

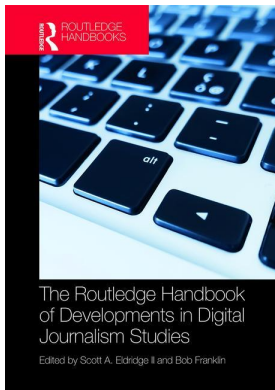
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STUDYING ROLE CONCEPTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A critical appraisal

Folker Hanusch and Sandra Banjac

Digital developments have been a central feature of journalism's transformation over the past two decades. However, while journalism scholarship has paid considerable attention to these developments, this has not necessarily been the case across all areas of inquiry in the field. Where research has been slightly less responsive to digital transformations is the area of journalistic role conceptions, despite its centrality for much of the work that goes on in journalism research more broadly. Accounting for how journalists think about their work and the role they see for themselves in society is crucial because it is believed that such conceptions eventually affect what journalists actually do. While recent studies have suggested this link is not as strong as sometimes assumed (Tandoc et al., 2013; Mellado and van Dalen, 2014), there remains a strong belief in the importance of studying role conceptions as discursive devices to articulate what values are important in journalism (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016).

Studies of journalists' role conceptions have predominantly addressed institutionalized, mainstream journalism, and in increasingly global ways. The digital age, however, has led to a fragmentation within the journalistic field and the arrival of new actors who now practice journalism in ways that were not possible previously. Further, audiences play an increasingly important role in affecting journalistic work, whether through direct contact with journalists or in aggregated form through tools such as web analytics or social media (Hanusch and Tandoc, 2017). How these developments affect established understandings of role conceptions has so far been less fully explored.

In this chapter, we therefore call for increased scholarly attention to the ways in which the impact of audiences and new journalistic actors need to be taken into account in future studies of journalistic roles. We do so particularly by drawing on role theory and its relevance for studying role conceptions, in order to provide a theoretical framework for such studies. The aim, then, is to highlight some fruitful avenues for research that may enable us to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of journalism cultures in the digital age.

The evolution of role conceptions research

Studies of how journalists conceive of their roles have a long history in scholarship, dating back more than 50 years. Throughout this time, conceptual and methodological approaches have continually been modified and expanded upon, both in analytical and normative terms (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). Early accounts of journalistic roles as 'neutral' or 'participant' (Cohen, 1963)

eventually evolved into large-scale, quasi-longitudinal studies, such as in the United States (Johnstone et al., 1976; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver and Willnat, 2016). Over time, these studies have become increasingly complex, with scholars expanding their curiosity across the globe in comparative studies (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Weaver and Willnat, 2012). Throughout this process, typologies of journalistic role conceptions have undergone a continual process of terminological expansion and adaptation, but often – a few exceptions aside (see, for example, Christians et al., 2009; Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2007) – with little “feed back into conceptual work” (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016: 3).

In response, a recent overview of existing scholarship on journalistic roles identified several shortcomings (see Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016, 2017), highlighting how research has: (1) tended to conceptualize journalistic roles within a Western framework that emphasizes journalism as having a central function in democracy; (2) relied on a variety of terms to refer to different role concepts inconsistently and interchangeably; (3) primarily explored roles through inductive and descriptive approaches, leaving this area of research short on theory; and (4) tended to “conflate”, or treat as one and the same, distinct “attitudinal and performative” dimensions of journalistic roles (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017: 4).

While these are important and valid critiques of the literature in this field, we would argue that a key development affecting journalistic production has so far also been neglected in the context of evolving role conceptions. Technological developments, while always having been a part of journalism, have had a particularly fundamental impact on journalistic work recently. The rise in interactive technologies has accompanied a veritable transformation of journalism rarely seen before, which is important for future studies to take account of. First, technological innovations have led to increased interaction between journalists and audiences, requiring the former to reassess their views of their readers, listeners, and viewers (Loosen and Schmidt, 2012). Second, these innovations have assisted the arrival of new journalistic actors, whose role conceptions may differ substantially from those of established mainstream journalists because of different journalistic missions. For journalism scholarship to better reflect developments on the ground, it is therefore crucial to investigate how this growing role of audiences and the impact of new journalistic actors may be affecting journalistic role conceptions.

