisite for dialogue and cooperation. In particular, he emphasised two central virtues of truth: accuracy and sincerity. Accuracy is about correctness, ensuring that what is said or written is as precise as possible and not false or misleading, while sincerity is about being sure that what is expressed is meant honestly (p. 44). If we doubt the sender's honesty, his or her credibility is undermined. In a discussion about the importance of these two virtues for media ethics, Phillips et al. (2010, p. 54) added a third: the virtue of *hospitality* (Silverstone, 2007), taking into account the importance of how the news media affect the conditions for dialogue between cultures and peoples.

At the same time, it is necessary to note an important difference between general public morality and media ethics. In the novel *Immortality*, Milan Kundera reminds the reader about a special journalistic privilege: "The power of the journalist is not based on his right to ask but on his right *to demand an answer*" (Kundera, 1991, p.

110). The ideological justification of this “right” is based on the recognition of journalism as an independent institution with a societal mission. Press freedom, which in Sweden and Norway is based on constitutional rights, includes the possibility of publishing information that can damage the reputation of both individuals and organisations, i.e., a right to harm for the sake of the greater good.

However, this classic argument regarding the freedom and power of the press is sometimes distorted and interpreted as a possible defence for sensational storytelling. In the UK, it has regularly been used by representatives of the popular tabloid press as an argument for their notorious working methods and never-ending range of celebrity scandals of widely varying public interest (Davies, 2014). According to Paul Dacre (2008), the long-serving editor of the right-wing *Daily Mail*, the press “has the freedom to identify those who have offended public standards of decency, the very standards its readers believe in, and hold the transgressors up to public condemnation”. An ethical problem with this pompous moral narrative is that it too easily confuses public interest with what interests the public. Moreover, ignoring the virtues of accuracy and sincerity in reporting undermines the transparency of journalistic work. The philosopher Onora O’Neill commented in the 2002 BBC Reith Lecture as follows:

> If powerful institutions are allowed to publish, circulate and promote material without indicating what is known and what is rumour, what is derived from a reputable source and what is invented, what is standard analysis and what is speculation, which sources may be knowledgeable and which are probably not, they damage our public culture and all our lives. (Cited in Phillips et al., 2010, p. 61)

In journalism, truthfulness is usually interpreted as a duty to report with a basis in reality and fact-checked information. Paragraph 1 of The International Federation of Journalists’ (IFJ) Global Charter of Ethics reads as follows: “Respect for the facts and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist” (IFJ, 2021). Questions related to the authenticity, credibility, and reliability of sources are regarded as essential to the information quality of journalism. Such ethical demands also play a crucial role in the boundary work of news media organisations towards other types of mediated communication. As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) underlined in their influential book about the elements of journalism: "In the end, the discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art" (p. 79). In a textbook on ethics for journalists, Bruås (2006, p. 298) characterised truth as "an overriding requirement, in the sense that all other qualities of a good story become irrelevant if they are not true".

However, concepts such as truth or truthfulness are not directly mentioned neither in the Swedish nor in the Norwegian ethical codes of the media branch. Instead, a key concept is the truth-related virtue of *accuracy*, i.e., an obligation for journalists to present correct factual information from credible sources. One reason for avoiding "truth" as a concept may be that the ethical councils of the media branch have a limited assignment. They are not fact-finding institutions and never conduct any independent investigations in complicated and disputed cases. How media organisations prioritise news and frame their news stories is also outside their mandate and realm of interest (Bjerke, 2011). The role of the media's ethical councils when complaints against published articles or programmes have been submitted is to organize a review process and decide whether the media organisation has followed the established procedures for "good press practice" described in their ethical codes.

How such formulations are interpreted in relation to the virtue of accuracy is another story. In a discussion on press ethics in Norway, Bjerke (2011) pointed to the difference between *two different levels* of accuracy. On a simple report level, the quality demand is limited: citations from identified and seemingly trustworthy sources must be correctly rendered. We may call this "level 1". The ethical problem is that this basic type of control is insufficient in many situations and journalistic reports. As a result, media sources sometimes provide inaccurate, biased, or misleading information. This lack of a serious verification process obviously applies to politicians and other power players, and the documented stream of lies from the 45th president of the United States is just one, albeit extreme, example. *Verification*, which may be called "level 2", represents a more demanding fact-checking process. Finding relevant and reliable evidence generally requires information from different, independent sources, and that this information is subject to critical scrutiny. However, an independent verification process is costly and time-consuming. In ordinary day-to-day journalism, thorough fact-checking is not, in practice, a *requirement* before publication, according to Bjerke (2011, p. 129) in an analysis of the Norwegian press ethical system.

It is also evident that accuracy on "level 1" is inadequate in all cases where sources promote claims that, if published, may publicly harm the accused. "Naming and shaming" scandals during the #MeToo movement are a new reminder of the importance of verification processes in serious journalistic work.

Benny Fredriksson's lost honour

Benny Fredriksson was, until his resignation on December 8, 2018, the CEO of one of Stockholm's most important cultural institutions, *Kulturhuset Stadsteatern* (Stockholm House of Culture & City Theatre). During earlier stages of his career, he worked both as an actor and a stage director. In 2002, Fredriksson became *Stadsteatern's* manager and CEO and remained the top leader of the theatre and its administration for fifteen years.

The front-page story that led to his downfall was published December 5, 2017, by *Aftonbladet's* online edition (*aftonbladet.se*). An abridged version of the article was published in the printed edition of *Aftonbladet* the following day (Kerpner, 2017). The newspaper's advertising placard for this issue, visible at newsstands all over Sweden, had the following text:

> **THEATRE DIRECTOR PRESSURED actor TO ABORTION FOR A ROLE Employees paint a reign of terror by the CEO of Kulturhuset. "Everyone is afraid of him."**

Aftonbladet claimed that their case presentation was based on 40 testimonies from past and present staff members about Benny Fredriksson's "reign of terror". An anonymous source was quoted as saying: "You may not openly quote me. He would deliberately go in to crush my career" (Kerpner, 2017). The only identified source in the news article was a former employee who had served as Fredriksson's secretary more than ten years prior. All other citations and claims were based on anonymous sources.

Fredriksson was described as a person with "a double nature", and one of the examples mentioned was that he once advised an actress “to have an abortion if she wanted a particular role. She had the abortion and got the role” (Kerpner, 2017). This part of the story, together with claims that he had failed to intervene against male actors responsible for sexual harassment, made it possible to frame the critique as part of the #MeToo movement.

The #MeToo framing was also underlined in an editorial by Eva Franchell (2017) and a column written by the newspaper’s cultural director, Åsa Linderborg. An online version of her commentary was published on December 5, 2017, entitled “He has run the business with horror and fear”. An almost identical text was published in the paper on December 6, 2017, under the headline “Politicians closed their eyes to Fredriksson’s reign of terror” (Linderborg, 2017a). In the online column, she wrote that “He has pressured actors not to take parental leave. He has even forced an actress to have an abortion”. In the printed newspaper column, the words “forced an abortion” were deleted. However, in another commentary, Linderborg (2017b) criticised a Facebook text published by Johan Wirfält, one of *Kulturhuset Stadsteatern’s* middle managers, who criticised *Aftonbladet’s* attack on Fredriksson. She dismissed his objections as follows: “With all due respect, but it is not Wirfält’s womb that Benny Fredriksson has made demands on.”

Aftonbladet’s publications were reported to the Press Ombudsman in 2018 by his widow Anne Sofie von Otter and two sons. The PO summarised their main criticism in four points:

- *Aftonbladet* had not given Benny Fredriksson a real opportunity to respond to the accusations before the publication
- The newspaper had not published any statements which were to Benny Fredriksson’s advantage
- *Aftonbladet* had not checked the accuracy of the accusations
- The accusations were summarised with a choice of words that gave them another and more serious significance

After organising a round of written answers and comments between *Aftonbladet* and the complainants, the PO assessed the case. In a detailed review, he especially criticised the lack of evidence concerning several serious accusations, including undocumented claims from anonymous sources, which were presented without reservation by the newspaper. He concluded that *Aftonbladet* had inflicted unjustifiable publicity damage on Benny Fredriksson and should be held accountable for this. He then handed the matter over to the PON for assessment and decision-making.

In the introduction to its assessment, the PON (2019) underlined that a person who is the head of an important cultural institution is "a person in power who must accept a harsh and thorough examination of the responsibilities that come with leadership". However, *Aftonbladet's* publications "consist predominantly of a series of accusations against Benny Fredriksson regarding individual events as well as sweeping and insulting descriptions of him as a person". PON assessed that the publications about Benny were flawed in several respects. The stories were, with one exception, anonymous, and it appears as if they were part of a petition: "It is not stated, except in one case, when the allegations should have occurred, and it is not clear whether the newspaper has been in contact with the informants." These circumstances "show that Aftonbladet has not done enough to investigate the information and the newspaper has thus had no basis for publishing such serious accusations".

Furthermore, PON concluded that Benny Fredriksson was not given a reasonable opportunity to respond. The main conclusion was as follows:

> The Press Council thus shares PO's assessment that Aftonbladet has inflicted unjustifiable publicity damage on Benny Fredriksson. This is a serious press ethics violation, which is also reinforced by the fact that the publication has taken place on a broad front and includes not only the news part but also the editorial and cultural pages.
> In summary, this means that Aftonbladet has grossly violated good journalistic practice.

In the preface to an anthology on media ethics and public shaming, Truedson (2020, p. 10) summed up that *Aftonbladet's* publications about Fredriksson "developed into one of the most tragic and shocking cases Swedish media ethics has ever experienced". How could it happen?

In a detailed review of the case, Torbjörn von Krogh (2020) pointed to some factors that seemed to have played a significant role. As Rosenvinge (2020) documented, one such factor was that *Aftonbladet* had fallen somewhat behind other news outlets in the commercial competition for sensational #MeToo-related revelations. As if this was not enough, the #MeToo story prioritised in *Expressen*, *Aftonbladet's* main competitor, were accusations against one of *Aftonbladet's* well-known reporters and editorial commentators, Fredrik Virtanen. The freelance writer and social media activist Cissy Wallin accused him of rape.[7] Internal contradictions and critique had also led to a leadership crisis inside the news organisation. On December 4, 2017, the responsible publisher and editor-in-chief, Sofia Olsson Olsén, reported being sick because of a stress reaction. She never returned to the newspaper.

In the last part of November 2017, Åsa Linderborg was contacted by employees of *Stadsteatern*, who, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, wanted to launch a critique of Benny Fredriksson's leadership methods. After she had spoken with a few sources, the follow-up was left to *Aftonbladet's* newsroom (von Krogh, p. 27). The launch of their accusations apparently gave *Aftonbladet* a unique opportunity to recapture lost ground in the ongoing news competition, and their dramatic news story attracted national attention. Immediately preceding this publication, Linderborg (2017c) penned an indignant column about *Expressen's* speculations about #MeToo and *Aftonbladet*. She characterised it as motivated by an "unrestrained aggression in the pursuit of market shares". Unfortunately, this also seems to be a precise summary of *Aftonbladet's* lowering of the ethical news threshold in the Benny Fredriksson case.

