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CONTESTING COMMUNITIES
The problem of journalism and social order

Robert E. Gutsche Jr. and **Kristy Hess**

This introductory article to the combined special issue of Journalism Studies and Journalism Practice *provides an overview of some of the key contemporary approaches to studying journalism and social order. It argues the need to step beyond a functionalist framework when considering the news media's central role in shaping social connections, community and cohesion. To advance our understandings of social order, our paper suggests a greater emphasis of the significance of journalism's relationship to the wider social sphere along with three other key considerations, including (1) a critical focus on the relationship between media, politics and social order, especially in defining and/or negotiating "anti-social" practices and social disintegration; (2) a more refined focus on the "imagined" and geographic boundaries of news audiences in digital spaces; and (3) the changing relationship to norms and conventions of journalism practice from trust and legitimacy to the role of journalists as arbiters and connectors across social spaces.*

KEYWORDS "anti-social" practices; contesting communities; journalism; social order; social sphere

Introduction

When it comes to social order, media scholars and sociologists have celebrated the humble ant as a triumph of collective action and sociability (see e.g. Hechter and Horne 2009; Marshall 2016). Ants learn to coordinate activities in remarkable unison, forming organized highways and bridges with their living bodies to carry food and build shelter. Using refined communication techniques, they can organize the building of underground passageways and towering hills all with amazing efficiency and order.

These skills are attractive to social and political scholars in discussing human social organization, yet what theorists often omit is the dark side of the ant world. Ants recognize and react to those within their "colony" by odour—if one smells "wrong" it will be forced out. Ant queens—the highest of the social order—are also under constant threat from their subjects; a swarm will attack those that do not produce large broods for the colony, biting and spraying acid in a contest of ultimate natural selection (Keller and Ross 1998). Amazon slave ants, meanwhile, are indoctrinated into a life of inequality, learning to follow in the footsteps of their sisters who do the drudge work for their masters, from nest-building to foraging for prey (Moffett 2010).

Functionalist accounts of news media can view journalists in much the same way social theorists position the ant. Reporters are socialized by peers within an organizational structure and draw on the interpretive community's norms and values. Using their own set of advanced communication practices, they are expected to gather and share information that should not be seen to benefit themselves as individuals but contribute to the success of a broader collective whole. Yet journalism, too, is not immune from issues of power and

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inequality, especially in a digital world where competing media practices and platforms have become integral to our social lives (Couldry and Hepp 2016). Journalists, for example, have marched quickly to exclude or contest practices of those who either do not belong or who challenge traditional norms and values that may (re)shape the field. In some instances, metaphorically speaking, they have begun to spit acid at the new queens of the media world such as Google and Facebook to re-assert their centrality to "truth" seeking and the shaping of core societal values (Hess and Gutsche 2017). Outside the journalistic field, boundary work also looms large as nations on both sides of the globe threaten to erect their own "walls" highlighted by movements such as Brexit and the contentious rise of Donald Trump. In these contexts, boundary work functions as a practice of power and coercion.

The focus on who and what makes a journalist in these changing times, therefore, cannot be fully addressed until we consider the more complex role journalism plays, or is expected to play in the wider social spaces they serve. Scholars must balance considerations of context, power and control alongside cohesion, collective identity, connections and sociability. This combined special issue of *Journalism Studies* and *Journalism Practice* calls for a re-assessment of the relationship between journalism and social order as it relates to theory and practice. Scholars draw on a kaleidoscope of complementary lenses from cultural studies to political communication, critical cartography and philosophy, to consider the problem of social order. Such an approach is vital for examining changing legacy and established new media in an increasingly fragmented world of journalism.