This chapter aims to address these key interrelated issues by discussing (a) the way in which the increasingly reciprocal relationship between journalists and audiences has led to a shift in audience expectations and consequently a reconceptualization of journalists’ understanding of their roles in society; and (b) how the emergence of new types of news producers challenges existing role conceptions of mainstream or traditional journalists. Exploring these two developments allows us to reconceptualize our approach to understanding journalistic role conceptions and how we study these from different perspectives in future research.

Role theory in the study of role conceptions

A review of the literature on journalistic role conceptions reveals that surprisingly few studies appear to engage with a theory from which role conceptions seem to take their name and which we argue is very useful as a theoretical framework. Role theory, with its origins in the dramaturgical or theatrical perspective (Simmel, 1920; Goffman, 1959), where people are understood to play interactive parts according to scripts, has only recently started featuring in studies exploring journalistic roles (Tandoc and Duffy, 2016; Mellado and Hellmueller, 2015; Vos, 2005). Frequently applied to studying roles in the educational setting (Webb, 1962), role theory offers multiple perspectives and concepts through which role conceptions can be studied in diverse societal settings (Biddle, 1986), including journalism.

Mimicking some of the terminological confusion found in the literature on journalistic roles (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017), role theory has endured scholarly disagreement over the definition of what comprises a role – a discrepancy largely understood as terminological rather than conceptual (Biddle, 1986). Among the numerous definitions stemming from different sociological perspectives within role theory, a role can be understood as a “collection of patterns of behavior which are thought to constitute a meaningful unit and deemed appropriate to a person occupying a particular status in society” (Turner, 1956: 316). Despite the terminological divergences, most perspectives and definitions agree on the assumption that roles exist in response to expectations which role-incumbents have of their own behavior, of other people’s behaviors, and what they imagine others expect of them (Turner, 1956; Merton, 1957).

This explicit conceptualization of expectations as “generators of roles” (Biddle, 1986: 69) and emerging in response to patterned behaviors (Turner, 1956), interaction between individuals (Blumer, 1962), and relationship conduct (Merton, 1957) offers one theoretical framework for the study of journalistic role conceptions in an age of increased audience interaction. Key here is that such a framework should draw on multiple perspectives in role theory in an attempt to bridge gaps between role analysis at the system or macro-level (structural, functional), the meso-level (organizational) and at the individual or micro-level (symbolic interactionist, cognitive) (Stryker, 1980). Relying exclusively on one would dismiss the idea that journalistic roles are on the one hand discursively and symbolically constructed and their relationship to audiences is one increasingly built on interaction and, on the other hand, that journalists operate within an institution that is organized and hierarchical in nature (albeit increasingly less so), where roles are generated in response to expectations directed at their journalistic position and status in society.

If journalistic roles are understood as a collection of behavioral (performance) and cognitive (orientation) patterns held by individuals within a particular position, we can assume that these patterns create an opportunity for audiences to develop expectations of a journalist’s role in society. The conceptual claim that expectations generate or affect certain role conceptions among journalists is particularly worthy of studying in light of recent work that challenges the normative and theoretical assumption that audiences necessarily consider participation valuable or even beneficial to journalism (Karlsson et al., 2018).

Studying audience expectations of journalistic roles

Typically, roles have been studied by focusing on journalists’ views of their relationship with power, the existence of their voice in the news, and how they imagine and relate to their audiences. Switching the perspective from the journalists to that of audiences allows us to more accurately “assess the changing functions which journalism fulfills in society and the roles it enables the public to play in social life” (Mellado and Van Dalen, 2016: 214). Research on journalistic roles has focused on three areas: role conception (how journalists understand their roles), role performance or enactment (how journalists enact or perform their role through their work, evident in journalistic content), and role expectation (what audiences expect or believe is journalists’ role), as well as the relationships and gaps between these areas (Tandoc and Duffy, 2016). Research on the relationship between role conceptions and role performance has detected gaps (Mellado and Van Dalen, 2014) and some correlation (Van Dalen et al., 2012). At the same time, the relationship between journalistic role conceptions and audience expectations remains relatively underexplored, with sporadic and geographically scattered case studies so far revealing both congruence and gaps between the two (cf. Schmidt and Loosen, 2015; Tsftati et al., 2006; van der Wurff and Schoenbach, 2014; Tandoc and Duffy, 2016; Nah and Chung, 2012; Heider et al., 2005).