Trond Giske's scandalised bar dance

In early December 2017, two leading Norwegian news outlets, *Dagens Næringsliv* and *VG*, wrote that the Labour Party's leadership had received #MeToo-related alerts from several women about Trond Giske, one of the party's deputy leaders. The claims in the alerts were that Giske had previously exposed them to unwanted sexual advances. Two of the women later stood forward and publicly presented their case. Giske generally denied that he had sexually harassed the women but regretted that he had sometimes behaved in a way that individuals had perceived as inappropriate or unpleasant. According to an internal party summary of Giske's commentary to one of the cases, he "admits that he was too drunk and that his behaviour was inappropriate both in terms of his position and the age difference between them … He has given the woman his unreserved apology".[8]

However, Giske also characterised other alerts as baseless and false. The party leadership, however, concluded in their assessment that, on several occasions, he had violated the party's internal guidelines. As a result, he lost his position in the central leadership of the party.

Despite this, Giske continued to be trusted by many party colleagues in Trondheim, his local constituency in mid-Norway (Sletteland & Orgeret, 2020, s. 81). From both inside and outside the party, suspicions were also raised about alarms of sexual harassment being used in an internal power struggle. As in other mediated scandals, the extent, intensity, and one-sidedness of the media coverage led to some counter-reactions and sympathy among the general public.

Around a year after his downfall, in February 2019, Giske was proposed by the local election committee to be the elected deputy leader of the Labour Party in Trøndelag, a county in which Trondheim is the largest town. This position would also give him a place in the national party leadership. Political observers and pundits interpreted the proposal as an attempt at political rehabilitation.

Shortly after this nomination, Giske visited Vulkan Bar in his neighbourhood. A young woman, Sofie (27), who was celebrating her birthday with some friends, recognised him and spontaneously invited him to dance with her.[9] He obliged. One of her female friends filmed the episode, and the six-second-long video was later shared privately among some of Sofie's friends. However, the video recording was also leaked to others, among them a local trade union official. He interpreted this as a new "#MeToo affair", and without contacting Sofie, he sent a "message of concern" to the Labour Party's central leadership. The video was also leaked as a news tip to one of *VG's* journalists and "Giske hunters", Lars Joakim Skarvøy.

Skarvøy quickly contacted Sofie and organised a meeting with her about the video. On February 21, *VG* published an online article about the case. The main message, and frame, was a new "message of concern" to the Labour Party about Giske. The video recording was described as follows: "It shows that Giske hangs over the back of a woman in her 20s and places his hand on the woman's hip while they dance. The woman then bends away from Giske". Sofie, referred to as "the woman in the video", is cited as saying: "We danced and had a good time, then it became a bit much, so my friend and I left."

Following *VG's* publication, Sofie contacted NRK, the Norwegian public broadcaster, to challenge *VG's* representation of the case, and she said in an interview that the dance with Giske was "unproblematic and OK". Despite this quick public denial of *VG's* claims, the proposal to elect Giske to a new leadership position in the Labour Party in Trøndelag was immediately withdrawn, and Giske himself withdrew his candidacy.

In the weeks that followed, criticism of *VG's* working methods in the case increased, especially after an interview on March 20, 2019, with Sofie on TV2, one of the national TV channels. It also became known that, after Sofie's critical interview with NRK, *VG's* editor-in-chief, Gard Steiro, called her personally. He repeatedly asked whether she had perceived the meeting with Giske as unpleasant, which she denied (PFU, 2019).

A few days later, on March 27, *VG* presented a self-evaluation report about the case and admitted to violations of several paragraphs of the Norwegian media's ethical guidelines. However, *VG's* editors also presented journalist Lars Joakim Skarvøy's and Sofie's differing views about the disputed "citation" in the initial online article as two equal and alternative versions of what had been agreed in their meeting.

After a formal complaint from Sofie, The Press Complaints Commission (PFU) appraised the case on August 28, 2019 and concluded that *VG* had used "unacceptable methods" in its relations with a non-professional source (PFU, 2019). The critique from the PFU concerns both *VG's* publication about the Vulkan Bar case and its later self-evaluation report. According to the PFU, this represented a breach of good press practices concerning five paragraphs in the ethical codes, *Vær Varsom-plakaten*.

In the Spring of 2019, a committee was appointed by the Norwegian Press Association, with a mandate to bring about a broad investigation of the media's relationship with their sources, including some lessons from the *VG* case. The report was delivered in November the same year (Omdal et al., 2019). In his discussion about the Swedish and Norwegian #MeToo cases, von Krogh (2020, p. 32) characterised such thorough and critical investigations of media ethics as "the tool Sweden lacks". Among the topics discussed were the media's relations with anonymous sources, premises concerning contacts between sources and interviewees, requirements for documentation, and citation rules. The committee also proposed some revisions in the ethical codes (Omdal et al., 2019). After a round of consultations and debates in the media industry, the board of the Norwegian Press Association adopted changes in five of the paragraphs, among other things clarifying the guidelines concerning identification, accuracy, allegations from anonymous sources, and citation control. It also included a warning against misusing inexperienced sources.

Discussion and conclusion

Journalists' relations with their sources have always been vital for news media content and the quality of journalism. The credo about journalism as a discipline of verification (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007) underlines the importance of norms related to fact-checking and accuracy. Gross violations of such ethical rules, as the above cases illustrate, immediately lead to loss of trust in the newsrooms involved and endangers public trust in journalism as an institution. The sharp, professional criticism directed at *Aftonbladet* and *VG*, respectively, may therefore be interpreted as necessary "boundary work" (Carlson, 2015, p. 10), a demarcation against publication types and a journalism practice that cannot be accepted. It may also function as a confidence-building branch strategy.

A key question seldom discussed in relation to specific complaints is *why* journalists – and their newsrooms – are from time to time tempted to overlook elementary and well-known ethical rules concerning fairness and accuracy. Why do they lose their ethical foothold? One of the crucial factors is arguably an inherent conflict between different norms related to professional, market-driven journalism.

When particular types of news stories capture the public interest, such as the #MeToo movement in the autumn of 2017, they immediately influence newsroom priorities. However, anonymous testimonies about sexual harassment and structural critiques of men's misuse of power are difficult to present as eye-catching and exciting human stories – especially after the first reports and headlines. Professional, market-driven journalism requires news stories based on concretisation and personification, and for popular journalistic media, this is more or less “a life-and-death matter”. If such revelations can be presented as an attempt to hold powerholders to account, they also demonstrate the importance of another important professional norm.

Commercial news values provide the self-fulfilling impetus for the editorial hunting of stories linked to or directed at well-known persons, celebrities, and powerholders. Being the first newsroom to launch a political scandal may increase the organisation’s professional prestige, and if other newsrooms follow up on this, it is regarded as a success among peers. That was exactly what happened after Aftonbladet's “scoop” about Benny Fredriksson; the story was followed up by many other news media outlets.

While Swedish media have gradually learnt to be more restrictive in publishing names, for example, in their crime reports (Pollack, 2020), the hunt for #MeToo-relevant, personalised stories quickly lowered the threshold for publishing names in relation to allegations of sexual harassment. As Rosenvinge (2020) pointed out in an analysis of the first month of #MeToo, whether names were published or not did not follow any logic or principal line; it could change from day to day on a case-by-case basis.

In major scandal cases, larger news media often *compete* for the leading role in the hunt. Without verification of these claims, *Aftonbladet’s* willingness to publish a long list of defamatory accusations against Benny Fredriksson may first and foremost be interpreted as a desperate move to conquer a leading position in the #MeToo news race. Even the editorial opinion and cultural pages were used in the attack, a strategy that should demonstrate the importance and seriousness of the alleged scoop. However, this also helped make the ethical violations more severe and resulted in a backlash that secured *Aftonbladet’s* coverage of the Benny Fredriksson case a place in “the hall of shame” in the history of Swedish media ethics.

VG’s Vulkan Bar story was also presented as a “sensational” story about a (former) powerholder, but the methods used became the most important ethical question: it was an attempt to create a “scandal” by manipulating a non-professional source and constructing a misleading citation. This practice represented a violation of norms about honesty and sincerity in relation to news media sources. The strong reactions from peers and the criticism from the media’s ethical watchdog, the PFU, emphasised that this was a harmful act to the public and represented an undermining of the relationship between journalism and its sources.

Another common feature related to *Aftonbladet's* articles about Benny Fredriksson and *VG's* Vulkan Bar story about Trond Giske was the construction of these cases as #MeToo-related. This intentional framing, without doubt, strengthened the commercial and political news value of the cases. However, both attempts were based on loose grounds. In the Benny Fredriksson case, this was based on unfounded claims and misrepresentation. Most of the potentially substantial critique – if *Aftonbladet* had researched the story – was how he exercised his power as a director and CEO, which was practically unrelated to personal stories of sexual harassment. In the Bar Vulkan case, the #MeToo associations were based on misinterpretations of a harmless private dance episode – and a journalistic manipulation of a citation from an inexperienced source.

Journalists often highlight the ability to criticise powerholders' norms transgression as an important mission and the legitimacy of their craft. Therefore, the right to publish revelations that may harm others is also part and parcel of journalism ethics. However, the precondition for this right is that the publication is based on relevant, accurate information and that the framing does not distort the context of the case.

The global #MeToo movement pointed to the widespread structural problem of sexual harassment, which was also the case in Sweden and Norway. Across the various sectors of working life, women were able to identify with the call. This perspective, however, was undermined in the public sphere when person-centred scandal stories about a few powerholders and media celebrities took over. The important political issues highlighted by the #MeToo movement diminished in importance. Unscrupulous name publishing and lack of verification weakened public trust in journalism, resulting in a backlash against the public discussions surrounding sexual harassment.

NOTES

[1] In 2020, the PO was renamed the Media Ombudsman (MO), and the PON changed its name to Mediernas etiknämnd (the Media Council). The name changes were related to an extension of the institution's mandate: While the PO primarily assessed ethical cases related to the printing press and their online outlets, the MO assesses ethical cases related to print media, radio, television and online media. Before 2020, a public institution, The Review Board for Radio and Television (Granskningsnämden for radio och tv), assessed all ethical complaints against radio and television channels in Sweden.

[2] A few #MeToo-related cases were assessed by The Review Board for Radio and Television, among them, a programme published by Swedish Television's investigative programme Uppdrag Granskning (UG), #MeToo och Fredrik Virtanen. SVT/UG was criticised for invasion of privacy in relation to Cissy Walin, the person who had accused Virtanen of rape (Adelai & Hill, 2019).

[3] https://presse.no/pfu/ (PFU-sak 1987/18; PFU-sak 188/18 and PFU-sak 189/18).

[4] Quotes from Swedish and Norwegian newspaper articles and documents were translated into English by the authors.

[5] See Harcup and O'Neill (2017) and O'Neil and Harcup (2009) for an overview.

[6] VG, January 19, 1983.

[7] In 2011, Wallin reported Virtanen to the police on allegations of rape, which were alleged to have occurred in 2006. Virtanen denied this, and the case did not lead to legal action. In 2019, Wallin was sentenced to probation for gross defamation because of her public accusations.

[8] Letter to the Labour Party's central board, cited by VG on January 2, 2018.

[9] We base the presentation of the Vulkan Bar case on information provided to the PFU (2019).