To advance our understandings of social order and control, this essay recommends alterations to dominant perspectives on the role of journalism in the maintenance of social order. We begin by emphasizing the significance of journalism's relationship to the wider social sphere along with three other key considerations, including (1) a critical focus on the relationship between media, politics and social order, especially in defining and/or negotiating "anti-social" practices and social disintegration; (2) a more refined focus on the "imagined" and geographic boundaries of news audiences in digital spaces; and (3) the changing relationship to norms and conventions of journalism practice from trust and legitimacy to the role of journalists as arbiters and connectors across social spaces. Articles in these special issues address, to varying degrees, elements of this realignment and surround how journalists identify—or imagine—their audiences, their needs, and the ability (and legitimacy) of journalism to satisfy those standards.

Journalism and Social Order

Social order is widely understood as the necessity of people to maintain collective stability or a status quo. Early social theorists, from Durkheim (1889), de Tocqueville (1945) and Weber (1947) have examined how individuals and societies come together in the interests of something bigger than themselves and leads to extensive literature simply too large in scope to canvas here. Work on media and its relationship to community and social integration certainly evolved through the Chicago School via, among others, scholars such as George Mead (1934), Charles Cooley (1909) and Robert Park (1922). More contemporary scholarship has examined the ritualistic function of news (see especially Carey 1989; Sumiala 2013) and the role of media events (and media power) in uniting people in time and/or place (Turner 1974; Anderson 1983; Dayan and Katz 1992; Rothenbuhler 1998; Couldry 2003). There, too, has been extensive studies on the

relationship between news media and concepts such as social capital, civic and public journalism (see e.g. Glasser and Craft 1998; Putnam 2000; Merritt 2009; Haas 2012; Leupold, Kilnger, and Jarren 2016).

Importantly some media theorists who examine what we say and do around media and its relationship to the social distance themselves from the functionalist dimensions of social order and/or the very idea that the concept is "contained" to nations or societies in the digital era (see especially Couldry and Hepp 2016). It is our contention that journalism studies cannot completely disentangle itself from either of these dimensions given its deep symbiotic relationship with the societ(ies) and/or the communities of interest that news media is seen to "serve". There is a need, nonetheless, to position journalism studies against a backdrop of power to identify issues of coercion and control, to embrace the everyday use of news media in shaping our everyday social lives and community integration, and to challenge key concepts, norms and understandings of journalism that may inhibit more comprehensive research in this space.

In this issue, Michael McDevitt and Patrick Ferrucci (2017) draw on James Carey to highlight that "the public" is much like a "god term", which without, the enterprise of how and why journalism operates "fails to make sense" (Carey 1989, 5). That journalism, then, is viewed as a public service seemingly negates its elements of abuses of power or its potential to negatively influence our social lives. Some news media practices—or even social media practices that attract journalistic attention—can indeed foster sociability and connections between individuals, but others exert influence and control. News media can play an active role in community maintenance and repair, connecting people during times of crisis and enhancing people's sense of place. In everyday spaces, meanwhile, citizens armed with cell phone cameras and YouTube accounts patrol social and cultural boundaries, catching out those who engage in anti-social or immoral behaviour and reinforced via coverage in news media.

Contestation is captured too within the news media beyond overt forms of surveillance and ideological control through journalistic norms and practices. They can be evident in the more banal aspects of everyday life—from obituaries to wedding announcements in news media—all of which reinforce ritualistic practices and behaviours but which can also impose a form of symbolic violence on those who do not conform to certain societal expectations and values.

Another important dimension of social order that is often overlooked in journalism studies is the very significance of the "social realm". We set a tone in this special issue to re-position the social sphere as a key foundational concept for journalism scholars. In turn, we argue that too often the significance of the social is subsumed by a focus on news media's relationship to the public sphere, or more recently, on the role of social media. While the Latin word "com" has been embedded in many words that express deep ties of togetherness (communicate, commune, commiserate) (see Goss 2017), the increasing focus on the tools and technology afforded in the digital era that provide real-time communication and complex, data-driven visualizations, suggest the social is now more readily equated with ".com". A critical approach to social media and journalism is needed in the context of social order.