Audiences and journalists: a shift in relations

Alongside the adjustment to digital technologies in everyday newswork, “one of the major changes journalists encounter today is the expectation that they will form relationships with the audience” (Ferrucci and Vos, 2017: 13; Vos and Ferrucci, this volume, Chapter 3). Whereas previously the view of the relationship between journalists and audiences was more or less unidirectional, with journalists producing and audiences consuming news, the “development of digital technologies now enables participation on a scale not previously possible” (Karlsson et al., 2018: 578). This has narrowed the distance and changed communication patterns between these two groups. The greater input and influence that audiences have on journalistic routines has led to a blurring of roles captured by terms such as “produsage” (Bruns, 2008), “prosumerism” (Toffler, 1980), and “prodience” (Villi, 2012). Accessing the journalistic field through digital means gives audiences “a press critic’s role and, therefore, makes them potentially powerful shapers of journalism’s standards of performance” (Craft et al., 2016: 678). With this seemingly greater influence, audiences are arguably in a position to exercise what the functional perspective in role theory refers to as ‘sanctions’ – which is to boycott actors or their actions if these contradict or deviate from the norms expected from them (Popitz, 1972). Thus, audiences become an “institutional force that can exert pressure on journalists” (Craft et al., 2016: 680). Having originally been reluctant to interact with audiences, journalists now appear more open to such engagement and participation, which is arguably leading to changes in how online journalists view the relevance and importance of certain norms (Agarwal and Barthel, 2015). How journalists perceive their relationship with audiences, how likely they are to interact with them, and whether they choose to do so online or offline has also been linked to particular journalistic roles (Holton et al., 2016).

Further, journalists are now receiving extremely detailed information about audience behaviors through mechanisms such as web analytics, resulting in a loss of autonomy and increased pressure to deliver on audience expectations (Hanusch, 20167). Recent studies have also found that audiences engage in increasingly diverse and complex news consumption practices and considerations that determine what may or may not attract their interest (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink, 2014; Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer, 2018). The increased opportunity for audiences to interact with and criticize the press and journalists on social and moral grounds is also an increasingly relevant indicator “of the flattening of the hierarchical relationship that previously existed between readers and journalists” (Craft et al., 2016: 687).

Changes to role conceptions

Such a shift in the way audiences interact with news and news producers affects both the expectations audiences have of journalists and, in turn, how journalists attempt to meet those expectations by adjusting their role conception (Banton, 1996). By challenging journalistic practices, audiences are essentially asking journalists to reflect on the way they continue to discursively construct their role in society (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). The longer a role and its behavioral norms have had to develop and crystalize over time (Popitz, 1972), the more disruptive any shift in expectations will be to the role-incumbent. This means that journalistic role conceptions grounded in long-held normative ideologies might be more difficult or slower to change. In an ongoing effort to discursively reaffirm their authority and maintain their societal/professional legitimacy, journalists engage in different processes. The first relates to “role normalization”, where journalists contest and consolidate roles into norms. The second relates to “role negotiation” through which journalists either assimilate into a journalism culture or idea of what is expected of a ‘good’ journalist, or they appropriate, i.e., readjust their professional aspirations

(cognitive roles) to align more closely with actual practice. Finally, if these mechanisms fail to alleviate the role conflict, journalists may exit the journalistic field entirely (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017). Exiting the field would therefore require a journalist to relinquish his or her professional role of being a journalist. This is often a painful process, as has recently been observed among professional journalists who were made redundant as a result of the economic crisis in journalism (Zion et al., 2016).