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Fabrication and erroneous information

Exploring two types of news media scandals as critical incidents in journalism

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Abstract

This article analyzes news media scandals as critical incidents in journalism. A critical incident can be broadly understood as an event or development that reflects 'the hows and whys' of journalism. A part of the research into critical incidents studies these as occurrences that are made scandalous by journalistic misdeeds or ethical lapses. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, theoretically, to link this understanding of critical incidents to the study and theory of the scandal. Second, empirically, to analyze how different types of news media scandals lead to reflection and debate about journalism. To achieve this purpose, the article focuses on two specific types of news media scandals: the fabrication scandal and the erroneous information scandal. The two types of scandals bring into question fundamental standards and practices of journalism, such as 'telling the truth' and basing stories on 'facts.' They also lead to reflections on 1) increased competition between news media, 2) the pressure to produce more stories inside the individual newsroom, 3) the drive to get a 'scoop,' 4) journalism's relationship to powerful and/or anonymous sources, and 5) the problems of a 'trust, not supervise' culture in the newsroom.

KEYWORDS
journalism, scandal, critical incident, fabrication

Introduction

News media scandals occur in many different countries and often become global news stories when they are uncovered. In the US, both the Stephen Glass scandal (1998) and the Jayson Blair scandal (2003) involved reporters who were caught fabricating or plagiarizing their stories. In Great Britain, Sky News reporter James Furlong fabricated a news story that showed a fake live firing of a cruise missile at sea in the Persian Gulf during the Iraq War in 2003. In 2011, the British Tabloid News of World had to shut down due to a phone-hacking scandal. The latest global media scandal to hit the headlines is the so-called 'Spiegel-gate' (2018). A prizewinning reporter of the famous German news magazine was caught fabricating both stories and sources. Historically, of course, various kinds of news media scandals have always existed with the Moon Hoax, a series of six articles about the people living on the moon, published by New York Sun in 1835, often referenced as one of the first news media scandals (Thornton, 2000).

Traditionally, the news media is a central part of the scandalization process: from Watergate to the Panama Papers, many types of scandals are linked to information uncovered by the news media. However, journalists and news media also sometimes find themselves the subject of scandals (Lasorsa & Dai, 2007: Fenton, 2019; Kepplinger & Viererbl, 2021). Historically, there has been a link between the study of 'scandalous' journalism and the study of critical incidents in journalism (D'Angelo, 2021). While a critical incident can be broadly described as "an event or development that leads journalists to reconsider 'the hows and whys of journalism practice'" (Jenkins et al., 2021: 1), D'Angelo (2021) shows how the concept of the critical incident has also been linked to paradigm repair research since the

1980s. In this line of research, according to D'Angelo (2021: 19): "(....) a critical incident is incited by an occurrence made scandalous by virtue of journalistic misdeeds and/or ethical lapses that news media must subsequently promote as an accident."

In a recent book by Tandoc et al. (2021), the concept of the critical incident is presented as an entrance point for the discussion on the changes and challenges that journalism as a profession is facing in the new millennia. The book builds on the original work by Zelizer (1992) but expands and updates the debate and concept. Thus, the book illustrates the many ways that 'critical incidents' can manifest themselves in today's media landscape, such as when international journalists cover genocide (Magdenga, 2021) or the use of children as news sources (Sybert, 2021). This article builds on studies looking at critical incidents as part of paradigm repair research focusing on journalistic 'misdeeds' and 'ethical lapses' (Bennett et al., 1985; D'Angelo, 2021). However, we categorize journalistic misdeeds and ethical lapses under the theoretical headline of scandal research.

Today, scandals have become a frequent and prevalent part of modern societies (Pollack et al., 2018; Tumber & Waisbord, 2019). Probably still, most prominent is the political scandal and the media coverage thereof, which are often the focus of scandal research (Entman, 2012; Pollack et al., 2018). The second focus in scandal research, however, are studies that focus on the corporate scandal, or the CEO scandal, where it is the media's coverage of the wrongdoing of big corporations or their CEOs that are in focus (Kuhn & Lee, 2003; Benediktsson, 2010; Kantola, 2014). The third focus in media research concerning scandals is the victim's perspective (Karlsen & Duckert, 2017; Hammarlin, 2019), while a fourth and final focus is the missteps and wrongdoings of journalists and the news media (Carlson, 2014; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014; Fenton, 2019). This article seeks to contribute, first, theoretically, by linking the understanding of critical incidents to the study and concept of the scandal. Second, empirically, by analyzing how different types of news media scandals lead to critical incidents, causing intense public debate about journalism's 'hows and whys.'

The article proceeds in the following steps to accomplish the goals above. First, the article argues that the use of Thompson scandal theory complements the existing research of critical incidents with a focus on journalistic misdeeds or ethical lapses in several ways: It helps to define, and thus identify, which events can be considered scandalous, and it helps to explain the relationship between scandal and power—in this case, the power of the news media. In turn, this helps explain why scandals themselves can be so powerful and have, sometimes, such severe consequences for the actors or institutions involved. Second, the article analyses two specific types of media scandals—the fabrication scandal and the erroneous information scandal—and shows precisely how news media scandals function as critical incidents that bring into question fundamental 'hows and whys' of journalism.

In this study, this means questioning ideals such as 'telling the truth' and practices such as basing stories on 'facts.' Still, the analysis of these scandals also shows that the scandals lead to specific reflections on 1) the increased competition between news media, 2) the pressure to produce more stories inside the individual newsroom, 3) the drive to get a 'scoop,' 4) journalism's relationship to powerful, as well as anonymous sources, and 5) the problems of a 'trust, not supervise' culture in the newsroom. However, while both types of scandals lead to reflections on journalism, this reflection stops when, in the case of fabrication scandals, the responsible reporter has been punished, usually by being fired, or, in the case of the erroneous information scandal, when the scandal has been 'handled' or when the scandal no longer receives media attention. Collectively, therefore, it seems that very little reflection is going on, as each new scandal most often is presented and discussed without mention of previous scandals, and only one example of a scandal directly leading to a change in news media practice was uncovered.

News media scandals and the increased visibility of power

Research-wise, what this article deems 'news media scandals' has been previously researched under different headlines. Often, cases of journalistic misconduct have been analyzed based on paradigm repair theory with a focus on how the news media caught in a scandal have tried to reestablish faith and legitimacy to the journalistic paradigm after the fact (Cecil, 2002; Hindman, 2005). Studies have also focused on journalistic transgressions as a question of journalistic boundary-crossing or journalistic deviance and analyzed how media discourse has set the boundaries between what can be defined as journalism or otherwise (Carlsson & Berkowitz, 2014; Carlsson, 2014). On the other hand, other studies have focused on the concept of 'deceptive journalism' or 'journalistic deceptions' (Govaret et al. 2020, Lasorsa & Dai, 2007). In these studies, the characteristics of so-called deceptive news stories are investigated based on the assumption that deceptive news stories have several common characteristics that can be used to identify and analyze these kinds of stories (Lasorsa & Dai, 2007). In a recent German study, news media scandals were linked to journalistic norms and the increasing number of complaints to the German Press Council, indicating that these norms are declining amongst (some) German journalists (Kepplinger & Viererbl, 2021).

As evident from the above, studies of news media scandals address the issue from various points of view. A way for research to more collectively address news media scandals would be to link their study closer to studies of other types of scandals, such as the political scandal (Thompson, 2000). For Thompson (2000, 2005), whose work was central in placing the political scandal as an important part of postmodern society, the growing prevalence of scandals in society is linked to the rise of a new and mediated visibility. This new visibility is again linked to the question of power. In earlier societies, before the existence of print media, television, and other types of media, the elites in power were largely invisible to regular citizens. Like kings or queens, when the elites did appear, it was for a restricted public, such as the nobles within the court (Thompson, 2005). This kind of visibility required co-presence and was also governed by law and strict social norms. With the rise of print media, television, and the internet, this all has changed. This change has led to the rise of the new kind of mediated visibility, where political leaders and other powerful elites become increasingly visible, sometimes by choice, at other times through leeks, paparazzi photos, or other types of visual or audio communication (Thompson, 2005; Trottier, 2018).

According to Thompson (2005), the rise of a new mediated visibility is a double-edged sword for those in power. On the one hand, the new visibility may be used to spread and control information, messages, and images; on the other hand, the new visibility can be a risk and lead to loss of control and to the exposure of secrets or information that may end up threatening those in power. Thus, for Thompson

(2005), the rise of political scandals in postmodern societies is inexplicitly linked to a new mediated visibility most typically exemplified by the news media and investigative journalism. Thompson also clarifies the basic premise of most political scandals: making visible something previously hidden or invisible. All in all, Thompson (2000: 13–14) identifies five features of scandal: (1) transgressions of certain norms or values that, (2) were intended to remain concealed but become known to others, (3) who disapprove of these transgressions, (4) publicly express this disapproval, and (5) may damage the reputation of those involved.

In Thompson's view, scandals are linked to questions of power and holding the powerful elites, the political elite, and other kinds of power elites of society accountable. As studies about corporate, financial, or military scandals show, elites can be held accountable (Tumber & Waisbord, 2019). Indeed, another kind of power elite that seems to be gaining more scandal attention, though so far perhaps mostly in public discourse, are journalists and news media owners. As mentioned, the news media scandal has previously been the subject of research. Still, this research has often been based on paradigm repair theory, where the focus is not so much the scandal itself but more on how the affected news media try to rebuild trust in their brands afterward (Hindman, 2005). However, as Fenton (2019) states, the study of scandal is as much a study of society's power elites as a study of ritual or journalistic ideals. Moreover, the news media and its leading journalists are themselves one such elite.

Though it is common to refer to the news media as powerful, as agenda-setters, or as the Fourth Estate, the study of journalists and news media as a power elite is much less common (Mayerhöffer & Pfetsch, 2018; Fenton, 2019). Traditional elite theory is not blind to the existence of the news media, of course, but tends to view the news media as either in opposition to the traditional elites or to focus just on media owners or leading editors as elite members (Mayerhöffer & Pfetsch, 2018). Consequently, when compared to the study of political elites or business elites, the study of media elites is much less common. There is, however, good reason to focus on media elites as they can, at least partially, control and influence the flow of news and information to society, while they also interact with, and sometimes influence, other power elites (Mayerhöffer & Pfetsch, 2018; Fenton, 2019). Not only can journalists and the news media be seen as a power elite themselves, but the practices of this power elite, despite its focus on the transparency of political power, are often hidden and invisible from the common news consumer (Karlsson, 2011). Indeed, theory on transparency has long argued that viewed from the outside, 'news' seems to be produced in a black box shrouded in the mystery of objectivity. Karlsson (2011: 283) sums up this view of news production: News is produced inside a closed 'fortress newsroom' where journalists 'do' journalism based on routines that are invisible to the audience, and when the news product is finished, it falls out of a black box and appears before the audience. Based on the backstage/front stage dichotomy, Karlsson (2011) argues that most of the production of news—the gathering of information, the research, the talking to the sources, the priorities of the news desk, the editing, etc.—all take place backstage. From a transparency point of view, the problem for journalism is that its 'power' comes from journalists' and news organizations' historical claim of objectively and factually producing information based on a paradigm of objectivity; therefore, the news produced can be trusted by the audience (Karlsson, 2011). However, news production takes place almost entirely backstage and is mostly invisible, making journalism a hidden and almost archaic power form viewed from Thompson's (2005) argument about the invisibility or visibility of power. Based on this, it is easy to understand how news media scandals become global news stories, given that most of them bring visibility to highly questionable, unethical, or outright illegal practices of the media elite.