In this issue, Svetlana S. Bodrunova, Anna A. Litivnenko, Anna S. Smolyarova, Ivan S. Blekanov, and Alexey I. Maksimov (2017) critically engage with the (journalistic) role of Twitter, posing questions about journalism's processes of performance via the social networking platform in the United States, Germany, France and Russia. Here, the authors

combine network and content analysis of news coverage during times of crisis to evaluate the social forces at play in creating both journalistic community and a sense of ideological and physical collectivity via performance. From strictly providing information via Twitter to enticing (or inviting) audiences to "follow" the news outlet across social and traditional platforms, the authors argue that Twitter has become a normalized news tool and platform in a cross-continent fashion during times of contestation. The authors also found, however, that despite technological advancement in networking, tabloid and mainstream media in each of these countries remained committed to media traditions of geographic markets in building and maintaining legitimacy among audiences.

Critically Engaging with Media, Politics and the Challenge to Social Order

While we attempt to set the social sphere as something distinct but complementary to the public sphere, the importance of the political realm to social order is of central concern to scholars in this issue. The rise of digital spaces and its relationship to the public sphere is discussed by Brian McNair (2017) in his thoughtful essay on social order in a time of "cultural chaos". McNair reassesses his theory to highlight that while "cultural chaos" can empower minorities, digital platforms are also utilized with great effect by opponents of liberal democracy, whether they be extreme factions within faith groups, Islam, reactionaries and populists within the democratic countries, or in authoritarian polities. It is necessary to consider, according to McNair, if "cultural chaos" has emerged as a driver of ideological conflict in addition or in opposition to cultural democratization.

The very acknowledgement of "anti-social" practices suggests that who we turn to in order to help to identify and negotiate socially acceptable or unacceptable media practices in a given context speaks to issues of media legitimacy in digital spaces. This resonates with the work of Brian Michael Goss (2017) who explores the manipulation of "flak" in the changing news environment. At a time when there is indeed an abundance of news and information across a range of platforms, Goss refers to "flak" as a type of deliberate political harassment that erodes community sensibilities and trust. In an era of fake news, he contends outdated journalistic norms of objectivity and fact-checking limit what the profession might become in the interests of serving community and building cohesion.

The traditional role of "fact-checking", Goss suggests, does more harm than good. Scrupulous organizations are more vulnerable to flak stunts because they will perform due diligence and investigate even dubious claims of wrongdoing that ultimately breed heightened cynicism and mistrust among audiences. Examining bad faith political discourses simply by fact-checking, he argues, is "akin to pursuing financial fraudsters for parking tickets even as the fraudsters hold the economy hostage". The key for Goss is a more ambitious pursuit of truth within the field of journalism.

The clear relationship between politics and media in the shaping of the social is also evident in the work of Sushmita Pandit and Saayan Chattopadhyay (2017) who analyse journalism in India in regards to that nation's 2016 "surgical strike" against Pakistan. They show that news media largely presented the attack through patriotic, militaristic and nationalistic language aimed at normalizing tensions. Focusing on television coverage in an age of digital real-time demands, the authors argue that journalists employed a "Foxification" of news stories, relying on emotional and aggressive language of othering that enhanced Indian nationalism. Their work aligns journalism (as practice)—in this case the role of journalists in using sometimes personalized language to describe military action and conflict—with

"patriotism". This work suggests that sometimes it is not the "story" that is reported but how it is presented through vocal tone, personification, personal narratives, and collective identification that requires more attention from journalism scholars.

Henrik Bødker and Teke Ngomba's (2017) work in this issue offers a different yet complementary approach to journalists' response to national crisis in their study of news discourse in the aftermath of a gunman's deadly rampage in Copenhagen in 2016. They demonstrate how the attacks promoted a range of discourses at the intersection of social control with religious freedom, immigration and ideas of national community. Here, the challenge for mainstream journalism was to reassert national relevance while acknowledging the diversity of its audience. Indeed, Bødker and Ngomba highlight the broader process and stages of community repair from stories of condemnation, demonstrations of unity, resilience and resolve, along with instances of contestation. The case also highlights the fractious and symbiotic relationship between media and politics during such media moments. They cite a clear truce period in discourse around blame and conflict between elite groups to allow time for community repair before coverage shifted to avenues of action and responsibility that brought about ideological and cultural tensions.