If norms (and roles) are discursively constructed, they are also “discursively reconstructed” in response to changes in the field. However, Vos and Singer stress that Bourdieu’s field theory also falls short in elaborating on what happens when norms change, except “to point to how new entrants to a field can be a disruptive force” (Vos and Singer, 2016: 156). As traditional journalists continue to embrace evolving technological innovations, the emergence of new types of news producers and the proximity and involvement of audiences, their experiences of role negotiation and even the relinquishment of roles are a source of disorganization and distress (see Zion et al., 2016).

Multiple audiences, multiple expectations: a framework for diverse audience communities

Obviously, audiences are but one of many external influences and sources of expectations that impact journalists’ conception of roles (Donsbach, 2008). In fact, journalists simultaneously have multiple role-relationships and role-sets (Merton, 1957) with, for example, their sources, fellow journalists, editors, owners, and advertisers (Shoemaker and Reese, 2013). All of these are sources of influence and pressure which “can have a hand in wearing away at journalistic cultural capital” (Craft et al., 2016: 678). Each role-relationship is a source of expectations, many of which may not be compatible, leaving journalists exposed to role conflict (Stryker and Macke, 1978). Such inter-role conflict has, for example, been identified in studies of freelance journalists who also work in public relations (Obermaier and Koch, 2014). As conflicting expectations, and consequently role conflict increase over time, actors may experience stress, poor professional performance, low organizational commitment, and higher rates of resignations (Biddle, 1986). Aside from influences stemming from diverse external actors, such as audiences, further contributing to role strain (Goode, 1960) is the fact that audiences are far from unitary but instead highly fragmented. It is therefore important to speak of audience communities (Villi, 2012) who hold diverse expectations. This diversity of audience communities and expectations exists across different journalism cultures and is likely to become further evident when looking at audience communities formed around the intersectionality of social structures such as class, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and so on. Here, a framework that captures the various ways in which journalism approaches the audience (Hanitzsch, 2007; Mellado, 2015) combined with Bourdieu’s social, cultural, and economic capital to account for social differences (and inequalities) (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985) might be useful to studying diverse audience communities.

Research on the impact of social structures and differences on audiences’ interaction with news is limited (Lindell and Sartoretto, 2017; Hovden and Moe, 2017). Relying on Bourdieu’s cultural and economic capital to conceptualize social class, Lindell and Sartoretto (2017) found that class influenced the value young people placed on news, their news preferences and consumption patterns, and importantly the way in which the moral significance of these news practices was used by audiences to construct and maintain societal boundaries. Those in class categories that consume news infrequently (so-called “news avoiders”) were evaluated by the middle-class groups and elites as “the same people who skip school” (Lindell and Sartoretto, 2017: 15). The authors conclude that class, social position, and socialization through the family and school systems influence “the extent to which young people ‘buy into’ the normative order that regards news as inherently ‘good’, valuable and worthwhile” (Lindell and Sartoretto, 2017: 16).

Some of the key literature on journalistic roles also makes reference to audiences in ways that can be helpful for developing a framework. In his seminal work on journalism's institutional roles, for example, Hanitzsch (2007) proposed three dimensions: interventionism, power distance, and, of interest here, market orientation. This latter role, which has received much attention from scholars, goes "to the very heart of journalism studies" (Hanitzsch, 2007: 374). It is argued to be high where journalists orient themselves toward the "logic of the market" and address audiences as consumers or clients, while it is low in places where journalists "produce the news primarily in the 'public interest'" and address audiences as citizens (Hanitzsch, 2007: 372–375). The latter focuses on what audiences "should know" over what they "want to know", which may include news and information that centers around their "personal fears, aspirations, attitudes, and emotional experiences" and therefore "provides help, advice, guidance, and information about the management of self and everyday life" (Hanitzsch, 2007: 374–375). While journalism scholarship has examined these aspects of market orientation for considerable time, rarely have studies examined how audiences may be more or less directly influencing journalists' role conceptions in this regard. One recent analysis, however, suggests that increased audience interaction may indeed be affecting how journalists view their role. In a study of changes in Australian journalists' role conceptions related to the market dimension, Hanusch and Tandoc (2017) have suggested that perceived effectiveness of web analytics and frequency of reading reader comments may be leading journalists to become more consumer-oriented in their role conceptions.