News media scandals and what they reveal about 'the hows and whys' of journalism

The very basis of the media's power comes from its assumed objectivity, which is, in itself, threatened by the invisibility of newsroom practices. One such practice is plagiarism, which is at the root of several news media scandals (Lewis & Zhong, 2013). Here, studies suggest that a lack of clear rules on attribution in many newsrooms makes it difficult for reporters to draw a clear line between attribution and plagiarism (Hartley, Wittchen, & Blach-Ørsten, 2020). However, studies also suggest that news media are reluctant to impose such rules and thus often leave it up to reporters to make up their own rules in this area. These rules may then vary from reporter to reporter, with some reporters more likely to consider attribution optional if under pressure to produce or if the creator of the original content was considered to be less experienced (Lewis & Zhong, 2013). The pressure to produce content might also be the reason newsrooms resist firm rules on attribution or are hesitant to introduce practices where editors fact check their reporter's content (Blach-Ørsten, Hartley, & Wittchen, 2018).

Other practices often leading to news media scandals are the practices of deception and fabrication. In one study by Lasorsa & Dai (2007), the focus was on journalistic deceptions from 1998 to 2004. They found that different types of fabrication, such as 'source fabrication,' 'fact fabrication,' 'quote fabrication,' or 'full fabrication' accounted for most of the deceptive news while also finding many examples of plagiarism. They conclude, amongst other things, that the deceptions were possible because warning signs, such as a reporter with a high rate of corrections, were not communicated from newsroom to newsroom between organizations; that relationships between editors and reporters were built on trust without supervision; and that a lack of reporting standards and clear rules made reporters make up rules of their own (Lasorsa & Dai, 2007).

Taken together, the studies on news media scandals caused by plagiarism, deception, and fabrication all point to hard questions about the 'how's and whys' of journalism. Some point to the pressure to produce content; some point to a morally 'flexible' newsroom culture when it comes to following ethical rules and other types of guidelines; others again point to a lack of clarity in both newsroom policies and professional codes. In sum, news media scandals question core ideals, values, and practices such as 'telling the truth,' 'being objective,' producing 'original reporting,' and basing stories on 'facts.' While studies show that some news media scandals lead to debate and reflection on newsroom practices, others point to an overall lack of willingness to more potently address these issues, especially from inside the newsroom (Kepplinger & Viererbl, 2021).

Research setting and methodology

The present work studies news media scandals using Denmark as a case study. Denmark is part of the democratic corporatist media system, emphasizing public service and private news media subsidies (Blach-Ørsten & Willig, 2016). Despite recent changes caused by increased commercialization and digitalization, the Danish media system remains robust, with a high degree of traditional media use by most Danes and an above-average willingness to pay for news (Schrøder et al., 2020). Studies of news media scandals suggest that competition and shifting journalistic norms are attributed to a rising number of news media scandals (Kepplinger & Viererbl, 2021). Though Danish news media remain robust despite increased commercialization and digitalization, studies of Danish news media also suggest that competition is on the rise (Allern et al., 2021) and that fewer reporters produce more news stories (Blach-Ørsten, 2013). However, studies on media ethics also show a high degree of compliance amongst journalists and new media organizations (Blach-Ørsten & Lund, 2015), while also showing a relatively stable number of complaints to the Danish Press Council from 1999 to 2019 (Blach-Ørsten, Wittchen & Hartley, 2021).

The starting year for the analysis is 2004, with the Frank Esman-plagiarism scandal. Though the first scandal in Denmark does not involve a reporter, referring to plagiarism in a book rather than a news report, the scandal set a new public and political agenda on the subject. Also, it led to new and more precise rules on what constitutes plagiarism by the Danish Ministry of Culture in 2006[1]. In other words, this scandal helped to open up journalists and, by extension, the news media to public scrutiny in a new way. This is important because a challenge when researching news media scandals is the fact that despite notable exceptions, they often receive little attention from the news media themselves, who may fear that reporting about scandals in other news media could damage their own news media's reputation or be seen as an attack on competitors (Kepplinger & Viererbl, 2021). This is not helpful because meta-journalism, journalism about journalism, only plays a small role in many countries, Denmark included (Blach-Ørsten, Hartley & Flensburg, 2018). All in all, this presents a fundamental challenge to the study of media scandals, which we will return to later.

As the first step to this study, we constructed a list of news media scandals based on previous studies. This list consisted of four types of media scandals: 'fabrication scandals,' 'plagiarism scandals,' erroneous-information scandals,' and 'the hacking scandal.' When categorizing the scandals, we used Thompson (2000), characterizing the incidents according to what was criticized, made scandalous, in each incident, and which journalistic norms or values were supposed to stay hidden from the public. Like Lasorsa & Dai (2007), we then sought out the potential scandals using databases, specifically Infomedia, which holds the largest database of Danish newspaper (online and paper) articles. Inspired by criteria developed in previous studies of scandals in Danish news media (Allern et al., 2012; Pollack et al., 2018), we focused on the mention of search words separately and together in different search strings. These search words included but were not limited to: 'scandal,' 'journalist,' 'news media,' 'news,' 'media organizations,' 'criticism,' 'correction,' 'press council.' 'journalism ethics,' 'sound press ethics,' 'fired,' or 'let go.' The names of the leading Danish news media were also included as search words. A separate search in the magazine *Journalisten,* the Danish Union of Journalists' magazine, was also conducted using the same search words and search strings. Finally, the same search words were used as the basis of a Google search to catch the coverage of the scandals in news media or magazines not found in the Infomedia database. Like Allern et al. (2012:31) a requirement for a case to be registered as a scandal is that the case has been reported as 'scandalous' by the news media. However, unlike Allern et al. (2012) we did not require a scandal to be reported by a specific number of news media or for a specific period of time. The reason for this is the aforementioned limited amount of meta-journalistic coverage in the news media. A good deal of the scandals uncovered by this study did receive substantial coverage in national news media, but other scandals were only covered by more niche-oriented media.

Using these search words, 19 news media scandals from 2004 to 2021 were identified and listed. These 19 news media scandals consisted of seven fabrication scandals, six erroneous information scandals, five plagiarism scandals, and one hacking scandal. An important caveat is, however, the aforementioned lack of 'journalism about journalism'. It is thus likely that the 19 news media scandals that we did uncover are not a complete list of news media scandals mentioned in Danish news media from 2004 to 2021, but only a list of the most covered, high-profile scandals (see also Lasorsa & Dai, 2007: 164).

Having already written extensively on plagiarism in a Danish context (Blach-Ørsten, Hartley, & Wittchen, 2018; Hartley, Wittchen, & Blach-Ørsten, 2020), we focused on two other types of prominent news media scandals in this study: the fabrication scandal and the erroneous information scandal. We analyze these scandals based on the following RQ:

RQ 1: *Which type of debate, criticism, and reflections about 'the hows and whys of journalism' did the coverage of the fabrication scandals and the erroneous information scandals from 2004 to 2021 cause in the Danish news media*?

Analysis

In the following, we first analyze how the fabrication scandal raises serious questions about journalism's relationship to 'the truth.' We then analyze the erroneous information scandal and how this type of scandal questions the journalism practice of basing stories on 'facts.'

Questioning 'truth': The 'fabrication' scandal—when parts of stories or entire stories are made up

In our material, the fabrication scandal is the most common type of news media scandal. It is also probably the most well-known type of news media scandal, as it aligns with the scandals made famous by Stephen Glass and Jayson Blair.

In 2005, Danish viewers of public service station *TV 2* evening news bulletin learned that a heavily armed gang called Triple-A wanted to "take over fucking Zealand, Copenhagen. All of Denmark" (*Politiken*[2]*). However, it later turned out that there was no such gang. The fabrication resulted from TV 2's* focus on gangs and a production company that was using young people for a promotional video to brand a new clothing company. *TV 2* somehow used the tape made for the music video as a part of a larger story on gangs and violence in Denmark. Politicians and police started investigating the gang, but soon the young people from the video withdrew the quotes, which were made up as a "joke," and the police concluded that no gang named Triple-A existed. This led to massive criticism of *TV 2,* and the editor of *TV 2* news was given a new position in the organization due to the scandal. At first, *TV 2* denied the accusations, but after four weeks, mounting evidence, and public and political criticism, they withdrew the story and apologized[3]. The then-existing free newspaper, Urban, broke the story[4]. Still, it was also covered by an extended range of other news media, such as tabloid *Ekstra Bladet*, broadsheet *Berlingske*, and the business newspaper *Børsen.*

In 2007, the second public service channel in Denmark, Denmark's Radio (*DR*), was heavily critiqued for telling the story of how Danish troops were leaving Iraq, while the images of the truck used as footage were actually going *into* Iraq. The foreign correspondent, Jeppe Nybroe, was responsible for the story. The fabrication was uncovered by the editor of the then-existing free newspaper, *Nyhedavisen*, and featured in the evening bulletin of *TV 2*. The scandal led to massive criticism of DR in the Danish Press, and Nybroe resigned. DR's ombudsman also carried out an internal investigation of Nybroe but found no other fabrications[5]. The story was also covered by other news media such as the broadsheet paper *Jyllands-Posten*, the tabloid newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*, and the regional newspaper *Nordjyske*.

In 2011, the Danish Magazine *Journalisten*[6] uncovered that a freelance journalist working for Information as a correspondent in the UK had quoted a police chief who died in 2006. The correspondent, Mads Qvortrup, had also quoted other sources, who denied ever having spoken to the Danish journalist. The story was also covered by larger news media such as public service media, DR, the broadsheet newspaper *Politiken*, and the online magazine *Mediawatch*. However, no internal investigation was carried out, and the journalist resigned from *Information*, explaining that he was not a trained journalist but an academic. Therefore, he did not know the rules and norms of quoting in journalism. Reporting done by *Journalisten* suggested that internal sources had made the editor-in-chief aware of the problem. However, the then editor in chief said that the scandal was due to “sloppiness”' on the part of the reporter and that it was an internal matter that had been handled[7].

In 2014, the sports reporter Michael Qureshi (MQ) was accused of fabrication while working for the tabloid newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*. The newspaper had to withdraw an interview he had made with a famous football player. This was done relatively quietly, but a television sports program found the withdrawal of the interview so curious that they started their own investigation of MQ. On December 2, 2015, the program documented that MQ had used fake sources in his previous work; both quotes from sources he had never talked to and sources whose existence could not be verified by other reporters[8]. The scandal that also affected MQ's former places of employment, another tabloid newspaper, *BT*, and a sports magazine, was covered on and off until September 8, 2016, when the Danish police dropped the criminal investigation into MQ's reporting (see also Blach-Ørsten et al., 2018; Hartley et al., 2021).

In the spring of 2016, *Her og Nu,* a weekly gossip magazine, published a story saying that the Danish crown prince secretly had sex with prostitutes and that this had gone for years. As a source, they quoted a Danish writer and sexologist who, in an interview with the magazine, had said a book he had written as fiction about a prostitute who had sex with someone from the Danish royal family, in reality, was based on a true story involving the crown prince. However, as soon as *Journalisten*[9]*,* the magazine of the Danish Union of Journalists, started investigating the story and claimed that it conflicted with the guiding rules of press ethics, the source retracted everything and said that all the quotes in the magazine where he pointed to the fact the crown prince had sex with prostitutes were pure fabrications made up by the magazine. The magazine's chief editor first claimed to stand by the story but was quickly let go by the publishers, who also retracted and apologized for the story.