The "Imagined" Audience and Shifting Boundaries in Changing Digital Spaces

Journalism's relationship to social order requires not only a rethinking of Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities", but signals a need for greater journalistic reflexivity in terms of the how their perceived idea of the "imagined audience" matches reality. In this issue, McDevitt and Ferrucci (2017), for instance, draw on the recent US election to argue that the way journalists imagine their audiences led to an acceptance of punitive populism as a strain of anti-intellectualism. They argue that journalists, commentators and academics failed to understand the public on its own terms and that journalism's anti-intellectualism is often not subject to reflexivity in professional awareness.

McDevitt and Ferrucci also contend the role of journalism, moving forward, is not to engage the public mood but to engage the best ideas of candidates towards policy coherence. Journalism and journalism studies advocate misguided reform when they perceive the election as a failure of the press to affirm populist frustration, they write. To McDevitt and Ferrucci, a journalism of expertise—an "elite" journalism without apology—would have better captured the substantive concerns of rural America. They highlight that the entrenched journalistic norm of objectivity is most evidently challenged during periods of war and situations rich in cultural resonance, when journalists show allegiance to binding beliefs.

From scholarship that appears in these issues, it is clear that greater emphasis is also needed on how social and cultural factors influence audience understandings of credible news sources during media events that seek to enact social change. Lanier Holt (2017) asks how audience perceptions of race and the #BlackLivesMatter influence their response to news coverage of police shootings of African Americans in the United States based on the expertise (or experience) of the sources used to explain, in this case, resistance to racialized police action. From his work, Holt identifies issues of ideological control that likely may reduce interest or understanding of both audiences and journalists of race-related injustice

as journalists turn to select sources of expertise in matters of race that hold varying levels of credibility among both diverse (read, non-white) audiences.

Journalism's relationship to the patrolling of social and geographic boundaries means acknowledging the importance of physical territory and borders in shaping people's connection to place via journalism. Paul Adams (2017), for instance, calls for journalism scholars to consider the richness of critical cartography to examine the visual representation of the communities and nation states we imagine and the people who make up these ideals. News articles on refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants entering Europe, Adams writes, are often illustrated with eye-catching maps featuring brightly coloured arrows converging on Europe from various directions, scaled to represent aggregated human flows—a thousand people coming by one route, several tens of thousands via another route. Adams, therefore, highlights how news maps reflect choices on what to include and exclude and promote biases that influence dangerous social policies and acts against populations and individuals (see also Gutsche 2014).

This issue also incorporates discussions of tensions between digital and legacy news outlets, production, and audience interactions and understandings of the changes occurring within a fragmented, and evolving, news ecosystem. Jacob L. Nelson (2017), for instance, conducts an analysis of the journalistic interpretive community of mainstream legacy journalism in the United States and nonprofit news. Using Chicago as his case, Nelson turns to interviewing journalists at the *Chicago Tribune* and the nonprofit City Bureau to examine the processes of identifying news audiences and the needs of both audience members and the journalistic outlet. Specifically, Nelson examines how journalists address perceptions of audiences that news outlets remain "objective" or "balanced" while nonprofit news outlets are seen to approach journalism through a sense of "public service". Moreover, Nelson examines how *Chicago Tribune* journalists engage with audiences in ways that maintain journalistic autonomy, but bring in audience perceptions of the news, to shape local journalism.