Similar to Hanitzsch's conceptualization, Mellado's (2015) work on how journalistic roles manifest in news content posits three roles concerned with how journalists approach their audiences: the civic, service, and infotainment-spectator roles. Each of these roles may be simultaneously present (varying in extent) in the way journalists relate to audiences as found in news content (Mellado and Van Dalen, 2016). Arguably, however, the same coexistence and simultaneous emergence of role-expectations could be found among audiences, where certain expectations may at different times and contexts emerge more than others but nevertheless exist concurrently. To support the importance of an analytical distinction between the consumer and citizen orientation, Hanusch and Tandoc's (2017) recent study was able to empirically identify them as separate dimensions. Interestingly, however, they also found that the frequency of reading reader comments was a predictor for both an increase in the importance of a citizen and a consumer orientation among journalists.

Going forward, we believe that the discussion presented here may provide the basis for a potential framework for future analyses that takes account of existing work on the relationship between journalistic roles and audience conceptions on one hand and social-structural differences among audience communities on the other. Hence, it might be possible to measure (1) the prominence of diverse audience communities; (2) their diverse expectations; and (3) any interconnectedness across these audiences, as well as commonalities among their expectations of journalistic roles. We would expect that the prominence of certain audience communities and their expectations will differ across countries depending on their specific geographical, political, cultural, and historical contexts. Particularly in light of increasingly complex and detailed audience feedback mechanisms available to journalists, a more complex and nuanced study of such hybrid audiences could shed light on the way diverse expectations may be influencing developments in journalists' role conceptions over time. We will now move on to the second part of our discussion, to examine the extent to which the emergence of new journalistic actors, facilitated by digital developments, may impact on how scholars need to take account of journalistic roles.

Diversification of actors in the journalistic field

Digital developments in journalism have also had an important impact on the composition of actors in the journalistic field. This has occurred in two main ways. First, the arrival of the digital

age has been accompanied by dramatic economic downturns for established, mainstream media organizations in many Western countries, resulting in unprecedented job losses across a number of countries (O'Donnell et al., 2012; Starr, 2012). This alone has led to more precarious working conditions for many journalists and an increasing reliance on freelancers in some countries (Bakker, 2014) and the breaking-down of traditional 'walls' between editorial and advertising departments (Coddington, 2015; Ferrer-Conill and Karlsson, this volume, Chapter 35), as well as a fear that the resultant loss of autonomy and reliance on dwindling revenues may seriously undermine journalism's watchdog role (Siles and Boczkowski, 2012).

Second, in addition to these impacts on traditional forms of journalism, the introduction of participatory technologies and breaking down of the entry barriers to news publishing has led to an impressive diversification of the journalistic field. Having developed beyond the early days of citizen journalism (Bruns, 2008), there now exists a wide range of new, professionalized actors who are producing content that can to varying degrees be classified as journalism. In fact, journalism increasingly appears to be taking place outside the traditional newsroom (Anderson, 2011; Bakker, 2014). These used to be a blind spot in journalism scholarship, but increasingly, researchers are becoming more and more interested in exploring these new kinds of actors (Deuze and Witschge, 2018). The arrival of these new actors therefore calls for new conceptual approaches to better understand journalistic work in the digital age, especially with regard to how they conceive of their societal role.

The need to understand the roles of the journalistic "in-betweeners" (Ahva, 2016), who conceptually might be located somewhere between traditional journalists and audiences, comes at a crucial time. The distinction between the news producer and news consumer is blurring, with audiences increasingly acting as both (Carlson and Lewis, 2015; Bruns, 2008). The digital environment has allowed audiences to join journalists as co-producers of information, which has left journalists with "little to distinguish them from regular citizens" (Ferrucci and Vos, 2017: 3). To exemplify this blurring, Ferrucci and Vos (2017) suggest that, nowadays, both citizens and journalists are bloggers, both share information on social media, and both have audiences for their work.