In August 2019, one of the leading Danish newspapers, *Jyllands-Posten,* fired a cultural reporter and their cultural editor. This was because the reporter wanted the paper to cover an exhibition he was involved with as an artist. The paper refused to do this due to a lack of resources. The reporter then interviewed himself as an artist and put another reporter's name on the interview. The fabrication was discovered by the cultural editor, who at first reprimanded the reporter. However, the editor failed to inform the chief editor of the reporter's wrongdoing, and consequently, both the reporter and the editor were let go from their positions. The story was uncovered by the culture magazine *Ekko*[10] and was also covered by the news site *Mediawatch*.

In January of 2021, *DR* broke a story about freelance photographer Michael Fonsmark, who throughout his career had staged and fabricated events that he either filmed or photographed and then sold to various news media. The most famous of these fabrications took place in 1998 when he sawed off the head of the statue of The Little Mermaid in Copenhagen and then sold his exclusive photos of the event to the news media. Even though most of the fabrications by Fonsmark had happened years earlier, *DR* said in a statement from January 2021 that they would introduce new guidelines concerning acquiring pictures or videos from external suppliers as a consequence of the scandal. It was *DR* who broke the story even though *DR* was also involved in the case[11].

Crossing a line that cannot be crossed

Taken together, it is evident by the brief summations above that there is a line that cannot be crossed and that crossing it has severe consequences for the reporters or others involved. The public criticism is also severe, even from within the newsroom. In the case of *TV 2* and the Triple-A scandal, the board of *TV 2* criticized the story publically, saying it had damaged the credibility of the TV station and underlining that such mistakes cannot be repeated (*Politiken*[12]*). The then-head news editor of TV 2*, Michael Dyrby, also publicly conceded that the story had damaged the image of the *TV 2* station in the eyes of the public[13]. In the case of Jeppe Nybroe, the then news editor of DR, Ulrik Haagerup, also said in response to the scandal: "*I take this matter very seriously. Credibility is essential to DR and this cannot happen again*[14] *(...).*" In the case of Michael Qureshi, *Ekstra Bladet* went on a communication offensive, holding press meetings and talking extensively to other news media about the case, explaining and apologizing for the manipulation[15]. And in the 2021 case concerning the fabrications of Michael Fonsmark, it was *DR* who broke the story even though *DR* was also involved in the case. This helped *DR* take control of the story and be the first to apologize for using Fonsmark, even though his staged work had also conned other news media throughout the years.

There had been clear warning signs beforehand in many of the scandals, mostly from other reporters within the newsroom, warning of the stories done by Jeppe Nybore or Michael Qureshi. Still, these warning signs were either overlooked or never made it to the responsible editors. Finally, in many cases, the news media choose to present the scandals as the works of a few 'bad apples' (Cecil, 2002; Ogbebor, 2020), who were then either let go or demoted a solution to the problem. Most news media did not deny the accusation once they were made public, with *TV 2* and Triple-A as an exception: both the editor responsible for the story and the head of the News section wrote a lengthy defense of the story before eventually retracting it[16]. If the scandals led to any change inside the new organizations involved in the fabrication scandals, this remains only vague from the media coverage. Thus, as a response to the Jeppe Nybroe scandal, the then head of *DR* News stated that: "In DR News we have learned a lot from the case[17] (...)" and the head of *TV 2* news said that the story of Triple-A had made them reconsider how they present stories and as well as reconsider the risk of oversimplifying stories[18].

Altogether, the seven fabrication scandals led editors, politicians, and experts to reflect on several essential 'hows and whys' of journalism, such as the pressure to produce more stories inside the individual newsroom, the drive to get a scoop, as well as on the problems of a 'trust, not supervise' culture in the newsroom.

Questioning the 'facts': When stories, either deliberately or by accident, are based on erroneous information

With six scandals falling into this category, this is the second most common type of high-profile news media scandal uncovered in our material.

In 2008 and 2009, a political scandal known as the 'Special Forces book scandal' broke in the Danish news media. The scandal concerned a former soldier who had served in the Danish Special Forces, who wrote a book about his experiences. The Minister of Defense and the Department of defense labeled the book a threat to national security and wanted it redrawn from the book market (Blach-Ørsten, 2011). As an argument supporting the fact that the book was a national threat, the defense minister stated that a translation of the book into Arabic was already available on the net. The tabloid newspaper *BT* published a link to this supposed translation shortly after that. However, the newspaper quickly removed the link, claiming that the translation was nonsensical. At the same time, it was revealed that an insider from the Danish Defense Command translated the document[19]. All leading news media covered the case in Denmark. It was later revealed that *BT* got the translated book from the Defense Command, though the editor responsible at *BT* defined this at first, stating he found the translation online[20], only later to change his statement to *Politiken,* and say that he was not so sure, if and where he saw the book[21]. In the end, the scandal had no consequences for *BT* or the responsible editor.

In 2010, following several weeks of coverage of the "Maria-murder[22]," the brutal murder of a twenty-year-old young woman in the city of Herning in Jutland, readers woke up to the front page of Danish tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* showcasing a large picture of an unknown citizen of Herning named Jan Lindholdt Mikkelsen. *Ekstra Bladet* publicized that he was charged with the murder. Mikkelsen spent 18 days in custody until DNA cleared him of all suspicions. The accused was so distressed by the wrongful accusation and being on the front page that he considered suicide while in prison. Because his lawyer had failed to ask for protection of his identity, *Ekstra Bladet* did not violate any ethical rules by placing Lindholdt Mikkelsen on the front page; this was met by massive criticism by the public and politicians alike[23], with the politicians using the scandal as a reason for revisiting the Media Responsibility Act[24] (see also Blach-Ørsten & Lund, 2015). In the end, the editor-in-chief apologized but also underlined that the newspaper hadn't violated ethical rules in the process of covering the story. The scandal also led to a significant debate on the amount given in compensation to victims of journalistic scandals, as Jan Lindholdt Mikkelsen received just 37.000 KR.

In 2013, *DR* ran a story based on a local and regional election exit poll. The Exit poll claimed that the Social Democratic Party would suffer a severe setback, and DR began to run more stories based on this scenario. The exit poll, however, got the result completely wrong. The Social Democrats had a very good election and maintained their position as the biggest party, regionally and locally. The story started with a massive critique of *DR*[25] *and fellow public broadcaster TV 2* for their use of exit polls and their failure to take the statistics uncertainness of such polls into account.

Consequently, *DR* apologized[26] and changed their practice using exit polls so that *DR* can be more careful using, and sometimes not using, exit polls in their election coverage[27]. Much other news media expressed similar concerns regarding the use of exit polls. DR's ombudsman also delivered severe criticism on the use of exit polls[28].

In 2014, the newspaper *Politiken* wrote on the front page that the current Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen was resigning[29]. The information came from what the political editor called a "good source;" however, this was not true. The editor-in-chief of *Politiken*, Bo Lidegaard, gave several interviews apologizing for the story[30]. The incident had no consequences for staff, and Lidegaard did not resign but promised to make sure that the credibility of *Politiken* would be rebuilt and that they would have to consider all stories based on anonymous sources very carefully in the future. Though *Politiken* caught most of the flack on the story, similar and sometimes identical stories of Løkke's possible resignation were also reported by other news media, including *Berlingske, Jyllands-Posten,* and *Børsen*[31]*,* stories for which they also apologized[32].

In 2018, the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*[33] published a story online that, in large parts, was based on a story from Austrian tabloid newspaper *Kronen Zeitung.* The story claimed that 20,000 immigrants were waiting at the border of the EU and that most of them were armed with knives. The Independent Danish news site, *Altinget*[34], ran the story and uncovered no independent documentation for the claims in the *Jyllands-Posten's* version of the story. *Jyllands-Posten,* however, stood by their article[35] and also defended it in an article on *Altinget*[36]*. The facts of the story were later debunked*[37]*. Jyllands-Posten* then ran a correction of the story but did not retract it.

In 2021, right up to an election in Greenland, public service station *TV 2* published a story alleging that the leading candidate, Múte Egede, had attended meetings that could have positively affected his personal finances through a company he owned[38]. The candidate immediately contacted *TV 2* and told them that the story was wrong, but it took *TV 2* two days to acknowledge this and correct the article[39]. The tabloid newspaper, *Ekstra Bladet,* then uncovered that the reporters, who put their name on the story, had tried to get out of writing the story because they could not get the facts in the story verified. They were, however, pressured by an editor to publish the story anyway[40]. This editor then chooses to resign from *TV 2*, saying she had failed when she pushed the story[41]. *TV 2* has since apologized for the story[42], but this has not brought a close to the story or the question of how a story with no facts got published by a leading public service news media like *TV 2*, a question that the Danish minister for culture also wants answered[43], as does the newly elected government in Greenland, which Múte Egede, the falsely accused candidate, is now heading[44].

Negotiating the 'facts'

Getting the facts wrong is a severe problem for news media, especially if these erroneous facts involve politics or politicians, as was the case with the erroneous stories on then Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen from politics, the unreliable exit polls used to cover the regional and local elections, and the case about the election in Greeland and Múte Egede. Looking at the consequences for the reporters and news media involved, however, getting the facts wrong is not as bad as making up the facts altogether. So while the news media scandals concerning erroneous led to a good deal of criticism and self-reflection, they did not lead to reporters being fired for their mistakes, as was the case with some of the fabrication scandals. An exception here is TV 2 and the erroneous story on Mute Egede, where the responsible editor resigned. It is, however, also possible for news media to 'negotiate' the facts, as *Jyllands-Posten* tried to do in the story from *Kronen Zeitung*. Here, *Jyllands-Posten*, for a long time, referred back to the original source in Austria and the Austrian government. However, a lot of evidence suggested that the 'facts' *Jyllands-Posten* had based their story on were not verified. Altogether, the six erroneous information scandals led editors, politicians, and experts to some of the same types of reflections as was evident from the fabrication scandals, such as the news media's drive to get a 'scoop,' its relationship to anonymous sources[45], as well as the problems of a 'trust, not supervise' culture in the newsroom.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been twofold: first, theoretically, to link this understanding of critical incidents to the study and theory of the scandal. Second empirically, to analyze how different types of news media scandals lead to reflection and debate about the standards and practices of journalism. We have thus tried to answer the following RQ: *Which type of debate, criticism, and reflections about 'the hows and whys' of journalism did the coverage of the fabrication scandals and the erroneous information scandals from 2004 to 2021 cause in Danish news media*?

Though less covered than political scandals, our analysis of the two types of news media scandals clearly shows that the scandals lead to public criticism and reflections about 'the hows and whys' of journalism. Taken together, we find the two types of media scandals lead to serious questions about some of the fundamental 'hows and whys' of journalism, such as journalism's relationship to 'telling the truth,' 'reporting objectively,' and basing stories on 'facts.' We also find that crossing the line between news and fabrication often has severe consequences, though mainly for the individual reporters, rather than the news organizations involved. Getting the 'facts' wrong also has consequences, but they are far from as severe as fabrication scandals.