The Changing Relationship to Norms and Conventions of Journalism Practice

Some researchers in this special issue have called for a reconsideration of traditional norms and conventions that guide journalism practice, from a renewed emphasis on "truth" over objectivity to the importance of journalistic reflexivity. In being reflexive of our own practices, for example, we acknowledge that a shortcoming of this particular collection is the emphasis on advanced liberal democracies. Studies of social order should promote a shift from western-centric models to consider the interdependency of a range of political, religious and media systems that either possess power to influence (or attempt to exert) the maintenance of norms and values within a given "community". It is our hope that this collection can guide scholars in this manner.

Relevant across the globe, however, is the role of trust in journalism, a core concept that has preoccupied journalism scholars in a digital era—especially given the rise of fake news. Here, Nikki Usher (2017) sets out a convincing argument that trust in journalism is a critical mechanism in social cohesion, yet journalism's conceptual understanding of trust is broken. She highlights scholarship that demonstrates trust in the news across many western democracies is at an all-time low, but that trust is too often measured in terms of news consumption rather than it being a relational construct involving journalists,

audiences, sources and other social actors, including the "objects of journalism". Usher invokes the material turn in journalism as a way to move beyond this dichotomy. Hard and soft objects of journalism, such as the influence of physical news buildings or digital news products like software, inspire new ways of thinking about trust.

There are also growing expectations that journalists play a much greater connector role in the communities they serve, especially in the local context, due to the rise in journalistic adoptions of social media. Tanya Muscat (2017), in her study of local news audiences in Australia, for example, analyses perceptions of authority of local news production in Sydney. Her work is based on interviews with local television news audiences that not only recognizes how journalists present stories of the everyday to audiences, but also suggests that journalists perform surveillance over social conditions and actors. Audience members reported that journalists' self-branding as "local" arbiters of the everyday served as both a community-building effort, but also one that then advances published notions of "bad neighborhoods" or "good citizens" based on the self-authority that journalists ascribe to themselves in the news they cover. In other words, Muscat argues, journalists hold the authority with audiences that they say they have, despite audience interpretations that they operate at a distance from citizens' everyday experiences that provide alternative meanings and interpretations to social conditions.

Alice Baroni and Andrea Mayr (2017), meanwhile, adopt the same theory of mediated social capital as deployed by Muscat to encourage a greater emphasis and appreciation of journalists' own social capital and networks during investigative reporting of Brazil's drug trade. They examine the power of habitus as a form of cultural capital both inside and outside the journalistic field. Importantly, this research also provides insight into the way journalists engage elites in discussions that ultimately inform policy on the drugs trade.

Of course, in a desire to rethink normative ideals of journalism, there must also be scope to provide improved analytical frameworks for understanding journalism in the digital era. This leads to an enriching article by Curd Benjamin Knüpfer (2017), who argues that the rising use of concepts such as echo chambers or filter bubbles does not account for a coherent analytical framework or provide scope to consider the overlap or feedback between competing projections of reality. He proposes a model through which frame competition via different modes of journalistic production might be systematically observed. Knüpfer contends that political communication scholars, for example, are increasing likely to encounter stark differences in public perception and knowledge stocks and argues that his model provides a baseline measure to gauge the degrees of overlap and difference of mediated output. Only by acknowledging similarities between various types of news production, he writes, is it possible to highlight the actual degree to which they may differ in their output.

Conclusion

The relationship between news media and social order can be viewed and examined through a variety of theoretical lens and contexts, but our aim here—above all—is to reposition the value of and journalism's ordering role within the social realm. In a fragmented media world, it is also imperative that we gather the fragmented dimensions of social order as it relates to journalism studies and piece together a more nuanced approach to this area of inquiry—one which acknowledges journalism's ability to promote and foster cohesive and collective action, but which also considers its place in the intensifying

battle to control the social. The ways in which journalism subtly and overtly shapes the expectations we have of others and patrols and shapes social, geographic and cultural boundaries deserves attention, particularly in times when scholarship—and social networks—lead to a view of utopian society and ignore institutional desires for control.

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