The blurring of boundaries in journalism has led to a growing cluster of diverse, so-called atypical producers of journalistic content, who will need to be accounted for by journalism scholarship. This is a challenge in particular for research on journalistic role conceptions, a field that has traditionally focused not only on mainstream journalism but also predominantly on journalism's relationship with politics, at the expense of exploring journalism's role in everyday life (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2016). This latter field, which includes areas such as lifestyle journalism, has, however, been increasingly important and relevant for audiences during a time of major social and cultural transformations (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013). But more broadly, actors beyond the traditional newsroom now include regular citizen journalists, bloggers, news startups, entrepreneurial journalists, students aspiring to become journalists, academics contributing to public discourse, activists, and influencers on social media. They are blogging on personal or popular social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter; producing for traditional media on an (ir-)regular basis; and creating content of public interest, informing audiences and media alike, and thus can be discerned from regular users sharing private content (Nicey, 2016).

Challenges for scholarship

However, our conceptual understanding of (1) what defines these new journalistic actors and (2) how they might conceive of their role in society remains very limited. The first point is a complex undertaking at the heart of much scholarship that interrogates forms beyond traditional

journalism. While such traditional views may not suffice in the digital age, there is also a risk in labeling everything as journalism, resulting in too broad an approach that may render the term meaningless. Of interest here would be the trend toward increased brand journalism (Light, 2014), long-held debates about whether citizen blogs may constitute journalism (Nah and Chung, 2012), or the mix of commercial and journalistic motives and interests evident in successful social media influencers' accounts (Abidin, 2017; Pang et al., 2016).

This aligns with a point most recently raised by Deuze and Witschge (2018), who argue that scholarship needs to go beyond traditional views of journalism as a stable institution distinct from other social systems and beyond an almost exclusive focus on its democratic relevance. At the same time, they believe that long-held understandings of journalism defined by terms such as public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and a sense of ethics (Deuze, 2005) are still useful to studying journalism from the inside out (Deuze and Witschge, 2018). They argue that "it would be a mistake to assume that the types of journalism emerging outside and alongside legacy news organizations are necessarily different or oppositional to the core values, ideals, and practices of the profession" (Deuze and Witschge, 2018: 168). One key criticism is that most approaches have focused on journalism's relationship with politics, having led to an undertheorization and underappreciation for emerging and increasingly popular factuality formats and related journalistic practices (McNair, 2000; Harrington, 2013). Hence, an arguably more open approach that conceptualizes journalism as something much broader than has so far occurred may also help us better identify journalistic boundaries that may continue to exist, as well as those that may be breaking down.

On the second point, how new actors may conceive of their roles, as well as how such role conceptions may also indirectly or directly affect established journalistic role conceptions, recent work on journalism beyond its relationship with political life may prove at least a useful starting point. The traditional focus on journalism's relationship with politics and democracy has largely been at the expense of journalism's relevance for everyday life in societies where the media have increasingly replaced traditional institutions to provide guidance to people on how to live their lives. Recent accounts of lifestyle journalists demonstrate that quite different role sets exist for such beats (Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013), which, it has been claimed, necessitates broader conceptualizations of journalistic roles based in realities on the ground (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017).

Taking account, then, of new journalistic actors' role conceptions may prove useful in further broadening our understanding. Again, while it will be useful to measure brand journalists' or social media influencers' role conceptions vis-à-vis established journalistic tenets, explorative work may be particularly promising in its ability to tease out entirely new, yet important types of roles. In line with Deuze and Witschge's (2017: 8) call, this may help us further address "the diversity in roles, functions, and people's backgrounds that exists in media work generally and newswork in particular". In fact, as a recent study has shown, just comparing digital journalists with traditional journalists can help us along this path. Examining digital journalists, Ferrucci and Vos (2017) found that this group of newswriters were considerably more interested in reporting, analyzing, and contextualizing and had a better awareness of community needs, leading to a decline in importance of the objectivity norm.

Further, today's news ecology needs also to be seen as a complex mix of what Lewis and Westlund (2015) have described as actors, actants, audiences, and activities in cross-media newswork. It is particularly the new, nonhuman technological actants who, through their impact on journalistic work, may further contribute to evolving and even new role conceptions for journalists. As we have already argued, then, new entrants to the journalistic field may challenge not only existing norms (Vos and Singer, 2016) but also journalists' discourses on their roles in society. Yet, as research on these new actors' role conceptions is still in its infancy, it is difficult to identify the

directions in which these could develop and what this may mean for the journalistic field at large. Hence, we believe that this area will provide quite a fruitful avenue for future research.