Concerning reflections, we further find that the scandals lead news media and editors to reflect on 1) the increased competition between news media, 2) the pressure to produce more stories inside the induvial newsroom, and 3) the drive to get an exclusive 'scoop.' This is evident from scandals such as the Qureshi scandal, the scandal about Lars Løkkes' 'fake' resignation and the Exit-poll scandal. News media scandals have also led editors to reflect on; 4) journalism relationship to powerful and or anonymous sources, such as in the scandal about the 'Special Service-book,' for instance, in Lars Løkke's fake resignation, and, most recently, in TV 2's 'Greenland-scandal.' Finally, the news media scandals covered in this article have led to reflections on 5) the problems of a 'trust, not supervise' culture in the newsroom, which comes up with the Qureshi scandal and Jeppe Nybroe scandal.

The news media scandals have also led to a higher awareness amongst editors as to the need to maintain credibility and trust, which has been evident in the editorial response to a good deal of the scandals and has also been used as an argument for sanctioning or firing the scandalized reporters. However, most of the scandals seem to be 'solved' by the news media apologizing and promising to do better in the future. Outside the news media, the scandals have had general consequences for the Danish media system: some have fueled political demands for more control of the news media and new and stricter guidelines for the news media. Indeed, the general guidelines for press ethics in Denmark were updated in 2013 as a direct consequence of some of the news media scandals featured in this article (see also Blach-Ørsten & Lund, 2015).

In sum, the increased visibility that the news media have brought about, according to Thompson (2000), has also increased the visibility of news media organizations themselves. This is especially true in the critical incidents that we have examined in this article, where the visibility caused by news media scandals has brought light to highly questionable journalistic and news media practices, as well as raising serious questions about journalists' and news organizations' historical claim that they produce objective and factual information. The news media scandals caused by fabrication or erroneous information point to blind spots inside the 'black box' of the newsroom's 'fortress.' The control and fact-checking of information that is an essential mission for modern journalism is sometimes lacking when it concerns the 'inside' control of the information being produced by the news media themselves.

It is also interesting to note that while journalists and news media themselves have actively engaged in the debate about several of the news media scandals mentioned here, they almost always do so referring to the scandals in a journalistic discourse highlighting professionalism and ethical rules, and most often casting blame on a few bad apples. And all through the scandals have led to a lot of reflection on behalf of the news media, they seem to have led to little observable change in news media practice, with the revised use, or not use, of exit polls as perhaps the only example of a scandal directly leading to changed practice.

NOTES

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"Ignorance is strength": Representing COVID-19 Facebook experts in Danish textual news satire

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how Danish textual news satire constructs its social critique of the many Facebook users whose comments during COVID-19 imitate expert statements in disregard of authoritative health science statements. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, UNESCO has proclaimed a disinfodemic of emotive narrative constructs and pseudo-science on the internet and especially in the social media. As with the ruling Party's paradoxical slogan "ignorance is strength" in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984,* we sense a similar trend of the public disinfodemic, but studies of this paradox in satirical publications are scarce. Thus, the goal here is to scrutinize this enigma exemplified in an article in the Danish spoof news online media of *RokokoPosten* in which such experts are parodied in a kind of "doublethink" style which begs critical reflection on social media credibility. Hence, such textual news satire may potentially provide a vaccine against post-truth delusions of health science as it provides immunity against the disinfodemic by its own causative agents.

KEYWORDS
style, satire, rhetoric, misinformation, health science, disinfodemic

Introduction

The goal of this study is to put the linguistic and stylistic construction of textual news satire about the disinfodemic of COVID-19 under a qualitative microscope. During 2020, the Danish spoof news website *RokokoPosten*, for instance, published an abundance of articles about various aspects of the pandemic, such as the lockdown, hygiene, self-contradictory guidelines and restrictions, the decision to kill all minks in Denmark, the government's and the Health Authority's self-appointed power, etc., to open the readers' eyes to paradoxical takes and measures in our country. But how is this awakening achieved? Recent studies in fact demonstrate how people presented with both ordinary informative content and satirical content on TV are prone to change their minds about a serious matter the most based on the satirical content (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2018). This is a thought-provoking mindset which calls for further interrogation: News satire, I propose, is a kind of upsetting fake news as it encompasses and confronts the true and the untrue at the same time as it basically holds two truths (the translation of factual truth into a representation of non-factual truth). The reader is asked to hold both in the mind and then choose to decode the untrue as the truth. Thus, the nature of news satire is a kind of translational Orwellian 'doublethink', constituting *real information* in a symbiosis with the *disinformation* of a kind of fake news. Since news satire has the purpose of correcting the malaises of society, this kind of 'doublethink' may become a vaccine against delusions of health science as it provides immunity against the disinfodemic by its own causative agents.

Even though this reasoning is unfolded in intricate metaphorical terms, it is still safe to propose that news satire may remind news consumers to reflect on the illusory endeavour of searching for the truth, while at the same time functioning as a critique of the curiosity and clickbait codes and conventions of news media in general (Reilly 2012; Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016; Auken 2019). In this way, news satire may be regarded as a significant form of culture jamming, i.e., criticising mass media through its own means (DeLaure & Fink, 2017). But how is the linguistic and stylistic construction behind such doublethink formed? This leads to the following research question:

- How does textual news satire convey its social criticism of post-truth behavior in the social media during COVID-19 through its language and style?

Answering this question, I hope to contribute with significant knowledge about the linguistic construction of news satire in the fields of textual news satire, rhetoric, and text and discourse analysis.

Contextual background

Immediately after the outbreak of COVID-19, The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a so-called "infodemic", i.e., "an over-abundance of information – some accurate and some not – that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it" (WHO, 2020). Their communication team worked 24 hours a day trying to combat numerous non-evidence-based myths and rumors about false prevention measures and cures which in fact might harm public health. For instance, specific toothpastes, dietary supplements, and creams have been sold illegally in the USA due to claims that they cure the virus (Porter, 2020). Poisonous fruit from the datura plant has been sold as a cure, too, probably because its spiky appearance resembles the corona virus, resulting in eleven people ending up at hospitals in India (*The News Minute,* 2020). And even more bizarrely, celebrities have been advocating taking six deep breaths and then coughing as a treatment of COVID-19 infection (Oliver, 2020).

One would then expect health science communication to act as it aims to enhance the level of health science knowledge in society. It also aims to enlighten and educate the public about various health risks based on scientific results, advocate against delusions about health science, and engage people in making the right decisions (Trench & Bucchi, 2010). But in the present post-truth, or post-factual, era, these tasks have become increasingly challenged. In 2016, The Oxford dictionaries declared "post-truth" the international word of the year as it characterizes a disturbing trend of a new epistemology where researched facts may be regarded as less credulous than personal feelings, anecdotes and opinions (D'Ancona, 2017). *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it thus: "Originally *U.S.* Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Several current behavioral studies demonstrate how people presented with both persuasive facts and misinformation tend to continue to believe in the misinformation even after learning that it is false. In fact, if the truth counters people's worldviews, their belief in the falsehood seems to be strengthened. Corrections only seem to work if they affirm the individual's sense of self-worth, if the person learns about the motives behind the disinformation and is then offered an alternative explanation (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017, p. 355). But the entire post-truth "malaise" is not readily corrected as it is an alternative reality living its own life by (ab)using a confrontational political discourse and rhetoric of overgeneralization, sensationalism, *ad hominem* attacks, partial truths and downright misinformation basically aimed at generating uncertainty and thus preserving status quo (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017, p.360). A pertinent case in Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook is the entire climate change debate in which scientists' cry for action is mistrusted and undermined by popular beliefs and the invention of scientific postulates of the contrary.

Scientific knowledge is to be found everywhere on the internet, and it is easy to pick and choose what you like rather than engaging in laborious research to get to the bottom of an issue. And the digital culture of social media has turned into an epistemic space where everybody is an expert on-the-go in either epistemic bubbles, where you do not hear the other part, or echo chambers, which are formed based on distrust in the other part (Nguyen, 2018, p. 2). Here "propagandists, hoaxers, hackers, partisans, and activists" (Reilly, 2018, p. 139) can post quick glimpses into truths and non-truths and then actually be heard, seen and liked. And Reilly concludes: "The twenty-first century era of fake news is increasingly bolstered by economic, technological, social, and political factors, making it a highly adaptive cultural form that continues to elude regulation and reform" (Reilly, 2018, p. 140). Such truths may be expressions of "truthiness" – a term coined by the satirical *The Colbert Report* on 17 October 2005 – representing the truths you want rather than the real truths (*Language-log*, 2005). This is a kind of motivated self-deception and may lead to downright science denialism, as in the above-mentioned cases of climate change denial, which may be regarded as a form of pseudoscience or junk-science (Hansson, 2017). Unmotivated self-deception, on the other hand, entails either seeking information which confirms one's *a priori* beliefs, or avoiding that which counters them, otherwise known as confirmation bias (Froehlich, 2017). Thus, the public opinion of the post-truth era is contaminated by (self-)deception, misinformation, disinformation, truthiness, denialism, confirmation bias and pseudoscience to such a degree that we are talking about a so-called disinfodemic.

In their Policy brief 1, UNESCO labels the spread of fabricated health communication about COVID-19 a "disinfodemic" and distinguishes between misinformation and disinformation: "The production of content promising fake treatments for reasons of private profit is an example of disinformation. But it can be described as misinformation when the same content is believed to be true, and it is then shared with the intention of being helpful" (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020, p. 2). This document categorizes the disinfodemic into four main types: 1. emotive narrative constructs and memes; 2. fabricated websites and authoritative identities; 3. fraudulently altered, fabricated, or decontextualized images and videos; 4. disinformation infiltrators and orchestrated campaigns. These may be combatted by way of a typology of four responses in which one is relevant to this study, i.e., supporting the target audiences of disinformation by way of ethical, normative and educational responses, such as a) public condemnation of disinformation, recommendations, media and information literacy development, and b) empowerment and credibility labelling efforts, such as verification tools and misinformation tracking centres (Posetti & Bontcheva, 2020, p. 12).

This disinfodemic ironically takes us back to The Ministry of Truth's "doublethink" in George Orwell's famous dystopian novel *1984*: "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it" (Orwell, 1949/2000, p. 34). This is of course a deliberate orchestration of lies from one entity. In our world, on the other hand, different entities send out opposing truths in a dialectical war for prevalence, which leads to the same kind of confusion. And such cacophonies of voices paradoxically still resound the Orwellian oxymoronic slogan that "Ignorance is strength" (Orwell, 1949/2000, p. 27). In this study, I propose to adopt the expression 'doublethink' as a metaphorical framing device which lends explanatory power to an understanding of today's misinformation as it epitomizes people's trust in the lie even after learning that it is a lie. However, there is an alternative means of expression that may help cure this post-truth malaise of scientific denialism, and that is textual news satire. Paradoxically, this genre relies on the same kind of doublethink by way of incongruent defamiliarization.

Theory and method

Previous published research on news satire, COVID-19 and disinformation is limited. The few publications either examine the widely distributed satirical memes (Kaur, 2020) or the possible links between satire and dangerous messages in conspiracy theories of 5G and COVID-19 posted on Twitter (Ahmed, Vidal-Aball, et. al., 2020). A special edition on COVID-19 of the *Journal of Science Communication* has also seen the light of day in which analyses of newspaper cartoonists, crisis memes and games are made (Massarini, Murphy et. al., 2020). But since such studies are sparse at the time of writing, it is my hope that the present inquiry will contribute to laying the foundation of a prospective area of study.

Previous studies on the nature of satirical fake news are, however, less sparse. In *The Oxford English Dictionary*, satire is defined as: "A poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary". In extension to this, news satire in the press, then, may be "regarded as a parodic form (an intertextual game wherein two texts – the original one and the fake one – are set against one another resulting in comic incongruity) with satirical content (i.e., with a critical intention of laying bare, by way of ridicule, the wrongs of politics and society)" (Ermida 2012, p. 191). Furthermore, news satire has a corrective, educational function as it aims to persuade people to change their delusions or misguided behaviors (Reilly 2012) – hence my suggestion of satire being a vaccine which may cure the disinfodemic by way of its own causative agents.

In the literature, news satire is also referred to as satirical fake news (Reilly 2012; Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016; Auken 2019), which must not be confused with the mis- or disinformative type of fake news mentioned in the contextual background of this study. Without going into detail with the nitty-gritty pros and cons of treating news satire and satirical fake news as either synonyms or two different phenomena, this study will treat them as belonging to the same spectrum of presenting fake news with the intention to criticize and ridicule societal sickliness - and in this particular case study the news media themselves.

According to Berkowitz and Schwartz, satirical fake news may serve as a kind of watchdog which observes and reacts to every move of the real news media (Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016). They suggest that news satire may turn into a so-called 'fifth estate' which holds the 'fourth estate', that is the news media, accountable for their indirect but also key role in influencing the political system (Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016, p. 1). In this way, satirical fake news may become "hyper-real" as it is difficult to distinguish between reality and a simulation of reality (Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016, p. 3). This nature is further emphasized in particularly *textual* news satire which, contrary to the loud and host-oriented clowning of satirical news on TV, is typically anonymous and thus more closely resembling reality (Berkowitz and Schwartz 2016, p. 3). This may lead to situations where various readers believe in the fake stories, which the website *Literally Unbelievable* about Facebook reactions to the American news satirical website *The Onion* testifies to (https://www.literally-unbelievable.com/). In other words, news satire/satiricial fake news is a parodic imitation of real news events with the purpose of critically exposing and commenting on these events to elicit laughter and eventually change people's minds about the matter.

When it comes to scrutinizing how this hyper-reality is constructed by way of language and style, results are meager. Some studies on the linguistic and discursive construction of textual satire have appeared (Simpson, 2003; Ermida, 2012; Reilly, 2012; Auken, 2019; Klitgård 2020), but more profound inquiry is needed if we are to fully understand the incongruent defamiliarization of 'doublethink'. But first we need to understand the nature of humor.

According to Billig (2005), all cultures use ridicule as a disciplinary means to uphold norms of conduct and conventions of meaning.

One way of understanding this is to regard humor as resting on the mind's faculty of making judgments on what it perceives as either the same or different from previous perceptions as expressed in John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Billig explains: "If judgement involves carefully distinguishing between things that appear to be similar, but which are actually different, then wit is based on the reverse process. It brings together ideas that are different in order to treat them as if they were similar" (Billig, 2005, p. 60).

Thus, eighteenth-century thinkers' preoccupation with wit took flight, and numerous philosophers continued this tradition which has been called the incongruity theory of humor. In 1792, for instance, Dugald Stewart added the layer of surprise: "we consider wit as a sort of feat or trick of intellectual dexterity, analogous, in some respects, to the extraordinary performances of jugglers and rope-dancers" (quoted in Billig, 2005, pp. 61-62). In *Thoughts on Laughter* (1725) Francis Hutcheson regarded laughter as the response to incongruities. And Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, envisaged humor as crucial in maintaining common sense and as a weapon to ensure liberty from religious dogmatism (Billig, 2005, p. 73) – much on a par with Berkowitz and Schwartz' Fifth Estate. Later, Mark Akenside (1810) was of the belief that such reason was divine, and hence "the sense of ridicule always judges right" in all controversies between claim and fact (quoted in Billig, 2005, p. 74). Thus, the Age of Reason paved the way for the view that congruities (common sense, wisdom, good manners and decorum) and incongruities (dissonances) are neatly separated, and that only incongruities are prone to ridicule.

Today, the incongruity theory of humor has continued in psychological studies of the cognitive shifts in jokes (Latta, 1999; Boyd, 2004). We suddenly have to reorganize our frames of references when confronted with an incongruity, just as Locke told us. This observation evolves into the linguistic script-based semantic theory of humor (SSTH) represented by Victor Raskin in 1985. This theory was later developed into a general verbal theory of humor (GTVH) together with Salvatore Attardo (Attardo and Raskin, 1991). To Raskin, the following two criteria must be met to form a verbal joke:

> (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different [semantic] scripts
> (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite [...]. The two scripts with which the text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part on this text (Raskin, 1985, p. 99).

The punchline of the joke makes us suddenly shift from one script to another, and thus laughter is elicited.

This theory has gained wide precedence due to the idea of these semantic scripts, otherwise known as frames. They are defined in the following way:

> The script is a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. Every speaker has internalized rather a large repertoire of scripts of 'common sense' which represent his/her knowledge of certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations, etc., for instance, the knowledge of what people do in certain situations, how they do it, in what order, etc. Beyond the scripts of 'common sense' every native speaker may, and usually does, have individual scripts determined by his/her individual background and subjective experience and restricted scripts which the speaker shares with a certain group, e.g., family, neighbors, colleagues, etc., but not with the whole speech community of native speakers of the same language (Raskin 1985, p. 81).

Such scripts may be *rich, health, life, school master, tennis, riding, scientist*, etc. In other words, all kinds of words which elicit mental schemas in which the individual envisions a set of expected and associated constituents. Such cognitive scripts are crucial in creating humor.

According to Raskin, jokes are based on the principle of incongruity, meaning that a surprising clash or opposition must occur to create the effect of humor, and this happens when scripts overlap and/or collide. Such scripts may be *truth vs. lie, rich v. poor, normal vs. unnormal,* etc. And such clashes are also at play in the construction of satire. But satire is of course much more than just hilarious jokes with punchlines. Satire goes beyond mere shifts as it is a genre of a kind of 'doublethink' in which incongruent layers of criticism and entertainment merge in a profound constellation of hybridity, and as in Orwell's *1984*, the readers must hold both layers in their minds at the same time.

A model of the linguistic and rhetorical construction of satire which explains this kind of translational 'doublethink' is Ermida's (Ermida 2012, pp. 194-95; Klitgård 2020, p. 13). Hence, it will form the method of text analysis in this study. The model consists of three components and various subcomponents: 1) The first major component is *intertextual* as the piece of satire builds on a previous text or situation, and in this way, it functions as a kind of translation, parodic imitation or defamiliarization of the original text/situation. This component contains a *structural subcomponent* of a) a format imitation, such as the traditional format of a newspaper article in this case, and b) a *stylistic subcomponent* of style imitation, such as the traditional discourse of a newspaper article. 2) The second major component is *critical* as this is where the judgmental and disapproving nature of the exigent issue is embedded. 3) The third major component is the *comic* one which may be divided into three subcomponents: a) The first subcomponent is *lexical* and refers to the words which may activate and trigger the surprisingly overlapping scripts; b) the second comic component is *pragmatic* as the text must be constructed in such a way that the reader's cultural frames of reference and presuppositions are activated in the interpretation. And lastly, c) the third comic subcomponent is *rhetorical* and designed to intensify the script incongruencies by way of rhetorical tropes and figures, such as antithesis, hyperbole, personification, etc. In sum, this model enables us to unwrap the structural, stylistic and linguistic layers of criticism and entertainment making up spoof news articles as the one which is the object of this study.

Analysis

The print medium is *RokokoPosten – siden 1732* [*The Rococo Post – since 1732*, my back-translation] which is a Danish non-profit news satire website in the league of the American *The Onion,* the British *The Daily Mash*, the French *Le Gorafi,* and the German *Der Postillon* whose title font is closely resembling that of the Danish *Rokoko-*

Posten. Their description reads: "RokokoPostens nyheder er fiktive. Enhver lighed med personer – levende, døde eller bare meget sløje – er sandsynligvis tilsigtet" [RokokoPosten's news is fictitious. Any resemblance with persons – either living, dead or just rather unwell – is probably intentional]. It was established in 2010 and has grown into one of the country's most prominent satirical websites with more than 200,000 visitors a month. The Facebook group is also immensely popular with 123,571 followers at the time of writing. Their articles, which mimic the style and structure of real news articles, have been published in *Berlingske Tidende* and *Jyllands-Posten,* two major right-wing newspapers, since 2012. Marta Sørensen, one of the co-editors, says that their audience consist of people of 24-40 years old with a higher education. She adds that their texts have an intellectual aura and may be characterized as a bit dry and semi-academic social satire that does not speak to the lowest common denominator in society (Brix, 2017).

The case study is a satiric article about the shocking news that half a million Danes are wiser than the Danish Health Authority (*RokokoPosten,* 2020). It was published 12 March 2020 and thus reflects Ermida's *intertextual component* of the at the time growing tendency for people to vent either their disbeliefs or amateur medical expertise and advice about COVID-19 on Facebook. It also follows the great public scandal that a major international horseshow in the city of Herning in Jutland took place 4-8 March despite warnings of mass contagion. The *structural and stylistic subcomponents* are expressed through both the parodic news format and style of a regular newspaper article with a headline, a lead, background information and documentation presented in a dry, neutral and factual way.

The article may be summarized as follows: The conflict consists of the Danish Health Authority who are suddenly seriously shocked as their 600 years of knowledge of virology and epidemiology now face a defeat to ordinary people's feelings and opinions. These are expressed through two *vox populi* representatives of Facebook comments in the article: A male boilermaker regrets that the Health Authority's calculations are ludicrous compared to his own calculations as he has never met any Chinese people or Italians. A woman who is to participate in the major horse show comprising 1,000 participants thinks a cancellation would be wildly exaggerated and an expression of mass hysteria. If we do not die from the stupid virus, then there are loads of other things that can kill us. Get on with it, she says. To balance the comments from 'ordinary people', a researcher of future studies then says that ever since she participated in a first aid course in a night school, she has learnt to be rational about things. She, too, thinks all the restrictions are superfluous and that it might be a good idea to "call reality". Her studies in the future tell her that we are all going to be contaminated anyway. In the light of these statements, the Health Authority will now have to fire all their medical experts and swap them with an answering machine where all Danes can express their insightful analyses to be used as documentation for governmental decisions.

This line of events, which will be unfolded below, leads us to believe that the text's *critical component* is clearly to ridicule the behavior of many Facebook users who disbelieve science and the seriousness of COVID-19 and express themselves through an overabundance of *pathos* rather than *logos*. The article also ridicules future studies representatives as the woman here is represented as relying on intuition rather than scientific evidence. Together they represent the self-deceived post-truth denialists who participate in spreading the disinfodemic.

The comic component: the lexical subcomponent

The *lexical* content of the words must activate incongruous and overlapping scripts to release the humor. The lead, for instance, introduces the reader to a "chokmåling" [shocking figures – my back-translation] evidencing that half a million Danes are "klogere" [wiser] than the Danish Health Authority. Thus, we are immediately introduced to a surprising scenario where the scripts of *experts vs. non-experts* are contrasted, and the roles are reversed. A study of the "analyser" [analyses] by "helt almindelige danskere" [quite ordinary Danes] which have been shared on Facebook demonstrates that these Danes have far greater "medicinsfaglig indsigt" [medical health insight] than the experts in the Health Authority. In this way, people's Facebook comments suddenly carry more weight than medical health science – personified in the Director Søren Brostrøm and over 600 years of knowledge from virologists and epidemiologists with PhD and Habilitation degrees.