Conclusion

The development of a broad spectrum of digital tools has enabled new actors – ranging from bloggers, digital start-ups, and social media influencers to audiences partaking in news processes – to access the journalistic field in unprecedented ways. These shifts in the previously tightly guarded journalistic field are challenging its practices and, as a result, also long-established role conceptions of mainstream journalists. In this chapter, we have argued for increased scholarly attention to the impact that audiences and new journalistic actors have on the ways in which journalists are (re)conceptualizing their roles in society in the digital environment.

Journalists are increasingly expected to form relationships with audiences (Ferrucci and Vos, 2017), and they appear to be more open to such engagement and participation (Anderson, 2011). However, little is known about how the expectations audiences may have of journalists are affecting their role conceptions (Tandoc and Duffy, 2016). In light of a shortage of theory in this area of scholarship (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2017), we suggest that role theory offers a rich and relatively underutilized framework for studying journalistic roles in response to audience expectations. We conceptualized the relationship between journalists and audiences primarily through Hanitzsch's (2007) set of institutional roles, which provides a useful starting point to, for example, examine change in journalists' role conceptions as a result of audience feedback (Hanusch and Tandoc, 2017). In addition, we argue that social structures, such as class and race, among others, may further contribute to the diversification of audience communities and divergent expectations of journalists, leading to experiences of role conflict among journalists (Stryker and Macke, 1978).

An additional source of strain for mainstream journalists is the growing pressure to integrate digital technologies into their daily work, accompanied by increased job precarity (O'Donnell et al., 2012; Starr, 2012). While the breaking down of entry barriers to the journalistic field has diversified actors within the journalistic field, this also means much journalistic work now takes place outside of the traditional newsroom (Anderson, 2011; Bakker, 2014). Here, we can also observe that these new actors are simultaneously audiences and respond to journalistic content in that capacity. These changes call for scholarly work to engage with questions on reconceptualizing the roles of journalistic 'workers' beyond the newsroom and traditional journalistic boundaries (Deuze and Witschge, 2017). More than ever, research on role conceptions of new journalistic actors would benefit from shifting its view away from journalism's relationship with politics (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018; Hanusch and Hanitzsch, 2013). This shift in definitional approaches would allow us to broaden our conceptualizations of the roles of both traditional and new journalistic actors, resulting in an arguably more comprehensive understanding of journalistic work in the digital age.

Beyond this broadening of our conceptualizations, future research would ideally study these across cultures. So far, much of the research on digital developments in journalism has still tended to be focused, single-nation studies, yet to be able to test our theories and challenge phenomena and universality, we need to do so across different cultural, social, historical, and political contexts (Livingstone, 2003). In addition, longitudinal studies would allow us to map gradual shifts in the role conceptions of traditional journalists as they continue to embrace digital technologies and the evolving role conceptions of new journalistic actors as their prominence and relevance in the journalistic field continues to flourish. Lastly, future research ought to address the shortage of scholarship on audience expectations of journalistic roles, as well as its tendency to rely on quantitative surveys, modeled on items extracted from previous journalistic role conception

surveys. Studies based on qualitative and grounded theory approaches (Tandoc and Duffy, 2016) would allow us to reconceptualize journalistic role conceptions through more nuanced audience expectations that may emerge when unprompted by predetermined survey conceptions of journalistic roles.

Further reading

This chapter has drawn on key scholarship in the study of journalistic role conceptions, specifically, Hanitzsch and Vos' "Journalistic Roles and the Struggle Over Institutional Identity: The Discursive Constitution of Journalism" (2017), Tandoc and Duffy's research on audience expectations in "Keeping Up with the Audiences: Journalistic Role Expectations in Singapore" (2016), Bruce Biddle's overview of role theory in "Recent Development in Role Theory" (1986) and Deuze and Witschge's call to look at new journalistic actors emerging outside of the traditional newsroom in "Beyond Journalism: Theorizing the Transformation of Journalism" (2017).

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