This new reality is exemplified in the Facebook voices of a male boilermaker from a town in Jutland, a female horse show participant from a municipality outside Copenhagen and a leading scholar of future studies. They all draw on their personal experiences with COVID-19. The boilermaker has never met anybody who was contaminated; the woman thinks the situation is exaggerated and hysterical, which we learn through a lot of swear words; and the future scholar asks us to calm down, since we are all going to catch the illness anyway, and since we need to be rational about things. This is a lesson she has learnt on a first aid course at night school. So, there is no need to cancel all events and set up rules for kisses and hugs, she claims. She also introduces a phone metaphor: "Det er altså meget godt engang imellem at ringe til virkeligheden" [Sometimes it is actually a good idea to call reality].

The fact that the Health Authority then decide to fire all their experts to rely on "indsigtsfulde danskeres" [insightful Danes'] personal analyses – recorded on a phone answering machine – is grotesque. Thus, "regeringen kan trække på den bedste viden på området" [the government can draw on the best knowledge within the field].

So, here we see comically clashing cognitive scripts of *trust vs. distrust, Søren Brostrøm vs. the people, the Health Authority vs. Facebook, scientific knowledge vs. Facebook feelings, doctors vs. future scholars, virology/epidemiology vs. first aid course, university vs. night school, reality vs. future studies* and *facts vs. opinions.* These can be encapsulated in the overall scripts of *science vs. non/pseudo-science, truth vs. post-truth* and *power to the authorities vs. power to the people.* Embedded in these are also clashes between the rhetorical appeal forms of *ethos and logos vs. pathos and fallacies* represented in the three statements in the article. So, in general, the article criticizes the post-factual society where beliefs and bias in the social media win over traditionally authoritative knowledge and science.

The comic component: the pragmatic subcomponent

The second comic subcomponent is *pragmatic* in the sense that the satirical construction must activate the reader's cultural frames of reference and presuppositions in the interpretation. These cognitive schemas are here activated by for instance bringing in the Health Authority whose power and constant appearance in the mass media ring strong bells of white coat seriousness and science-based knowledge. The characterization of the Facebook users and the future scholar are also highlighted to the audience by way of regional origin, their tone and voice of their Facebook comments, and through what they mention as significant.

The comic component: the rhetorical subcomponent

The third comic subcomponent is *rhetorical* and designed to highlight and intensify the script incongruencies by way of rhetorical devices, such as tropes and figures. In this text not only the format and style mimic newspaper articles, but the tone and voice of the invented Facebook comments are also parodic. This is how the horseshow lady's haughty comment is rendered:

> Det er totalt massehysteri, kom videre i livet… 😂😂😂 Og op i røven med den åndssvage virus … Hvis det ikke er en virussygdom vi skal dø af, så er der andre 1000 ting, vi skal dø af… ✌️ Jeg giver ikke fem flade ører, endsige en hel Corona, for det pis.
>
> [It's a complete mass hysteria, get on with it…. 😂😂😂 And up yours with that stupid virus… If we are not going to die from a viral disease, then there are other 1,000 things we are going to die from… ✌️ I don't give a toss, or a whole Corona beer, about that piss.]

We note the frivolous language including invectives based on undocumented claims, the liberal use of punctuation and the typical smileys of ridicule together with a smiley of crossed fingers. Such traits are ever so familiar in Facebook and thus elicit our laughter through recognition - especially in hindsight as the comment is prototypical of early reactions of disbelief in March 2020.

The article also uses sarcasm as the theme of the text is the carnivalesque, inverted roles of experts and non-experts: In this preposterous scenario, suddenly half a million emotive Facebook users turn out to be the clever ones we should rely on, and the Health

Authority the fools who must step down. This dreaded scenario is amplified through discursive operations which do not quite take us to the opposite meaning but move on a scale of closeness and distance to the underlying critical component. Such ambiguous ambience is provided by the devices of exaggeration and understatement. However, they are not just represented in single, isolated statements or sentences, but as underlying rhetorical principles throughout the text. When turning up the brightness of either exaggeration or understatement, you still never lose sight of the satirized, i.e., the real situation. This interplay forms the linguistic technique which enables us to conceptualize both truths of the true and the untrue in the Orwellian slogan of 'ignorance is strength' at the same time.

Exaggeration is used in both the language and the content. For instance, the hyperbolic headline sets the agenda: "Chokmåling: en halv milliard danskere klogere end sundhedsstyrelsen" [Shocking figures: Half a million Danes wiser than the Health Authority]. This is elaborated in the fact that "et stort flertal af danskere på sociale medier er langt klogere på coronavirussen end Sundhedsstyrelsens eksperter, sender chokbølger gennem styrelsen" [a majority of Danes in the social media are far more knowledgeable when it comes to the corona virus than the experts of the Health Authority, and this sends shock waves through the Authority]. The Health Authority have more than 600 years of knowledge as well as high academic degrees, but they still must see themselves beaten by the wisdom of so many ordinary Danes. So, the impact of Facebook experts is not only depriving the experts of their status, but it also causes shock and mass firings. This revelation is further taken to the extreme as the Health Authority will annihilate themselves and just install an answering machine where "indsigtsfulde" [insightful] people can vent their wisdom. The word "indsigtsfulde" here elicits laughter as it exaggerates the level of cherry-picking sagacity, we have just read about in the three invented Facebook comments cited in the article. Thus, exaggeration is also used to emphasize the superiority of Danish Facebook users. The biased truthiness of emotive responses based on personal experience outperforms scientific research and results.

Understatement goes hand in hand with exaggeration as the values of science and knowledge are minimized when the values of ordinary Danes are maximized. This is illustrated in the boilermaker's comment:

> Hvis Sundhedsstyrelsen var i stand til at læse tal og se nøgternt på tingene som jeg, ville de ikke ænse denne virus på nuværende tidspunkt. Så længe man ikke møder nogen fra Kina eller Italien, kan jeg ikke se problemet, og det gør jeg stort set aldrig.
>
> [If the Health Authority were able to understand figures and take a common-sense view on things as I do, they would not pay any attention to this virus at present. As long as you don't meet anyone from China or Italy, I don't see what the problem is. And I rarely do]

The Health Authority apparently do not know their math, and they do not consider realistic factors such as personal experiences with people from the disaster areas. In this way the interplay of exaggeration and understatement performs an ironic negation in which what is typically perceived as powerful, i.e., knowledge, reason and expertise (*logos and ethos*), now turns weak, and that which may be perceived as weak, i.e., emotions, imagination and incompetence (*pathos*), turns into a strength. Thus, the boilermaker's *ethos* may be regarded as a personification of the so-called Dunning-Kruger effect in which people of low ability overestimate their own abilities (Kruger and Dunning, 1999).

In general, the heuristics and cognitive conceptualisations of the three fictional Facebook users operate by the same standards of exaggeration and understatement as is the case with the comic rhetorical component of this case study. Their rhetoric is governed by the overgeneralisations and partial truths which characterize the post-factual era as stated in the introduction (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017, p.360). And in this way the effect emphasizes the analogy to Orwell's dictum that ignorance is strength.

The article serves as an example of the emotive narrative constructs of the disinfodemic which UNESCO warned us about: The three characters retort to emotionally loaded narratives to construct their self-deceiving apprehensions of COVID-19, and the article itself is an emotionally loaded construction of typical behaviour in the early stages of the pandemic. Such culture jamming, i.e., criticising mass media through its own means, begs reflection on credibility and serves as a vaccine against the post-truth malaise of disregarding science. In fact, the cognitively demanding nature of news satire may be regarded as belonging to UNESCO's infodemic combat strategies of both public condemnation of disinformation and media literacy development as social satire *both* condemns behaviour and trends in society *and* educates the readers to exercise critical thinking when exploring the social media.

Conclusion

This Danish spoof news article conveys its social criticism of COVID-19 Facebook experts through a linguistic and stylistic double take – or doublethink – on reality and truth vs. non-reality and non-truth. This is orchestrated by way of intertextual, critical and comic components of lexical, pragmatic and rhetorical subcomponents which make up a structure and texture of surprisingly colliding scripts, parody, irony and an interplay of exaggeration and understatement which express the ridicule of the power of ignorance in social media responses to COVID-19.

Vigilant readers of *RokokoPosten* realize that the preposterous scenario in the article is a fictional and parodic representation of reality since the readers' frame of reference tells them that this has not happened to the Health Authority. And since the readers may also recognize the nature of the Facebook comments, they will realize that the whole scenario is out of proportions as the role of health scientific knowledge has been understated, and the roles of ordinary people and not-quite-accepted science such as future studies have been exaggerated. As in Orwell's *1984*, readers of such news satire know and do not know at the same time. The readers are made conscious of an apparent truth decoded from a carefully constructed satirical lie by holding both in the mind. But unlike Orwell's characters, the readers of this piece of satire are ultimately forced to choose between them as satire parodies reality in a defamiliarizing way by playing with uncertainty and deception – just as when reading any COVID-19 misinformation in the social media. So, one could argue that news satire may seek to cure misapprehensions by its own means of twisting the truth. Or in other words, it may hope to vaccinate the reader against the contagious COVID-19 disinfodemic.

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Victor Pickard: Democracy Without Journalism? Confronting the Misinformation Society.

Oxford University Press, 2020, 255 pp.

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Victor Pickard has written a comprehensive, nuanced, and fascinating book on the crisis of American journalism. The Annenberg scholar provides a sharp and important analysis based on historical and sociological perspectives. Victor Pickard uncover the roots of the crisis, in order to reinvent journalism.

The underlying problem is a toxic commercialism that prioritizes profit over democratic imperatives and, consequently, degrades journalism. Pickard envisions a way out, based on a need for a publicly owned and democratically governed media system. With scholars like Robert McChesney and John Nichols, Victor Pickard argues that this social democratic approach is as American as apple pie!

In *Democracy Without Journalism?* Victor Pickard launches three competing narratives about journalism and the election of Trump. First: news media enabled Trump's ascendance through a horse-race coverage. Second: a newfound appreciation for the Fourth Estate. Third: the needed public service was precisely the journalism that failed.

Pickard's analysis has a strong historical and political economical basis, including normative aspects, in providing a rigorous account of social agents in power. Among Pickard's illuminating formulations is the following: Journalism should provide the nation's early warning system, "so problems can be anticipated, studied, and debated and addressed before they grow to crisis proportions".

The book locates different failures in the US media system to confront "the misinformation society", in which "Fake News" plays a central role. However, Victor Pickard finds the concept to be "a deeply problematic term". Unfortunately, he doesn't have much more to say about "Fake News" and its relationship to Pickard's preferred phrase – the misinformation society.

A strength with Pickard's approach is his focus on journalism's deinstitutionalization and how media figure within larger power relationships. This position also provides journalism with opportunities. It allows us to reimage what journalism could be, and brings into focus journalism's normative foundation.

Pickard's proposal is to regard journalism as a public good. His new book is a great resource in confronting "the misinformation society" and offering an investigation of the infrastructure of democracy. Pickard's contribution is helpful in an important endeavor to reimage journalism. "For too long, US society has held the wrong debate over what new business model might support journalism," Pickard argues. His proposal is to "clarify the structural roots of the crisis, expand the political imagery for potential futures, identify alternatives, and help chart a path toward actualizing them." Pickard's well written book will set us straight.

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